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## Immigrant Stories: Generation 1.5 Mexican American Students and English Language Learning in an Illinois Community College

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

IMMIGRANT STORIES:  
GENERATION 1.5 MEXICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS AND ENGLISH  
LANGUAGE LEARNING IN AN ILLINOIS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

BY

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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

MAY 13, 2010

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For my parents, Lloyd Hansen  
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## ABSTRACT

The number of recent immigrants to the United States has increased dramatically in the last few years, and more of these immigrants are members of a group often designated as “Generation 1.5” students. These immigrant students were born in another country, came to the United States at the age of 13 or older, and graduated from high school in this country. This qualitative research study occurs within two Illinois community colleges that require some students to enroll in courses below regular English Composition I as indicated by one or more placement tests. These courses are English as a Second Language (ESL) or developmental communication courses.

This study addresses many of the issues raised in the studies conducted by Oudenhoven (2006) and Hinkle (2006). Unlike those two recent studies, however, this one explores specifically the experiences of students who have come from Mexico.

The study attempts to explore the experiences of these immigrants and their adaptation to new cultural surroundings, through the use of four research questions: 1) What are the adjustments to U.S. culture in general? 2) What are the adjustments to the culture of the community college classroom and corridor? 3) Does the student encounter any feelings of anxiety in the language-learning process? And 4) Does the student encounter any feelings of stigma in the language-learning process?

It is documented that Latinos in general have faced a variety of obstacles in attempting to obtain a college degree (Gonzales, 2008; Firmen, Whitthuhn, Riggins, & Carson, 1997; Hunter-Anderson, 2008). It is hoped this study will help college faculty and administrators understand any obstacles more fully.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Most Latinos in the United States in the last few decades have been immigrants or children of immigrants. Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (1995) explain the importance of remembering this simple fact when they state, “Any serious consideration of the Latino condition must provide an understanding of how the immigration background shapes experience” (p. 52). Campbell (2009, p. 13) states that at this time Latino children within the United States have “at least one foreign-born parent, typically someone who came to this country in the immigration wave from Mexico, Central America and South America that began around 1980.”

It is important to consider not only the origin of these students, but also the rapidly-increasing number of these persons who are becoming qualified to attend institutions of higher education. In this study, it is also important to understand that not only are most Latinos in the United States either Mexican or Mexican American, but also that most of the Latinos in Illinois, Cook County, and the institutions involved are either Mexican or Mexican American. Further, this study focuses specifically on Generation 1.5 students who were born in Mexico.

The number of young Latinos in the nation is growing dramatically. Campbell (2009, p. 13) states that Latino students now make up 22 percent of all children under the

age of 18 in the United States. In the last decade, the percentage of Latino students in public schools has increased from six to 21 percent (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009a). Because U.S. high school dropout rates for Latinos have steadily declined from 2000 to 2007 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009a) more young persons in this group have become eligible to attend college. With a growing number of Latino students enrolling in U.S. institutions of higher education, it is important to develop a better understanding of the stories and experiences of these immigrants, and of their children.

The two-year community college has been the doorway to higher education for the majority of Latino students (Hunter-Anderson, 2009; Santiago & Brown, 2004, pp. 2-3). As such, this setting provides a wealth of research opportunities for exploring the experiences of these individuals as they attempt to navigate the challenging waters of a different culture with its own traditions and its own strange language called academic English. Almost half the Latino students in higher education have chosen recently to attend community colleges near their homes and most of them do not transfer to baccalaureate institutions (Santiago & Brown, 2004, p. 2; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2009b). In contrast, most White and Black college students have enrolled in four-year institutions (U.S. Department of Education, 2002b; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2009b). It is important to note, also, that Illinois colleges have one of the highest enrollments of Latinos in the nation, topped only by California, Texas, New York, and Florida, and that this enrollment continues to grow (Hunter-Anderson; 2008; Santiago & Brown, 2004, p.

3). Projections reveal that by the end of this decade Latinos will represent one in five of high school-age students and they will represent two-thirds of the growth in numbers of students enrolled in higher education (Vernez & Mizell, 2001, pp. vii & 3). Important to note also is the fact that Cook County, Illinois—the location in which this study occurs—contains the fourth-largest concentration of Latinos in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009).

Experts have stated that the number of Latinos in higher education is on the rise (Santiago & Brown, 2004, p. 2) and in fact represent the fastest-growing group of students. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that by the year 2020, Latinos will make up nearly 19 percent of the total U.S. population, and that by 2050 about one in four people in America will be Latino (2009). Developing a better understanding of who the students are in our classrooms is important as educators endeavor to better serve them, help them, teach them, and assist them as they learn how to make use of the resources in community colleges across the nation. Generation 1.5 Latino students are recent immigrants, some of whom come to be enrolled in ESL and/or developmental English courses in U.S. community colleges, and who have certain emotions, hopes and needs that are very much different from other students with other cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Generation 1.5 Latino students also face certain difficulties; the stories of the participants in this study may reveal some of them.

More specifically, Generation 1.5 Latino students in higher education, who are recent contestants in a race toward a better education and a better life, paddle hard upstream. Although the definition varies slightly, mostly regarding the exact age of

arrival, the following is a typical profile of Generation 1.5 students: These immigrant students were born in another country, came to the United States at the age of 13 or older, and graduated from high school in this country (Fry, 2002a). Thus, this population of students has been attending American schools for a relatively short period of time. Many Generation 1.5 Latino students who do graduate from high school and then take the required placement tests are often placed into ESL and developmental communications courses (Leki, 1999a) and in some cases into ESL classes instead of developmental communications courses as a matter of policy if they self-identify as being foreign-born rather than U.S.-born (Metro College administrator, 2009). These are pre-college courses that do not yield college credits. This in turn means these immigrant students must spend additional time away from their families and away from income-producing opportunities, in addition to being forced to deal with the stress of college life for a longer period than other students.

This lack of time in the English-dominant environment is perhaps more important than whether the student has ever been enrolled in bilingual education programs in secondary school. Both Headden (1977) and Krashen (*The dropout argument*) state this point. Such programs are not commonly found in Illinois high schools.

Latinos in general face a variety of obstacles in attempting to obtain a college degree (Gonzales, 2008; Firmen, Whitthuhn, Riggins, & Carson, 1997; Hunter-Anderson, 2008). Usually attending community colleges near their homes and core families, many Latino students contribute a great deal of their personal income to keep their own household functioning—in addition very often to the household of their parents. The

added pressure of supporting several family members makes completion of a college degree even more challenging than it may be for members of other groups. Such financial restrictions have severely limited the options for the most recent generation of Latino students in higher education (Blackwell, 1978; Farr, 2006; Firmen, Whitthuhn, Riggins, & Carson, 1997; Santiago & Brown, 2004, p. 2). One specific type of pressure is that which is placed on teenaged males in some Mexican immigrant families: they are pressured to get to work to make money for the family and to gain job experience—and to stop using valuable time going to school (Farr, 2006, pp. 113-114). Further, Latinos apply for and receive the lowest amount of financial aid of all ethnic groups enrolled in higher education (U.S. Department of Education, 2002a; National Center for Education Statistics, 2008). Thus, the community college is, by default, an economical and nearby resource that can be utilized.

In recent decades, little has changed for Latinos facing major challenges in obtaining college degrees, and as recently as 2009 they represented the smallest numbers of students receiving bachelor's degrees—despite the fact they continue to be the fastest-growing group of college-age students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009b; Vernez & Mizell, 2001, p. vii). Reported as being high-risk for stress in college are Latinos who are first-generation college students (Billson & Terry, 1982; Fry, 2002b) and those who have second language difficulties (Brown, Rosen, Hill, & Olivas, 1980; Fry, 2002b). Latino students who have recently lived outside the United States show a greater high school dropout rate than those who have been living in the U.S. for a longer period



of time, and U.S-born Latino students have shown the highest success rates in college (Fry, 2002b; Rumberger, 1983).

Compounding the situation is the fact that classifying these immigrant students has also proved to be difficult (Harklau, Siegal, & Losey, 1999, p. 4; Masterson, 2007). They are not second-generation students who were born and raised in the U.S. and who have grown up as bilingual speakers of American English and of another language. Instead, these are immigrant students who have been in the U.S. for anywhere from a few to several years; the exact number of years and the exact sorts of experiences in language training and language learning can vary greatly. These students may have come from neighborhoods where some variety of English was used daily. Although many of these immigrant students are able to use some spoken English suitable for casual communication with friends and for everyday life in their neighborhoods, some do not have exposure to the more specialized academic English used by many members of the college community (Forrest, 2009, pp. 1 & 4). The form of spoken English they use may be a nonstandard, urban variety marked by some non-native speaker errors. This is also a class issue, for there are some Caucasian students in community colleges who would also speak varieties of English that are not considered “academic English.”

The lack of sufficient literacy skills of some Generation 1.5 Mexican American students is revealed in a variety of testing processes for placing students into freshman-level writing courses. Although some Generation 1.5 speakers of English do have command of spoken English, it is sometimes the English of the urban neighborhood where they have been living and not standard American English (Cummins, 2003;

Forrest, 2009, p. 4). These speakers may not know that the English they speak is not the standard academic English used in college classrooms.

Accuplacer (College Board, 2002) is one type of placement test used in community colleges. It tests for placement into freshman English rhetoric and composition courses. It is online, and it consists of both forced-choice and essay questions. The results are available to students immediately upon completion. The general English version of Accuplacer reveals student use of non-standard varieties of English, as shown in the following example:

“Sample Question

Ms. Rose planning to teach a course in biology next summer.

planning

are planning

with a plan

\*plans

The correct answer is *plans*. The sentence should be ‘Ms. Rose plans to teach a course in biology next summer’” (College Board, 2002)

The use of “planning,” a present participle without a helping verb, is acceptable in Black English and some types of urban English.

The same is true in this second example, taken from the test for students designated as needing ESL classes. This second version of the Accuplacer is called the “Levels of English Proficiency” test.

“Sample Question

One or two sentences will be followed by a question.

Choose the correct answer to the question.

The teacher called on Joe in class.

What did the teacher do?

Shouted to Joe

\*Asked Joe a question

Telephoned Joe

Visited Joe

The correct answer is *Asked Joe a question*. “The teacher asked Joe a question” (College Board, 2002)

Note that “Shouted to Joe” is an acceptable response in certain forms of non-standard American English, such as Black English. As such, it is technically a “correct response” because it is English. However, it shows cultural differences too, for it would no doubt be considered too “informal” for the college classroom where standard American English is expected.

A recent study (Oudenhoven, 2006) documents the results of student performance on another commonly used instrument, the Combined English Language Skills Assessment or CELSA. Commonly used in colleges, the CELSA (Association of Classroom Teacher Testers) is a placement test that looks specifically at reading and writing levels of adult students for whom English is not the native language. The test consists of 75 multiple choice questions. The test is written only and does not include a listening or speaking section. Therefore, even if students are fluent in some variety of spoken English they must rely on their knowledge of standard American English grammar and syntax in written form only.

The frustration of some Generation 1.5 Mexican American students who find out suddenly that they are English Language Learners in college is understandable. Some may have very quickly developed what Cummins (2003) calls “Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills” in English meaning they can handle conversations with native speakers of English, and can do so by observing important clues such as the speaker’s tone of voice, facial expressions, physical gestures, and visual information. In fact, they

may even be able to read nuances of meaning from the conversation, and may become proficient in this type of communication in as little as two years. However, they may have not developed what Cummins calls “Cognitive Academic Linguistic Proficiency” needed for survival not just in English Composition I but also in the majority of college courses they will pursue. The written nature of academic English is problematic partly because there is no context for a language test that looks at a student’s ability to make assumptions, draw conclusions about or simply read a selection of text. Cummins explains how the misunderstanding of two different types of language usage has led to devastating results in the testing and placement of bilingual students in the U.S., such as retesting students for special needs concerns and putting the students into special education courses.

Although many Generation 1.5 Mexican American students in higher education may have an understanding of American educational institutions and of the dominant U.S. culture, some need a great deal of assistance in developing academic English skills and have low literacy levels in their first language (Forrest, 2009, p. 4; Harklau, Siegal, & Losey, 1999, pp. 4-5). Others need help transferring literacy skills from their first language into English. Still others identify English as their stronger language but have little command of it and little or no control of their first language; these students need help as they come to grips with the realization that they have low literacy skills in both languages. Although they are proud of their heritage and they consider themselves bilingual, some students in this situation feel that English is what they consider to be “truly theirs.”

It is important to understand that the students being discussed here do not fit the well-known category of “international students” and instead have their own roles and challenges (de los Angeles Torres, 2009; Reid, 1997). It is for this latter group that many college English as a Second Language (ESL) programs have been designed. Many ESL programs include intensive literacy training coupled with units and lessons about U.S. culture, speaking exercises, and listening exercises. However, much of this curriculum is not needed by many Generation 1.5 Latino students who have perhaps been in the United States and enrolled in U.S. schools for several years. Unlike some international students who may have extensive literacy training in their native language, some Generation 1.5 Latino students may have disjointed training in any language and may have had their schooling interrupted in their home country. The very system of English composition sequences, prerequisites, required skill levels, placement tests, and the attitudes and actions of college administrators and faculty is based on a design not focused on meeting the individual needs of these immigrant students.

If one were to view higher education using a metaphor such as a machine, one could see the image of Generation 1.5 Latino students getting trapped in gears designed to fit other components, such as mainstream Anglo students whose native dialect of English is very similar to the academic written English used in higher education. Another set of gears requires a smooth fit between placement tests and college-credit courses, such as admission, progression into English I, graduation into English II, and upward through the gears as students advance through the college machine. However, not all students fit the process, and not all students have the college experience sketched

out in the plans for building the college machine. It is important to consider not only the academic challenges faced by these immigrant students in college but also the personal and emotional difficulties encountered because these students will have very different experiences while enrolled in higher education.

It is essential to understand that for many non-Anglo, non-mainstream students in the United States, knowing “who one is” is just as important as understanding “where one came from” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 194). Trying to describe many Latino students as if they were Anglo students or individuals without distinct cultural backgrounds does not lead to successful results. Trying to discuss many Latino students as if they were simply non-Anglo or simply minority students does not lead to success either because they have entirely different cultural and linguistic backgrounds from other ethnic and racial groups. Awareness of cultural differences, traditions, and histories is crucial for conducting research on Latino students. Further, it is essential to understand that “Latino” and “Hispanic” are umbrella terms for persons of different races, languages, nationalities, and traditions (Idler, 2007).

While this study makes use of the term “Latino” when referring to growing numbers and the changing demographics of U.S. institutions of higher education, this study focuses specifically on Mexican American immigrant students who belong to Generation 1.5. This study attempts to examine some of the challenges and obstacles facing these students (Gonzales, 2008; Hunter-Anderson, 2008; Monsivais, 2004; Samacho & Spodek, 2005; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995) as immigrants.

Two recent dissertations record the stories told by students in intensive, one-on-one interviews. The first is a dissertation completed by Betsy Oudenhoven (2006) at Loyola University Chicago on Latino student experiences at Borderland Community College. The study focuses on both student stories and the implications for changing placement policies for Generation 1.5 students enrolling in community colleges. Of the nine students interviewed, seven are Mexican. The second is the dissertation about the experiences of Latino and other Generation 1.5 community college students completed by Kevin Hinkle (2006) for New York University. The students in Hinkle's study are from a variety of Asian and other countries. Although this study considers other research, Oudenhoven and Hinkle relate most directly to the present study and inform it in major ways. Both Oudenhoven and Hinkle share stories the students have told in intensive interviews, and both reveal student feelings, negative experiences, and strategies for coping with the community college placement process.

Both Oudenhoven and Hinkle describe the challenges immigrant students encounter while navigating a difficult stream with the goal of reaching shore, in this case success in college-credit English courses leading up a path to successful performance in a variety of other courses and a variety of careers. The two researchers explain much about the placement process, the classroom experience, the learning process, and the overall early-college experience of a specific group of students. While both studies reveal a great deal about student lives, neither study explores in depth key emotions that often surface, such as anxiety and stigma. Without a more interdisciplinary frame of reference

for explaining or shaping those student feelings, the two researchers do not provide further explanation of those students' emotions and experiences.

In the following chapter, the interdisciplinary literature review synthesizes studies that have uncovered similar outcomes—students feeling anxious, embarrassed, and cheated. One researcher states that students have been discriminated against by being placed into pre-college courses (Leki, 1999a). Other studies (N ye, 2006; Roberge, 2001; Ruiz, 2003) are relevant because they explore these student emotions although those discussions are about students from other ethnic groups, other types of institutions of higher education, and in stressful environments other than college settings. These studies are reviewed to show how they relate to this current study, help inform the questions to be asked during interviews, and provide assistance to better understanding complex relationships between the individual student and that person's individual struggle to adapt to, make sense of, and excel in the community college classroom.

The need exists for further and deeper exploration of Latino student feelings, including not only the nature and extent of any anxiety they feel, but also the shape or extent of the stigma students might feel when placed into these pre-college-level courses. Using information from other fields is an important expansion of research-to-date that has identified many interesting impressions and problems but has not yet attempted to explore them (Hinkle, 2006; Oudenhoven, 2006).

Other experts describe themes arising related to language learning anxiety and to any responses revealing stigma occurring during interviews with students. For example, Krashen (1982, 1985) reports that some students in the second language classroom



encounter “confusion.” This is because so much of their mental energy is being spent on fearing they will not know the answer when called on that they don’t have energy to find the correct answer. This is what Krashen calls the affective filter—some sort of block that engages when too much startling or frightening demand is placed on the student’s brain. According to Krashen the student is focused so much on being nervous that there is not enough brain power left to listen to language input, process the input, make decisions on how to respond, and then respond. Krashen’s theory on the affective filter continues to be considered in current practice and still forms the basis for more recent low-anxiety approaches to teaching language (Arnold, 1999; Gass, 1997, p. 2, 2008, p. 402; Kumaravadivelu, 2002, p. 104).

Experts in the field of psychopathology have developed a much more complete, and more technical, explanation for this confusion as a presenting symptom of social phobia or social anxiety disorder (Beck, 2005). The explanation bases in the notion that so much of the brain is devoted to producing symptoms of fear that an insufficient amount of the brain is left to conduct cognition. Expert researchers and practitioners (Antony & Swinson, 2008; Brantley, 2007; Clark & Beck, 2009) continue to make use of the diagnostic criteria set forth in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV-Revised (American Psychiatric Association, 2000)—usually abbreviated as the DSM-IV-R—a publication that provides a more technical framework for understanding anxiety.

The examples of symptoms of different forms of anxiety disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) might prove useful in looking at the nervousness of some

students in the second language learning environment. There are several types of anxiety disorders that could explain the symptoms: social phobia (a persistent fear of being trapped in a group, fear of speaking in front of others, fear of being evaluated or attacked by others in a group); panic disorder (irrational discomfort with a rapid onset, sudden heavy sweating, accompanied often by sharp feelings of dread, faintness, difficulty speaking or breathing, fear of dying, desire to escape the current location, being embarrassed about becoming too nervous, and/or vertigo); or perhaps a form of specific phobia never diagnosed in the student (terrible fear of a certain object or person, such as chalkboards or teachers).

Common to all anxiety disorders is the “fight or flight response mechanism.” This is the desire to attack one’s predators or flee the threatening situation. “For people who are prone to anxiety and panic attacks, their parasympathetic nervous system, or their ability to restore their body back to normal after experiencing a stressor, does not seem to function properly” (What is anxiety/panic?). A more technical explanation is that adrenaline and other chemicals are not metabolized as easily as they should be and they “linger” in the body too long, thereby not allowing the parasympathetic system to bring the body back to stability.

Some persons might have a variety of similar symptoms or different symptoms at different times. These disorders are said to have a wide range of severity, meaning very slight in some persons and dramatic and disabling in others. Although the DSM-IV-R has been translated into 22 languages and is used in many countries, a search of the literature on anxiety in learning other languages does not produce recent major studies

relating diagnostic criteria of the DSM-IV-R to the nervousness of students in the second language learning environment. The anxiety is definitely situational and has not been studying from the point of view of language learning or related topics such as language learning or the fear of being in a language classroom. The constellation of symptoms presenting could fall under social phobia (e.g., speaking in front of others) or specific phobias (e.g., fear of chalk boards) or post-traumatic stress disorder.

The use of concepts from Mexican culture and traditions can inform the current study because the idea of anxiety is played down for reasons of stigma (Keefe, 1979; Padilla, 1995). The more traditional Mexican families would refer to panic attacks as “asusto” and to panic feelings in general to “nervios.” In this way, the individual suffering is not seen as being weak or mentally ill. Instead, there may be spiritual or other causes of the feelings. In many cases, persons from these same families would avoid seeking services from a doctor or mental health professional.

The use of more technical explanations from scientific studies can give language educators a more informed way to understand anxiety. If students are extremely anxious, their ability to return to a normal state of feelings may not be functioning well enough to allow them to answer or participate in a class; this inability may make them even more nervous. This is related to the inability to settle down and focus on the task at hand (What is anxiety/panic?). It may be that some students feel the common sort of anxiety one encounters when entering a classroom for the first time; other students may be much more nervous and still others may be suffering from an undiagnosed anxiety disorder.

While many students from many groups may feel a certain amount of anxiety when entering college, some students also feel some stigma about being placed into courses they consider in some way to be below their expectations. Research has shown that some Generation 1.5 Latino students may experience a much more significant and dramatic sense of stigma. When placed into lower courses to develop their English language skills, they are experiencing Goffman's third type of stigma, one which is assigned later in life (1963). Goffman maintains that people must be taught to fear those who are different in some way. For example, people need to learn to fear and ridicule those who are disabled. By the time many people have become adults, they have learned to look down on persons in wheelchairs and those who do not see. In the case of these English language learners, studies show many feel stigmatized by being placed into certain kinds of special courses. They have learned to look down at certain individuals, and suddenly they are part of the stigmatized group they have learned to look down on. In this case, they may be part of a group stigmatized as "English language learners" (Ravitch, 2007). Goffman continues to serve as a cornerstone of sociological research on stigma and related phenomena (Jacobsen, 2009; Scheff, 2006; Smith, 2006). Goffman's work on stigma can be applied to English language learners today.

Students in the studies conducted by both Oudenhoven (2006) and Hinkle (2006) revealed feelings of stigma among the groups of students they interviewed. However, neither researcher focused on exploring those feelings of stigma further.

Although some students apparently consider their learner status or placement level to be only "a more or less peripheral issue" (Leki, 1999a, p. 27) to their learning

experience, other students can focus on the stigma and insult of being designated as “ESL students” (Blanton, 1999, pp. 124-125). Even though some of these disenchanted students work actively to learn English within the system provided for this purpose, they do feel the stigma. They state it plainly for the researchers in recent studies (Hinkle, 2006; Oudenhoven, 2006).

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The main purpose of this research is to explore the stories of Generation 1.5 Mexican American students who have graduated from high school in the U.S. and are being placed into ESL and/or developmental English courses when entering community college. Generation 1.5 students are those who were born in another country and who came to the U.S. at the age of 13, or older, and graduated from high school (using English as the main language of instruction) in this country (Fry, 2002). The immigrant students will address college language placement experiences, reaction to placement results, and the challenges and successes in courses on language skills development. Through interviews with students, information may also arise related to student background, family life, prior training, and previous education.

While both Oudenhoven (2006) and Hinkle (2006) explored the experiences of faculty members in addition to the experiences of students, my study focuses specifically on student stories. Student views and their reactions to classroom and social settings are very important stories. The exploration of student anxiety and stigma will be pursued if students voluntarily raise themes related to these feelings.

This study addresses many of the issues raised in the studies conducted by Oudenhoven and Hinkle. The study attempts to explore the experiences of these immigrants and their adaptation to new cultural surroundings. The main research questions of this study deal with four different aspects of the lives of the Mexican American Generation 1.5 students interviewed. The questions are:

- 1) What are the adjustments to U.S. culture in general?
- 2) What are the adjustments to the culture of the community college classroom and corridor?
- 3) Does the student encounter any feelings of anxiety in the language-learning process?
- 4) Does the student encounter any feelings of stigma in the language-learning process?

### **Definition of Terms**

It is important to define several terms that will be used throughout this study.

- **Affective filter**, used by Stephen Krashen (1982), describes certain powerful affective variables that prevent language input from reaching the parts of the brain responsible for language acquisition. This “filter” is activated when a learner feels anxiety, has low self-esteem, or feels like an outsider when hearing the language spoken. The learner may in fact be capable of understanding the message, but this sort of block prevents the message from reaching the brain.
- **Anxiety Disorders**, according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, are forms of mental illness in which an irrational and persistent fear of

certain places, objects or situations plague the individual to the extent that major life activities, such as attending school or maintaining employment are impaired (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

- **Bilingual Education** has two main goals, including the teaching of academic English and school success, along with development of literacy in the student's first language (Krashen, 1999). This is one common model, and variations exist.
- **Combined English Language Skills Assessment (CELSA)** was designed for placing adult learners into intensive English programs and into academic English courses in colleges (Association of Classroom Teacher Testers, <http://www.assessment-testing.com/celsa.htm>)
- **COMPASS College Placement Tests** are a series of instruments designed by ACT and covers these areas: reading, writing skills, writing essay, mathematics. There is also a special ESL section of the test, though not all colleges use it. This test is the standard used now in Illinois community colleges (American College Testing Program, <http://www.act.org/compass/advant/index.html>).
- **Developmental Communication Courses** are pre-college level, skills courses in which students learn basic language patterns, grammar and conventions necessary for forming correct sentences in the type of academic English used in freshman English courses, such as Rhetoric and Composition I, a mainstay of many programs in higher education.
- **English as a Second Language (ESL) Courses** contain content and strategies necessary for helping an individual with a native language other than English

enroll in college-level courses in which standard American English is the language of instruction; enrollment is indicated by placement results on a test such as the CELSA for non-native speakers of English.

- **English Language Learners** is a recent term used to describe individuals who speak and/or write a language other than English at home and who are not yet proficient in English (Ravitch, 2007, p. 87).
- **Generation 1.5 Students** are those who were born in another country and who came to the USA at the age of 13, or older, and graduated from high school (using English as the main language of instruction) in this country (Fry, 2002).
- **Second Language Acquisition** (SLA) refers to the process of “picking up” (Krashen, 1982) a language as opposed to learning a language in a structured environment such as a college classroom. The term also refers to the field of contemporary research to which experts like Stephen Krashen belong. Some experts in the field of English as a second language (ESL) feel that many of the theories and methods involved in the teaching and learning of ESL are subsumed under SLA.



### **Significance of the Study**

To grasp the relevance of this study, it is essential to explore key issues in the placement of Latino students in community colleges. For example, it is important to understand that neither ESL nor developmental communication courses are generally credit-bearing. This means that not only are students not making progress toward a degree while enrolled but also that the courses may not render the student eligible for financial aid. Harklau, Losey and Siegal report on this situation (1999, pp. 6-7). They explain that many students who take such courses for several semesters can deplete their resources before they are able to take regular courses such as Composition I and move forward toward obtaining credits that will count toward a certificate or a degree.

It is also essential to understand that interdisciplinary sources and approaches can inform research directions and conclusions across subject boundaries. Learning more about the developmental levels of these students can be facilitated by consulting experts like Chickering and Reisser (1993). Learning more about the range of emotions can be facilitated by consulting sources in psychology and sociology. Further, developing an interdisciplinary approach to discussing student feelings and experiences can help better inform administrators, faculty members, and other decision-makers in higher education.

It is also important to understand some of the ways in which Latinos of Mexican ancestry discuss anxiety, nervousness, and discomfort with the demands of adjusting to new cultural traditions and to a new language. Some Mexican Americans show a great reluctance to “open up” to therapists or eschew mental health professionals and seek assistance elsewhere (Gary, 2005; Martinez, 1977; Vega, Kolody, & Aguilar-Gaxiola,

July, 2001, p. 139) because of the belief that mental illness is a private issue. Others feel that mental health issues are more “emotional problems” (Keefe, 1978) and discussing them is a sign of weakness (Keefe, 1979). Still others avoid mental health professionals and counseling because of lack of information about available assistance, lack of English proficiency, or lack of financial resources (Sentell, Shumway, & Snowden, 2007; Vega, W., Kolody, B., Aguilar-Gaxiola, S., & Catalano, R., 1999). Experts on counseling Latinos, and specifically Mexican Americans, point to the differences among individuals of different cultures and to the importance of incorporating knowledge of these differences when designing treatment protocols for families (Arredondo, Davison-Aviles, Zalaquett, Bordes, Gracioso de Rodriguez, Hita, & Lopez, 2006; Arredondo & Perez, 2003; Padilla, 1995).

In addition, it is essential to comprehend that not only are Latinos different in how they frame anxiety and stigma but also different in how their population is growing. The number of Latinos in the United States is increasing, and more who desire higher education are heading to the community college—their institution of choice. The greater the number of Latinos in higher education, the more pressing the need to understand how to serve them (Fry, 2002b; Hunter-Anderson, 2009; Santiago & Brown, 2004, pp. 3-4).

Portes and Rumbaut (2006) address issues encountered by English language learners in the schools and defend the immigration of undocumented persons into the U.S. Stating that immigrants make many contributions and bring zeal and enthusiasm with them to their jobs, these researchers show the importance of welcoming newcomers into mainstream society.

### **Growing Numbers and Growing Need**

The 2000 United States Census (2000a) reveals that between 1970 and 2000 the percentage of foreign-born U.S. citizens who were from Latin America increased from 19% to 51%. Two-thirds of the Latin Americans were from Mexico and Central America. Further, the 2000 United States Census (2000b) reveals that of 281,421,000 Americans 35,305,000 or 12.5% were Hispanic/Latino. The U.S. Census Bureau provides the following estimates: by 2020, Latinos will make up nearly 19 percent of the total U.S. population, and by 2050 about one in four people in America will be Latino (2009).

In Illinois specifically, the 2000 Census reveals that 1,530,262 persons in the state identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino—representing 12.3% of Illinoisans (U.S. Census, 2000c). Of that figure, 1,144,390 self-identified as Mexican—representing 9.2 percent of state residents. Of Illinoisans aged 5 years and over, 2,220,719 individuals—or 19.2 percent of residents—indicated that they speak a language other than English at home (U.S. Census, 2000d). Of the Illinoisans who claim they speak Spanish at home, 665,995 individuals—or 5.8% of Illinois residents—say they speak English less than “very well.”

Illinois schools and colleges, and especially the educational institutions in the Chicago area, have a special stake in understanding and educating Mexicans and other Latinos. The mission and roles of Illinois community colleges come into play. Regarding future community college enrollments, programs, and services, it is important to note the following information (Hunter-Anderson, 2009):

- In Illinois, Latinos represent almost half of the foreign-born population;
- In Chicago, more than 1/3 of the school-aged children are Latinos;
- In Illinois community colleges, Latino enrollments grew over 75% between 1990 and 2006;
- ESL students make up almost 60% of the adult education enrollees in Illinois community colleges;
- Almost 50% of the adult education enrollees are Latinos;
- In 2007, Latinos accounted for almost 1/5 of the credit enrollees;
- By 2020, 17% of the working age adults in Illinois will be Latino;

As numbers of immigrant students grow, and therefore the student demographics of U.S. educational institutions change, educators need to consider using different lenses to look at the experiences of students from different cultures. One important aspect of this current research is the attempt to reveal a deeper understanding of the shape of student feelings, as revealed in the interviews conducted. Unlike recent research that has uncovered student feelings of both anxiety and stigma but not investigated them, this research explores these responses, using methods informed by sources in second language acquisition, psychology and sociology. This more focused study has at its core the attempt to more fully document and describe student experiences than has been done in other recent studies.

It is important to make use of interdisciplinary connections—and to forge them where they do not yet exist because of departmentalization within schools, colleges, and

departments in higher education. To date, few studies have attempted to bridge these gaps in order to more fully discuss the experiences of Generation 1.5 students.

### **Overview of Chapter II: Literature Review**

The literature review in the next chapter draws from a rich body of research in different fields because interdisciplinary sources and approaches can inform research directions and conclusions across subject boundaries. Looking at sources and schools of thought in a variety of fields, such as psychology and sociology, can help better inform college curriculum administrators, campus registration administrators, ESL faculty members, teachers of developmental communication, and other decision-makers in higher education by drawing upon other areas of knowledge.

The literature review is based on four interdisciplinary research streams related to the experiences of Generation 1.5 students: adjustments to U.S. culture in general; adjustments to the culture of the community college classroom and corridor; any feelings of anxiety encountered in the language-learning process; and any feelings of stigma encountered in the language-learning process. The streams are enriched by current research on closely-related topics for similar participant groups (Hinkle, 2006; Oudenhoven, 2006).

Although the term “Latino” is often used in this study, all participants sharing their experiences are specifically Mexican American immigrants who are from Generation 1.5. The literature streams include this focus on Mexican Americans whenever possible.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Immigrants face a variety of challenges and go through changes as they acculturate into U.S. culture (de los Angeles Torres, 2003). They also face challenges as they enter college, and Hinkle (2006) maintains this is because educational policies and programs are designed from the perspective of the college administrator. Instead, the goals and needs of the immigrant students should be considered. Generation 1.5 students represent a quickly growing population with different views of what education should mean. Understanding the needs and hopes of this specific segment of students should be an important goal for educators (Hinkle, 2006, pp. 20-22).

#### **Description of the Four Interdisciplinary Literature Streams**

This study seeks to explore the hopes and feelings of Mexican American Generation 1.5 students from their perspective. The foundation for the study of these immigrants' experiences navigating the waters of new cultures consists of these four interdisciplinary research streams, relating as closely as possible to the background of the participants to be interviewed:

1. Immigrant students' adjustments to U.S. culture in general;
2. Immigrant students' adjustments to the culture of the community college classroom and corridor;

3. Any feelings of anxiety encountered by immigrant students in the English language-learning process; and
4. Any feelings of stigma encountered by immigrant students in the English language-learning process.

This qualitative study of immigrant experiences consists of one-on-one interviews with 11 student participants who are enrolled in two Illinois community colleges, one urban and one suburban, that require students enroll in English as a Second Language (ESL) or developmental communication courses as indicated by placement results on the English section of the Accuplacer™ online test. This study considers closely the results of two recent dissertations on the placement of Generation 1.5 students into community college courses in the areas of ESL and developmental English (Hinkle, 2006; Oudenhoven, 2006).

### **Immigrant Issues Adjusting to U.S. Culture**

Some recent studies (Hinkle, 2006; Oudenhoven, 2006) do not focus on the fact that Generation 1.5 Latino Mexican Americans are recent immigrants to the United States and as such are still going through a process of adaptation and/or acculturation into U.S. culture. Experts hold it is essential to consider the major challenges immigrants face and the dramatic changes immigrants often undergo as they learn to deal with a new culture (Aroian, 1990). One study shows that Mexicans who are recent immigrants to the U.S. often identify strongly with their home culture and face what Monsivais (2004, p. 28) has called a “triple-whammy” of discrimination because they are so unlike the individuals who constitute the dominant, mainstream Anglo culture typical of institutions such as

schools and colleges. This is because they are not Anglo, they are not Protestant, and they are not native speakers of English.

One major form of discrimination against Mexican Americans is the attempt to force these immigrants to accept U.S. culture and abandon their home culture (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995, p. 60). At the same time, U.S. individuals in roles of authority may not understand why Mexican American students do not behave like native-born students in the school and why they do not adapt quickly to U.S. models of behavior and decorum. An example of this is young Mexican Americans looking down at the floor and acting in other acquiescent ways when reprimanded by U.S. school teachers (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995, pp. 58 & 61). Often, U.S. school teachers feel the children are ignoring them, disrespecting them, and “turning them off.” These cultural difficulties are documented thoroughly in the literature (Ricken & Terc, 2005; Sampson, 2007; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995; Valdes, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999; Valverde, 2006).

Another major form of discrimination is ignoring the fact that in many cases the family patterns and traditions of Mexican Americans are different from mainstream U.S. Anglo patterns (Arredondo & Rodriguez, 2006). As an example, members of the Mexican American family work together typically to solve problems. All members of the family might come to the high school or college to help students take tests and register for classes. The U.S. educational institution does not allow for members of the extended family, and babies, to attend registration activities in schools. However, the members of the Mexican American family may feel they are not welcome, and the enrolling student is



not welcome, when they see there is no place for family members to wait for, or assist, the enrolling student.

Samacho and Spodek (2005) have compiled several essays on major differences between mainstream Anglo U.S. culture and the workings of the Mexican American family, including helpful information for educators and administrators, such as differences in children's emotional regulation and psychological development, and changes in Mexican American families—including the ways they view cultural traditions and the importance of language choice. As examples, in the Mexican American family older siblings often help raise the younger ones and there is no nanny or babysitter, younger children develop their self-esteem as members of a large family and not independent from it, and certain religious holidays and observances may be sacrosanct. These facts may vary markedly from the culture from which the U.S. educator may originate (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995, p. 65).

Much discrimination against Mexican Americans does revolve around language usage. One major fact to consider is that some Mexican American parents may feel it is important to speak in Spanish about certain cultural points and personal family issues. Students may feel pulled in two very different directions regarding which language to use and which language to develop further. Parents may not understand the emphasis on students using English and abandoning their home language (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995). At the same time, students must decide when and how to accommodate the demands of their teachers who may insist students abandon their use of Spanish (Valenzuela, 1999).

Further, U.S. society discriminates against Latinos in public education. Because of the ways schools often receive funding locally, Latinos are at a huge disadvantage; they receive inferior education and services in poorer school buildings located in poorer neighborhoods. A study on the “resegregation of U.S. schools” drives home two strong points about differences in the students attending (Orfield & Yun, 1999, p. 17). First, minorities tend to be in schools with poorer students. Specifically, Latinos and Blacks are forced to attend schools with the highest poverty rates. The report states, “In other words, the students in the segregated minority schools were 11 times more likely to be in schools with concentrated poverty and 92% of Anglo schools did not face this problem” (p. 17). Second, the proximity to students from other cultural traditions is out of balance: “Anglos are the only racial group that attends schools where the overwhelming majority of students are from their own race” (p. 15).

Zhou (1997) also reports on the differences in the quality of education found in poorer schools and notes a growing tendency on the part of researchers to think of schools as arenas of injustice based on different class and race. An increasing number of experts are finding that inequalities of class and race are not only found in U.S. society in general but are carried into the schools because of the way educational institutions receive funding. These inequalities contribute to students leaving poorer schools without adequate preparation for college studies.

Requiring immigrants to use English is another major form of discrimination. There is pressure from members of the dominant English-speaking U.S. population for immigrants to replace their language with English, and this change can bring stress in a new environment for individuals learning to communicate using a new system. Experts

state that the ability for immigrants to learn the new language is essential (Aroian, 1990, p. 7). However, immigrants must have time to learn the language correctly. Immigrants must do this even if they are attending, or have recently attended, a school where there are only very few Anglo native speakers of standard English. Lessow-Hurley addresses cultural implications, explaining that immigrants learning English is not a trivial process, stating further “Whatever your political position, it needs to be understood that language replacement implies cultural replacement as well” (2003, p. 22).

Attempting to establish laws to require immigrants to use English—to the exclusion of their home language—is another major form of discrimination targeting certain groups. The “English-only” movement is a clear sign of efforts to force immigrants to learn the new language faster. This emphasis on English seems to represent forced assimilation into the dominant U.S. culture. Experts explain some of the sources of this movement and discuss how it can complicate the lives of new arrivals and students in schools (Crawford, 2000; Darder, Torres & Gutierrez, 1997). Mora (2007) discusses the pros and cons of English-only and bilingual education philosophies in the classroom, stating that the need for students to “depend on” their native-language in the classroom seems to make sense. Further, prohibiting them from using their native language—tied closely to their cultural identity—represents a marked devaluation of those students. Mora emphasizes, “Students can be profoundly harmed by negative messages about the value of their language and culture” (2007, faculty website).

Although some Mexican immigrants and some Mexican Americans feel it is important to abandon Spanish and learn English as quickly as possible when in the U.S.,

some members of both groups feel a strong allegiance to their native language and feel it is essential to maintain command of it for a variety of reasons (Hurtado & Gurin, 1995, p. 90). Some Mexican immigrants and some Mexican Americans feel it is important to speak Spanish when discussing personal and cultural issues; others feel it is important to use Spanish for showing they belong to part of a certain group of individuals like themselves.

Mexican culture and mainstream Anglo U.S. culture have many differences, such as those mentioned above. The responsibility for bridging the two major disparate realities is generally foisted upon the students. They are the ones responsible for taking on new cultural and linguistic behaviors and attitudes, at the same time they must jettison other ones (Valenzuela, 1999).

However, students can become caught between the two cultures as conflicting forces try to keep them within their home culture and from the other side try to pull them into the new one. A recent study (Ruiz, 2003) explores the Generation 1.5 Latino students as having come from a “border culture” or one that is somewhere between two distinct cultures. Ruiz encourages the students to move on, to quickly become mainstream U.S. college students, and to embrace the type of English they must learn in order to succeed in college. The main thesis of Ruiz’s study is the need to mainstream these students into regular composition courses in the university setting. This is an example of attempting to urge immigrants to assimilate linguistically—moving into usage of academic English as soon as possible.

Students caught between the two cultures would seem to have preferences for language use based on and linked closely to their degree of assimilation into U.S. cultural practices and rituals. A recent study examines four different types of identification among persons straddling the two cultures: 1) highly bicultural, 2) Latino, 3) U.S., and 4) low-level bicultural. The majority of the respondents, 73%, are of Mexican origin. The research shows that bilingual persons who identify more strongly with their Latino roots favor use of Spanish and have more proficiency in it than in English, while those who identify more strongly with mainstream U.S. culture prefer using English (Felix-Ortiz de la Garza, Newcomb & Myers, 1995, pp. 36-37).

There may even be a third type of culture to which older students decide to belong—not Mexican and not U.S. While younger Mexican-American children may show acquiescence and cooperation in school settings because these are traits prized and developed in Mexican culture for children in school, older adolescents may work harder to establish their own identities and may react in a more oppositional fashion to the negative statements of the dominant culture. They may in fact become part of a marginalized and oppositional culture that is different from both their traditional culture and the one to which they are being pressured to join (Bernal, Saenz & Knight, 1995, p. 88). This third culture encourages students to refuse to cooperate in school and deny the respect U.S. teachers expect from them. It is essential to explore these kinds of realities when looking at the community college experiences of the Generation 1.5 Mexican American students.

Hinkle (2006) also discovers that some community college instructors consider Generation 1.5 students in their ESL programs to be less cooperative than other students who have just immigrated. While the faculty interviewed felt newer immigrants respect them, they describe the Generation 1.5 students as “having been negatively influenced by American culture” and apathetic about their studies (p. 194).

Navigating the waters between and among cultures and settings is complicated by language differences and the roles individuals must play. There is also the necessary adjustment to a new type of power differential: Mexican American students must leave their home language behind and adopt the standard academic English of the authority figures in charge (Brittain, 2002; Cummins, 2000).

Norindr speaks of the unrealistic expectations placed upon new immigrants to the U.S. and how they must be enthusiastic, hard-working and acquiescent laborers who are excited about the prospect of gaining citizenship in a land of opportunity. This idealized view of immigration is based on sentimental accounts of nineteenth-century immigrants to America, most of who were from Europe. Norindr explains this romanticized view of the U.S. immigrant is at the core of “American cultural mythology” (1994, p. 243).

The immigrant students participating in the study may take several years to overcome the great stress from the adjustments to new cultural beliefs and patterns. Experts explain the complexity and force of such adjustments. As an example, Aroian (1990) states that immigrants go through a variety of phases and emotions when adapting to a new culture, including excitement about the novelty of the new culture, both negative and positive forms of culture shock, loss felt because of the distance from old friends and

familiar places, disruption in routines, change and even demotion in occupational and socioeconomic status, need to gain acceptance as speaker of a new language, desire to resolve grief issues, and need to feel at home in the new surroundings. It is important to remember that immigrants may experience several of these feelings. Further stress to the individual may occur as some immigrants may be trying to resolve past issues at the same time they are trying to master the challenges of the present.

It is essential to remember that there are both voluntary and involuntary emigrants from one land to another. Experts state that voluntary emigration often leads to the individual having more ownership in the acculturation process as immigrants in the new country—especially in societies that are explicitly multicultural and that more freely accept immigrants into membership (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). Having ownership in the immigration process lends to easier acculturation and adaptation to the new surroundings. In this particular study, it is important to understand how student participants have come to the U.S. and why they enroll in the community college.

However, Grinberg and Grinberg emphasize that if migration occurs at a time when children are trying to assert their autonomy and trying to control their environments they may resent their parents for forcing the migration (1989, p. 124). They remind us, after all, that:

Parents may be voluntary or involuntary emigrants, but children are always “exiled:” they are not the ones who decide to leave, and they cannot decide to return at will. (p. 125)

Grinberg and Grinberg further warn of the psychological stress caused by forced emigration, advising that any shame or doubt in the children will lead to possible weaknesses in further development as a young adult. Also, other feelings can arise as

children are exposed to new situations, including feelings they are different from their peers, difficulty communicating with native speakers of the new language, notions that the family is a coercive force, inability to interpret “secret codes” in the new culture, feelings of doubt, inability to judge who is good or bad, fear the children are outsiders or intruders in the new school, and loss of one’s identity (1989, pp. 126-129).

Immigration can also take the form of a new adventure (Grinberg & Grinberg, 1989). In such a case, the new immigrant’s peer group can “...help to anchor ones’ drifting sense of identity by offering solidarity, cooperation, and containment” (p. 128). While in some cases the children can enter into bitter conflicts with parents about the migration, in other cases children share positive expectations and a sense of excitement about the new culture. In fact, if the migration across borders is desired, or is a shared exile, the family can function as a protective shield (p. 126).

The traditional Mexican American family plays a much different role in the lives of children than do other families. There are certain clear and common tendencies evident in the literature. For example, the Mexican American family provides protection, safety, advice, and both financial and emotional support. According to many experts, the mother is revered, and all family members involve her in their lives. The father is somewhat distant, and his decisions are final. Many experts have spoken about the strong role played by not only the parents but also by the nuclear and extended families in the lives of Mexicans and Mexican Americans (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; de los Angeles-Torres, 1998; Falicov, 2000; Farr, 2006; Murillo, 1971; Padilla, 1995; Penalosa, 1968; Staples, 1971; Staton, 1972; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995; Williams, 1990).



Generation 1.5 individuals have other work. The roles of these children and young adults sometimes include the need to help parents navigate the acculturation process and daily survival, including translating important information (Gonzales, Spring 2009, p. 7). The different gender roles are reinforced in and by families, and often men and women meet separately when at family gatherings, the women talking in the kitchen and the men gathering in the living room (Farr, 2006, p. 219).

The role of the family in reinforcing traditional patterns and beliefs from the country of origin is seen as essential to many Mexican Americans. In fact, it is felt by some that when immigrant children lose their expressive culture, social cohesion can be weakened and parental authority can be undermined. Interpersonal relations suffer. Suarez-Orozco warns, “The unthinking call for immigrant children to abandon their culture can result only in loss, anomie, and social disruption” (2003, p. 69).

The above examples of discrimination help to explain the plight of immigrants who come to the U.S. and face the challenge of adjusting and/or adapting to new cultural realities. The issues and challenges these immigrants face show the variety of stress factors wearing upon them as they endeavor to navigate unfamiliar waters.

### **Immigrant Issues Adjusting to Community Colleges**

It is important to understand that there have been very few studies of adolescent and early adult English language learners (ELLs), especially in the community college setting (Hinkle, 2006). There are also very few studies of ELLs and English as a second language in the secondary schools (Collier, 1992) and very few about bilingual education programs prior to 1990 (Faltis & Hudelson, 1998). However, there are more studies at

the elementary school level—where the largest concentration of ELLs in American education is found—and of international students learning English and other subjects in higher education, especially in universities and four-year colleges.

Most sources speak to issues facing Generation 1.5 students within the classroom, but not in other rooms or areas in higher education institutions. The literature review provides definitions, examples, and general background related to Generation 1.5 students, often profiling these immigrants in English classes in which literacy skills are emphasized. Various works define who Generation 1.5 students are in these contextualized terms (Chan, 2006; Danico, 2004; Harklau, Losey & Siegal, 1999; Rumbaut, 1991) and more specifically who Latinos of this group are (Fry, 2002a). There seem to be no studies focusing solely on Mexican American immigrants who are Generation 1.5 students, although the majority of Latinos in some recent studies fit that description (Oudenhoven, 2006; Ruiz, 2003).

Two key recent studies help inform this study because of the similarity of participants in those studies, and the similarity of research goals, to the present study (Hinkle, 2006; Oudenhoven, 2006). Both researchers uncover the embarrassment, discomfort, displeasure, and stigma some immigrants feel being placed into ESL or developmental communication courses and the similar feelings once sitting in the classroom. However, neither study discusses at length the registration process—or the experiences of these immigrants during it and their reactions to it—even though in the findings both these researchers make clear statements that the registration process, beginning with the testing process, is unsuitable and inhumane to immigrants.

Harklau, Losey, and Siegal (1999) have compiled several studies into an edition focusing on this and other groups of Generation 1.5 students and the challenges they face in college—specifically in English composition courses. Those studies help inform this study also. The studies in that compilation reveal findings parallel to those in Hinkle and Oudenhoven generally and also about Latino students in particular.

Other works outline some general issues facing these students when enrolled in higher education (Billson & Terry, 1982; Blackwell, 1978; Brown, Rosen, Hill, & Olivas, 1980; Firmen, Whitthuhn, Riggins, & Carson, 1997; Masterson, 2007; Santiago & Brown, 2004; U.S. Department of Education, 2002a, 2002b; Verbez & Mizell, 2001). These issues include general forms of discrimination, testing policies aimed at sorting out students who have literacy issues often caused by their neighborhood of origin rather than their exact level of skill, lack of understanding of cultural differences, lack of service to immigrant students, ignorance of the students' culture and language, and lack of patience when dealing with second language issues.

Many Mexican immigrants, in general, are at a disadvantage when compared to other immigrants coming to the U.S. because they are of humble origins, have little education, and have met a good deal of hostility in this country. Often they are working class immigrants with little or no savings to rely on. In addition, they often lack access to strong support groups with a large number of members who hold a variety of professional positions. Speaking about different ethnic groups in the U.S., Fernandez-Kelly states, "Mexicans are the only group with a large proportion of members who expect never to

receive a college education” (1998, p. 89). This last statement is important to ponder, given the emphasis of the current study.

Generation 1.5 students are at a disadvantage because of the wide variety of language-learning issues they encounter (Blumenthal, 2002; Forrest, 2006; Miele, 2004). Students need better skills in reading and writing academic English, and the use of courses like English as a Second Language or developmental communication courses is meant to prepare them for freshman English courses, which are already being taken by their native-English-speaking peers with whom they have graduated from high school very recently. Labeled as needing special coursework to deal with deficiencies in literacy, these students have suddenly become “English language learners,” meaning they speak another language at home and do not have sufficient proficiency in English to succeed in school (Ravitch, 2007, p. 87).

It may be frustrating for some Generation 1.5 Latino students to find out they are English language learners in college. Some may have developed high proficiency in speaking English and in understanding it when it is spoken—or at least more colloquial types of English. Some may have very quickly developed something Professor Jim Cummins (2003) calls “Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills” or BICS in English meaning they can handle conversations with native speakers of English, assisted in securing exact nuances of meaning by important clues such as the speaker’s tone of voice, facial expressions, physical gestures, and visual information. However, they may not have developed what Cummins calls “Cognitive Academic Linguistic Proficiency” or CALP needed to pass English Composition I.

Cummins, an expert on English language learner issues, agrees that Generation 1.5 ESL students “seem to be a neglected group thus far” in the body of research about issues in adjustment of English language learners (personal communication, April 11, 2007). Further, he emphasizes the importance in such research cases of considering the difference in each student’s capacity for CALP as opposed to BICS.

Knowledge of academic English is indeed important for these immigrant students. Many educators are aware of the special needs of students with disparate educational and cultural backgrounds, and exposure to formal English as used in colleges and universities. For example, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) acknowledges that many new students are increasingly diverse both linguistically and culturally (2001). The NCTE special interest group’s “Conference on College Composition and Communication” recommends special courses in second-language writing methods and theories for teachers of writing. The group also stresses the need for further investigations into issues surrounding second-language writing and writers in the context of writing programs and tied directly to the definition of who these students are.

The above examples of discrimination help to explain the challenges and obstacles of immigrants who come to the U.S. and enroll in an Illinois community college. The issues and challenges these immigrants face show the variety of stressors threatening the success of these students attempting to learn English, mainly in the difficulties they encounter in the classroom.

## **Anxiety Issues Encountered in the English Language-Learning Process**

A review of the literature shows several theories and several related studies on the anxiety of second-language learners. The foremost expert on such topics is Stephen Krashen whose work on what he calls an “affective filter” is well known in the teaching of English as a second language. Krashen developed the Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982) that states that certain powerful affective variables prevent language input from reaching the parts of the brain responsible for language acquisition. In other words, a sort of “filter” engages and stops messages from getting to areas in the mind responsible for receiving, logging on, decoding, and sending meaning signals to other parts of the mind for further processing, decision-making, and possible action. One emphasis of the current study is to explore the anxiety of second-language learners, and another is to explain whether the affective filter may be engaged or not.

Other researchers follow up on and contribute to an understanding of Krashen’s theories (Shaaban, 2002; Young, 1999;) and others look more generally at second language acquisition theories and teaching methods while still keeping an eye on reducing language learner anxiety (Doughty & Long, 2005; Lee & Van Patten, 2003; Lightbown & Spada, 1999; Sauvignon, 1997). These researchers examine other types of contexts and scenarios to see if Krashen’s theories “fit” and “make sense” as educators attempt to provide low-stress or anxiety-free classroom activities to language learners. Other studies look at anxiety in language courses and recommend ways instructors can reduce it (Van Patten & Williams, 2006) and at ways in which older students monitor

their speech acts as they are conducting them better than younger students can (Colson, 1989).

Some experts adding to the body of research on anxiety in the second language classroom feel there is more than one type of anxiety experienced by various learners in the second language classroom. Horwitz and Young (1999) talk about the general anxiety present in any social situation such as a classroom discussion and a second type of anxiety that only occurs in second language learning environments. The second type is said to occur because learning a language seems to be a unique experience.

MacIntyre (1999, p. 27) states that there have been studies showing that the anxiety experienced by some learners in second language classrooms is indeed tied to the activities and the setting—not to other general or specific types of anxiety. Other experts discuss the types of activities which may contribute to the learner feeling discomfort in the classroom, using the term “anxiety” to explain the uneasy feelings of some students. Leki (1999b) addresses the anxiety some students feel in writing in a second language, while Phillips (1999) addresses anxiety felt by some when speaking in the classroom. Cizek and Burg (2005) speak to the devastating effects test anxiety can have on student performance, confidence, and motivation; they include definitions related to test anxiety and strategies for decreasing it in the classroom.

Vogely discusses ways to decrease anxiety experienced during activities for listening comprehension and states that this is the most frequently used language skill in the classroom (1999, p. 107). Further, she explains how some students become anxious if the speaker speaks too quickly, has a pronunciation unfamiliar to the students or speaks

with a marked difference in the quality of the voice (e.g., low versus soft). Vogely recommends preparing students for the listening comprehension activities beforehand through a variety of methods and strategies.

Less research has been done about anxiety and reading (Lee, 1999, p. 50). Lee provides examples of ways to reduce anxiety about performing reading tasks in the classroom, such as “reading-readiness” activities. This approach includes preparing the students for reading a passage. Lee suggests students could make lists of what they already know about the topic they will be reading about, compare these lists with those of other students, and explore the words in the text to see if the information jotted down appears in the assigned reading. Krashen (2003) emphasizes the importance of voluntary free reading in the classroom to lessen the possible anxiety caused by students being forced to read aloud in front of their peers.

MacIntyre (1999) further explains four types of impacts felt by some second language learners who are anxious in the classroom: academic, cognitive, social, and personal. MacIntyre states, “It seems clear that high levels of language anxiety are associated with low levels of academic achievement in second or foreign language courses” (p. 34). Impaired performance on tests is another function of language anxiety. Students may “over study” because of the anxiety they are experiencing and become disappointed that the results of the assessment are so poor despite the hard work and the time they have invested in hopes of overcoming their nervousness.

Anxiety can negatively impact students trying to learn in the second language in three ways (MacIntyre, 1999, pp. 34-36). First, it can interfere in the process of



accepting input (e.g., listening to a conversation in the second language). If the information is not taken in by the students, it is not there to be used in the next two stages. Second, during the processing of the information, anxiety can distract the student from the tasks of exploring meanings, taking apart data, manipulating language, and coming to a fuller understanding of the language. Third, students can have difficulty expressing themselves orally or in writing—the classic case of “freezing up” when an individual is about to perform or to respond. The anxiety can impact the student socially in negative ways also, with the most common research result being that anxious students do not communicate with their peers in the classroom as much as students who are not nervous. It has also been found that more confident students are more motivated to learn the second language (p. 35). The anxiety can also impact the students personally, including some very severe and traumatic feelings for certain learners. In those cases, the educator must assist students as individuals with challenges and avoid dispelling student emotions as being exaggerations.

Although there have been studies revealing the emotions—indirectly—of Generation 1.5 Latino English language learners in higher education, most have not focused on the community college setting. Instead, most have focused on the university setting, such as the large study conducted by Roberge (2001) at the University of California at Berkeley. A more recent study conducted by Roberge (2003) on students at San Francisco State University comes close to looking indirectly at the topic of emotions of Generation 1.5 Latino English language learners by looking at how much—or how

little—these students identify with a home culture abroad which they do not remember well as opposed to American culture they have experienced more recently.

Another study (N ye, 2006) has included the “perceptions of” participants’ literacy-learning experiences in a community college setting where four Generation 1.5 students tell their stories not only of how they learn to read and write in English but also what they think of the process. Students bring with them disparate personalities, different needs, and differing expectations of the learning experience. Implications of how to teach these students can be drawn from many of the studies in which they have served as participants.

Patton provides explicit advice on how to teach Generation 1.5 students and warns they have “great fears about their own academic abilities” and therefore tend to be quiet in the classroom (2007). Since they are individuals, it is important to not make generalizations about them. Patton says it is important to engage these students in activities based on questioning, reading, discussing, and evaluating in the classroom.

Other researchers provide a different perspective on anxiety. Experts in the field of psychopathology provide a much more technical explanation for the confusion as a symptom typical of social phobia, earlier called social anxiety disorder (Beck, 2005). They base this in the idea that so much of the brain is being used to produce fear that an insufficient amount of the brain is left for cognition necessary for participating in classroom activities important for learning the language.

The current study draws upon interdisciplinary sources revealing research results on anxiety in various types of second language classrooms, anxiety and other emotions

revealed by English language learners in community colleges. It is hoped these studies will serve to form a strong framework to better understand the richness of the experiences and feelings of the immigrant students participating in the study.

### **Stigma Issues Encountered in the English Language-Learning Process**

A review of the literature shows no major studies of stigma as the main phenomenon studied within the second language classroom or student placement process in higher education. However, as Oudenhoven (2006) and Hinkle (2006) both reveal in their studies, some Latino Generation 1.5 students feel embarrassment or discomfort about being placed into ESL or developmental English courses in the community college. In fact, Hinkle uses the term “stigma” specifically regarding how some students feel when placed into pre-college classes instead of into regular composition courses. It is important to document student feelings of stigma and resentment and then to explore those emotions further.

Blanton explains how Generation 1.5 students feel when they have graduated from American high schools, and then go on by taking placement tests and formulating additional plans for further study—only to be placed into ESL or developmental English courses in the community college (1999, pp. 124-125). Placing these students into ESL courses with international students, for example, makes students feel disenfranchised and targeted because it denies them their status in more “legitimate” courses such as regular composition with students for whom English is the home language.

Further, Blanton calls it an “act of discrimination” (1999, p. 124) to place the students into ESL programs with international students because this holds them back

from pursuing the courses they must take as required and major credits. Placing the students with international students—foreigners who may return to their country after a short tour of study here—makes some students feel resentful, makes them feel they are being discriminated against just because they were born in another country. Teaching these students basic facts about American culture and daily life can also seem insulting to some Generation 1.5 students because they have attended high school with native speakers of English, may know a great deal about life in the United States and understand how institutions like American schools and agencies operate (p. 124).

Rodby states that many Generation 1.5 students at her university felt so unhappy about being placed in pre-college language classes that they were happy to participate when the institution explored removing remedial courses from current offerings (1999, p. 45). Students wanted support for the reading and writing skills needed for regular freshman English courses—not for remedial courses. Students had not wanted to enroll in an ESL or “basic” curriculum. Their university no longer offers pre-college courses.

It is essential to consider not just the feelings of the Latino Generation 1.5 students placed into the ESL or developmental English courses in the community college but also some of the reasons for their feelings. Harklau, Losey and Siegel report that “ESL course sequences are often stigmatized as remedial and students may be reluctant or dismayed to be placed in them” (1999, p. 7). Further, many faculty and administrators in higher education are also guilty of the belief that such courses are remedial. This belief leaves the programs open to the dangers and vicissitudes of both institutional and state mandates regarding funding and policies. One current danger is the “anti-

remediation” move nationwide, threatening to curtail or cancel some essential aspects and courses in both ESL and developmental courses (Harklau, Losey, & Siegel, 1999). This movement proposes to do away with remedial courses in higher education so that facilities and resources can be devoted to college-level programs. It is unknown to what extent the political messages of this sort of movement have impacted the emotions and thoughts of the individuals stuck in the middle of the argument—the Latino Generation 1.5 students who need the services most.

Leki (1999a) reports in a qualitative study the story of a Polish Generation 1.5 student who also feels the stigma of having to deal with the requirements of ESL classes and shows how this is a frustrating experience for him in college as it had been in high school. Interestingly enough, Leki discusses the student’s tactic of “creating masks” to be able to survive the difficulties of being placed in ESL classes he has abhorred:

During this time he used smoke and mirrors to create a public image of himself to his teachers as a serious, hard-working student, he was also busy constructing another persona—the wily, street-smart manipulator he displayed during interviews. (pp. 32-33)

The student uses reprehensible positions to perhaps protect himself from any possible recriminations. The frustration with the courses has been so strong it seems to force its way into his revelations to the interviewer.

Schwartz (2004) speaks of the “stigmatization” of the “ESL” prefix of courses contributing negatively to the learning experiences of Generation 1.5 English language learners from various countries. His study deals mainly with placement into regular

composition courses in a university and the problems encountered by the students dealing with the demands of such a course while they still have second-language issues, literacy issues, and the challenge of straddling two different cultures. Still these students face instructors who do not know there are “gradations” in the English language-learning process and that these students have needs very different from international students.

It is important to explore the emotions related to stigma in a more organized fashion from the point of view of experts in fields such as psychology and sociology. For example, sociologist Erving Goffman’s “Dramaturgic Method” explains the performances individuals mount to be able to show their best side (1963). Goffman also discusses the ways in which persons endeavor to remain in their accepted role, maintain self-respect, and continue to be accorded respect by others. This is termed “face-work” and must be conducted for individuals to be consistent with the individual’s face. Goffman explains, “Face work serves to counteract ‘incidents’—that is, events whose symbolic implications threaten face” (1967, p. 12).

Researchers gain a great deal through cross-pollinating their studies with the theories and outcomes from other fields. It is interesting to note that Blanton uses a rather Goffmanesque term when discussing the feelings of Generation 1.5 students who have been placed into ESL programs with international students: “They have lost face” (1999, p. 125). Blanton is revealing more profound thoughts and possible future stress in the students when she states that these students are being taken away from their peers—the American students with whom they have attended high school—and then denied their rights as citizens or residents. They feel resentment because their connection to their

community has been shaken. Blanton (1999) also provides an important glimpse into the emotions of the Generation 1.5 students in this very telling sentence: “With such resentment—submerged as it may be—draining away from their energies, no wonder some language minority students have difficulty concentrating” (p. 125).

Exploring the stigma of being placed into certain types of courses is important as educators endeavor to understand the feelings of the immigrant students who are attempting to access and enjoy the rights of community college students. Goffman remains the principal expert on stigma in a variety of contexts and his work forms an important basis for researchers in sociology, social work and other fields. It is hoped that Goffman’s work can help to inform the current research and help establish a firm basis for understanding not only the participants in the current study but also the experiences and feeling of similar immigrant students in the future.

### **Overview of Chapter Three**

The following chapter describes the methodology for conducting this research study and describes the major steps for designing the study, collecting and analyzing data, and ensuring the trustworthiness of the study.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Introduction**

Writing about globalization patterns, Suarez-Orozco states, “In all countries facing immigration, there have been major debates surrounding the cultural and socioeconomic consequences of large-scale population movements” (2003, p. 65). Further, in the United States a major concern is how non-English speaking, non-European immigrants will adjust to a new culture and perhaps even transform it. In order to explore how some immigrants adapt to, and evolve in, a new culture I look specifically at how Generation 1.5 Mexican American community college students negotiate not just the culture of a new land but also the culture of an institution: the U.S. community college. I also look at how these immigrants adjust to the culture of their English as a second language or developmental communication classrooms in order to provide a context for their experiences (Creswell, 2007, p. 75).

More so than in the past, the success of immigrants today depends on how well they can adapt to and fit into various “segments of society” (Fernandez-Kelly, 1998, p. 87). My study focuses on Generation 1.5 Mexican American immigrants fitting into a specific institution: a community college in Illinois. This narrow focus is meant to examine a small group of students with similar traditions and cultural backgrounds. Earlier studies look at broader groups. For example, Oudenhoven (2006) studies



Generation 1.5 Latino community college students attending an institution in Illinois. Hinkle (2006) studies Generation 1.5 community college students in New York who come from a variety of national origins and traditions.

In keeping with the study's foundation in phenomenology, I attempt to delve deeply into the experiences of the participants in order to communicate what is at their core. This is what is referred to as the "essence" of the experiences (Willis, 2007, p. 237). I explore not only the content revealed in the student experience but also the realities of the cultural frames in which those experiences occurred (Kvale, 1996, p. 53) and attempt to construct a cultural portrait of the participants (Creswell, 2007, p. 72). This study attempts to advance a social justice agenda of fairness and service. Many experts feel this is one of the best uses of qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Heron & Reason, 1997).

This is a dual-site, qualitative study based on interview procedures recommended by Kvale (1996), emphasizing conversations with the participants. This study also draws upon selected "open interviewing" techniques to ensure flexibility during those conversations with the researcher and the participants negotiating during their discussion among various topics (Rubin & Rubin, 2004). The literature review provides a rich background for establishing research questions. I use interdisciplinary materials as appropriate, drawing upon the fields of education, English as a second language, psychology, sociology, and second language acquisition to provide a backdrop for the student experiences to be revealed in the study.

This chapter describes the methodology employed in this study by addressing the rationale for the research method, research design, study and site selection, selection of research participants, data collection procedures, data analysis, data reporting, issues of confidentiality and trustworthiness, issues of researcher positionality, and potential limitations of the current study.

### **Rationale for the Research Method**

The approach used in this study is qualitative, including the gathering and analysis of personal information through one-on-one interviews with results presented in narrative format. Principles that guide this study originate in “phenomenology,” which examines not only what has appeared but also the context in which it has happened (Kvale, 1996, p. 53). An attempt is also made to explore student experiences without preconceptions and to look at the experiences from the perspective of the participants—a concept belonging to the tradition of phenomenology (Willis, 2007, p. 107). Some components of grounded theory are also employed in the study because of the potential for more flexibility and the decreased emphasis of being locked into more linear procedures (Creswell, 2007, p. 202).

It is important in qualitative research to be able to be adaptable in dealing with the “phenomenon” at hand (Willis, 2007). The phenomenon examined in this study includes the experiences of Generation 1.5 Mexican American community college students enrolled in either English as a second language or developmental communication courses.

Qualitative research allows for an interview approach which “is a uniquely sensitive and powerful method for capturing the experiences and lived meanings of the

subject's everyday world" (Kvale, 1996, p. 70). Further, the interview allows participants not only to discuss their experience from their own perspective but also to use their own words. Participants may use another language to express some concepts, may demonstrate emotional responses, and may confide in the researcher—all results of a qualitative research approach. It is important in phenomenology to attempt to understand participant experiences from the perspective of other human beings in social contexts and not simply facts presented by the participants (Willis, 2007, p. 53). The narrative also attempts to provide meaning for those feelings and emotions expressed in the interviews (Creswell, 2007, p. 54).

It is assumed that there are major cultural differences between Anglo, mainstream, traditional, monolingual (English-speaking), college-age students and the students participating in this study. As mentioned above, it is important to explore not only student experiences but also the context (community college enrollment in ESL or developmental communication courses) and the cultural background of the participants (Generation 1.5 Latinos, and even more specifically here, those who are Mexican American).

### **Research Design**

This research is designed as a dual-site study, emphasizing interviews being conducted as "conversations" with the participants (Kvale, 1996) and drawing upon selected open interviewing techniques (Rubin & Rubin, 2004). The study explores the experiences of the particular group of community college students participating in the study. No attempt is made in this design to generalize to the experiences of other

students given the nature of the approach (Stake, 1995). This research approach is a reasonable and thorough one for gaining a deeper and more complex understanding of student experiences because case studies are by nature “naturalistic,” meaning they are about real people and situations, are “particularistic” meaning they focus on a specific context, and are appropriate for producing “thick descriptive data” about the specific phenomenon (Willis, 2007, p. 238). Geertz, an anthropologist, also refers to the importance of developing a “thick description”—a term he borrowed from Ryle—to explain the context and connotation of an event or object.

The plan is to employ as a main site for the study one community college with a relatively high number of Latino students, and it is hoped, a large group of Generation 1.5 Latino students—specifically from Mexico. Data collection occurs within two academic semesters. One-on-one, semi-structured interviews occur with participants in English. However, Spanish is used for clarification as needed.

### **Participant and Site Selection**

Before I formally secured Grassland Community College as the main site for the study, I had already initiated and then participated in discussions about site selections with several administrators at several community colleges in the northeast region of Illinois. Choosing institutions with substantial populations of Latino students, I spoke with administrators in a variety of contexts, ranging from very informal chats at conferences to more structured telephone conversations and email messages. All of these conversations were meant to “test the waters” and begin negotiations to locate a site at

which administrators and faculty members would agree to participate in a more formal discussion, potentially leading to their granting me access to the site.

### **Preliminary Negotiations at Three Community Colleges**

I spoke informally with the administrators of three different community colleges in the northeast corner of the state, referred to each of these persons by the president's offices. The names of the colleges are based on the colors of the field of the national flag of Mexico.

Green College denied me access to the site because the administrator there determined after a lengthy evening telephone conversation that the college did not have the resources to assist me in the study and that it would put a strain on the college staff members there.

Anglo College administrators exhibited difficulty understanding my study, and the director of the ESL program there became uncooperative. This person was reluctant to subject her ESL students to interviews, fearing the students would become too upset from the questions, as she insisted they had in a previous study. The college decided not to participate.

There were major difficulties encountered at the next institution, as Red College administrators were guarded about their placement testing policies and did not wish to discuss them, even though they are public information. This reluctance to discuss the placement tests meant that in future negotiations with other college administrators the topic of placement tests would be avoided so as to not make it more difficult to gain access to the students for the interviews. In addition, the administrator designated there

by the president's office as being my contact there discussed my study with members of the English Department himself, instead of getting more complete information from me or waiting for me to meet with them myself. The faculty members took it upon themselves to discuss the study, and only two volunteered to allow me access to their students. The rest of the faculty members in the department were reluctant to participate. When I explained that the protocol at the university required that I myself communicate with the faculty members, I was blocked by the chair of the English Department from doing so. I withdrew my request to use Red College as a site because it had become obvious the administrators and faculty members there were not interested in participating and could not understand the need to protect the integrity of the study. They wished to make their own decisions and would not cooperate.

The need to devote major energy to calming the fears of, the administrators and faculty members of the sites for the interviews had become clear. The difficulties encountered in the negotiations at the first three community colleges which would not come to be sites for the study would influence the way in which negotiations and discussions would be held in the future in order to protect the integrity of the study and in fact locate sufficient sites and a sufficient number of students to interview.

### **The First Foray into the Field: Grassland Community College**

After the conversations at those three institutions, during the fall 2008 semester I approached the administration of Grassland Community College seeking access to students during the spring 2009 semester. Grassland Community College (GCC) emerged as the site for several reasons. First, the college had a rapidly-growing Latino

population, including many students who may be classified as Generation 1.5 students. Second, GCC emerged as the site because of its particular placement and registration rules. The GCC registration protocols required that students who did not demonstrate academic English language proficiency enroll in either ESL or developmental communication courses, and this fact produces a large potential number of participants from which to select interviewees. In fact, students who insisted on enrolling in regular freshman English despite low placement scores were still dissuaded from doing so. Third, Latino student enrollments in both ESL and developmental communication courses have increased recently at GCC. Fourth, the GCC was located within Cook County, Illinois, one of the five largest locations of Latino students in the nation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). Questions about placement testing instruments or procedures would not be asked of the administrators or the faculty at this or any other colleges approached. College administrators sometimes raised the issue themselves, and the information they shared is noted at various points in the study.

### **Selection of Research Participants**

There is an established formal protocol for securing participants in any research study (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In this particular study, I agreed to establish and then follow several steps in order to secure participants.

Fall semester 2008, I conducted the following efforts and completed this work to advance the study, beginning spring semester 2009 at Grassland Community College (GCC). First, I applied to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Loyola University Chicago to seek permission to proceed with my study.

Second, I contacted the senior research officer at Grassland Community College (GCC) to inform this administrator of my intent to seek permission from faculty in the Intensive ESL Program and the Developmental Communications Program to come to their classes to make a presentation to students about my study. I also intended to seek permission from advisors of any student clubs with several members who would fit the profile of students I was hoping to locate for interviews; my plan was to attend meetings of those clubs and make a presentation about the study. The senior research officer at GCC informed me I would also have to complete a formal application to the IRB at GCC for permission to proceed with my study. The senior research officer at GCC also serves as chair of the IRB.

Third, I filled out the formal application to the IRB at GCC for permission. Once the Loyola IRB had approved my study, the IRB at GCC also approved my access to the faculty members and club advisors at the community college.

Fourth, with the two approvals, I presented the senior research officer at GCC with a template of a “cooperating institution letter” (Appendix A) which includes the request to approach the faculty of the GCC Intensive ESL Program and the Developmental Communications Program, in addition to the GCC student club advisors. The senior research officer at GCC had this letter printed out onto official GCC letterhead, signed it, and mailed it to me. The senior research officer at GCC provided me with the names of faculty in the two programs and the student club advisors so that I could approach them.



Fifth, I wrote a letter (Appendix B) to all faculty members teaching in the two academic areas to see if I would be allowed to enter their classrooms. I also used the letter for student club advisors to see if I would be allowed to come to the meetings. I included in the letter the purpose, plan, and methods of my study. I asked the faculty members and student club advisors to contact me by email or phone to let me know if they would allow me to visit their classes and club meetings. The letters were placed by GCC staff members directly into the mailboxes of the faculty members in the two program areas and student club advisors.

Sixth, I prepared for and took an additional step. The letter to faculty members and club advisors had produced initial results. Therefore, I felt I had to send reminders to the faculty members and club advisors, and the letter to them consisted basically of the original letter with one sentence added at the beginning to remind them that there was still time to participate by letting me come and make the presentation, plus administer the survey. The IRBs at both Loyola and GCC approved the letter; after I had sent it, I got several responses. Once faculty members and student club advisors indicated their interest, I scheduled times and dates to attend the classes and club meetings.

Seventh, I visited several classes in both programs and administered a brief demographic survey (Appendix C) written in both English and Spanish. I also used a script, reading only the English section, even though it was also available to me to read in Spanish (Appendix D). I decided to not use the Spanish version because I feared this might make the students look less capable—or make them feel stigma—and the literature had shown that this profile of students often has very high conversational skills in

English, with only their literacy skills sometimes needing development. I also visited only one club, one focusing on Spanish language and other areas called the Hispanic Cultures Club. It took students from 10 to 15 minutes to complete the survey. The survey was meant to identify participants who might be both interested in, and qualified for, the study. I would contact any interested students outside of class later. Completing the survey would not guarantee or require students to participate, and all students were told they were welcome to complete it.

The survey was meant to determine the following information: whether students had graduated from a U.S. high school within the last five years; were 18 years of age or older; spoke a language other than English at home; had been born in Mexico; and had come to the U.S. at age 13 or older. These items were meant to determine eligibility to participate in the study. The survey also asked if students were interested in participating. To these ends, the survey included questions about their contact information, best times to contact, in addition to the fact that students chosen to participate and completing the interview would receive a campus bookstore gift certificate for \$25.

It was important for me to administer the survey myself because of Loyola University Chicago IRB requirements. For example, if instructors had administered the survey, they could have overheard students' comments about participating or needed to answer students' questions about the survey. These events could have threatened the anonymity of the students.

Whenever I made the presentation and students completed the survey, I also went over the summary (Appendix E) for potential student participants, using the English

version. It had been written in English and in Spanish, explaining the purpose and methods of my study. I reminded students that they did not have to fill out the survey. I also reminded them that they were welcome to fill it out if they would like to but were from a different country. However, the script and the summary, plus questions I answered during the presentation, made it clear I was looking for a certain profile of Mexican students.

I hoped to locate 12 participants for the study. Based on the literature, this number seemed to be a reasonable and average sample size, and this sample size should promote a clearer and more focused description of the context. As examples, Oudenhoven (2006) had interviewed nine students, and Hinkle had interviewed 17 (2006). Creswell recommends a sample size as small as four or five (2007, p. 128).

In selecting participants, I had hoped to locate enough students to be able to sort all eligible participants into at least two groups and to achieve a balance in two ways: 1) students would be sorted by the course they were taking (i.e., intensive ESL or developmental communications or perhaps English 101 or higher; and 2) by gender. My original plan was to have an equal number of participants for the study based on this grouping: three male students enrolled in intensive ESL; three female students enrolled in intensive ESL; three male students enrolled in developmental communications; and three female students enrolled in developmental communications. My plan included the following step: If there were too many potential participants for any of these subgroups, individuals would be selected by random draw. If there were not as many as three in any of the subgroups, other subgroups would consist of participants selected by random draw

to reach a total of 12 students in the study. To provide a record of the entire sorting and selection process, comprehensive notes would be kept.

I visited several classes in both program areas, and many students filled out the survey, the majority of students not being eligible for reasons such as, being born in the United States, being foreign-born but coming to this country at a very young age and starting school in this land, and being born in Poland, China, or another country instead of Mexico.

The very first class I visited at Grassland Community College was one in which students were improving their reading skills. As I got ready to give my presentation, the instructor explained that at the beginning of class time some of the students get their homework checked off and the rest read silently at their desks. I watched as she asked several times for students to come up to her desk with their homework. For several minutes, students looked at their desks or their assignment and did not volunteer to go up to the teacher's desk. Finally, one older female student got up and came to the desk. The instructor looked at the homework pages in the workbook. Then the instructor burst out laughing, announcing so loudly everyone could hear, "You didn't do anything on page 20 at all, and you only did a few of the new words." The student stood there, looking down at the floor. "You didn't do the crossword puzzle either!" the instructor remarked, adding, "You have to do the crossword puzzles because they are good!" The instructor then told the student to go back to her desk and work on completing the homework assignment. The instructor asked for another student to go up to the desk, but none volunteered. She called on two male students in the front, both of whom shrugged their

shoulders when she asked if they had done their homework. Then, she turned to me and told me I could begin my presentation. I recited the presentation, and there were two students who appeared as though they might be Mexican, based on my judgements of their appearance and their clothing. One seemed very interested, and he was smiling as he completed every single question on the survey. The teacher said, “Oh, Name, it looks like you might want to be interviewed. That would be good.” The student nodded and brought me the survey. He asked me if the interview had to be in English. I said, “The interview could be in Spanish, if you want.” The other student asked, “But you’re not Latino, right?” I replied, “No, but I speak Spanish.” He glared at me, and he spoke in a low voice with the young male student next to him who appeared to be Asian. This other student said to me “I am Filipino. I would like to be interviewed if you need more students\* for your study.” The teacher interrupted and said, “Oh no, Name, it is only for students from Mexico.” The student said something under his breath to the student who had asked me if I was Latino. They continued speaking quietly, and then the teacher addressed that Latino: “This would be something good for you to do, too.” The Asian looked at him and said, “Are you gonna do it?” The Latino looked at me, sat back in his chair, folded his arms, and then replied, “F - - - no.”

\* This “volunteering” from ineligible students was very common in the classes I visited, as was the frequent questions as to why it had to be Mexican students and why it was that people only study Mexican students. Some students also asked if I planned to do a study on students from their country, and these questions came from students who

were from countries all over the world, I learned, as I glanced at the surveys they handed me, with Poland, China, Serbia, Russia, and other lands written on the second line.

Once I had collected and sorted the surveys from the visits to classes, I determined I had located only one student to interview. I visited the Hispanic Cultures Club and located only three students that way. All four interested and eligible students from GCC were males, and unfortunately, any sorting of students into groups would not be possible.

I contacted the student participants and ask them to meet with me for one-on-one interviews. At the beginning of the interviews, students were told 1) they could stop the interview at any time; 2) the interview would not impact in any way their grades or standing at GCC; and that 3) they would be allowed to see the transcript from their interview so that they could make comments on it.

Students received two copies of an “informed consent” form (Appendix F) written in both English and Spanish. Students had the option of signing and dating either the English or the Spanish version. I also signed both copies of whichever version they chose. Students kept one copy of the form; the researcher kept the second copy. Students were asked if they had any questions about this form, or about the interview, or about confidentiality issues, before the interviews began.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

I had planned to invite 12 students to participate, but I was only able to locate four total students at GCC during the spring 2009 semester. Each of the four students remained with me for a one-on-one interview lasting from 60 to 70 minutes. If questions

remained unanswered at the end of the 70 minutes, students were told they did not need to continue. However, they could have been asked if they would like to continue for no more than 20 minutes. In appreciation for their participation, I presented each student with a college bookstore gift certificate at the conclusion of the interview.

The interviews were exploratory in an attempt to establish themes, with the set of questions (Appendix G) consisting of four sets of probes for the conversation (Kvale, 1996, p. 29) between the researcher and the participant. As planned and approved, the first two sets of probes would relate to student adjustment to U.S. culture in general and to student adjustment to the culture of the community college. The second set of probes addressed anxiety and stigma and would only be used if students revealed in some fashion these issues with the researcher. Unlike tightly-structured interviews in which hypotheses are being tested, exploratory interviews can help maintain fluidity in themes pursued and can help drive the investigation (Kvale, 1996).

The interviews also borrowed from open interviewing techniques (Rubin & Rubin, 2004) in which the researcher is an active listener who follows the pathways of the conversation to see in which direction the participant will proceed when responding to certain questions. In this case, new themes may emerge from the conversation and this is to be expected (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995).

An effort was made to conduct all interviews as conversations, with questions that were of interest to both persons present (Kvale, 1996, p. 29). The benefit of looking at the work of researchers such as Oudenhoven (2006) and Hinkle (2006) is that I was

able to address research themes students had very recently discussed in similar interviews.

It is important to remember that in this type of qualitative research approach, there is no “hypothesis” proposed before the interviews are conducted. Although propositions can happen after the data collection process, they do not occur during it. In terms of the research stance taken, it was essential not to “wise up” the participants (Coffey, 1999). Great care was taken in this study not to lead the participants in certain directions to elicit particular responses. For example, it was essential not to suggest that adjusting to life in the U.S. is difficult for this group of students, or that academic English is more difficult than casual spoken English, or that being forced to enroll in an ESL class should make students feel anxious or embarrassed.

After the four interviews, the audiotapes were transcribed by typists who spoke both English and Spanish and were required to ensure confidentiality by signing a written agreement (Appendix H). The persons transcribing the interview tapes were chosen because of their professional abilities and because of their knowledge of Mexican Spanish, including familiarity with marked Mexican Spanish accents in spoken English. Following member-checking outlined above, each of the students was given the opportunity to review a tape script for accuracy and for the chance to make any additional comments. I listened to the tapes as soon as possible, as recommended by experts in qualitative research methods (Glesne, 2005; Stake, 1995). I reviewed field notes I had made during the interviews and immediately following. I used these strategies in an



attempt to prepare myself to more successfully paint with a full brush, to “write lushly” about the interviews (Goffman, 1989, p. 131).

All four interviews were conducted and recorded at GCC according to the plans and procedures above. At the end of the spring 2009 semester, the goal of interviewing 12 students was not reached. Further work would need to be completed to locate additional students for the study.

### **The Second Foray into the Field: Metro College**

Spring 2009 semester at GCC had produced only four students to serve as subjects; therefore, I approached an additional community college to gain access to more students for the study during the fall 2009 semester. Metro College (MC) is an urban Hispanic-serving institution with a large number of Latino students. I worked to secure approval from the chief academic administrator at MC to make my presentations in classes and clubs there and to interview a maximum of 8 students—in order to locate the target of 12. The plan was to follow the same protocol, using basically the same data collection procedures, interview protocols, and related paperwork, including presentations, surveys, summaries, and consent forms. Some slight adjustments would need to be made (e.g., phone numbers at MC college added to consent forms) and approved by the Loyola University IRB. Once again, I would approach faculty members in the two different areas and student club advisors.

The administrator approved my study on that campus conditionally, waiting for information from the Loyola University IRB. The Loyola University IRB also included requirements, and the director required that I submit an amendment to add the second

college. An amendment for this was submitted, and this included copies of all required changes to forms specially adapted to the MC setting. The amendment was approved by the Loyola University IRB, and I presented the template of the “cooperating institution letter” (Appendix A) with contact information specifically for MC added to customize it. The chief academic administrator at MC had the letter printed out, signed it, and mailed it to me in July, 2009. I was cleared to proceed with my study on that campus.

I received the following information during an informal meeting on campus at MC: the college has a requirement that all students attempting to register must sit for the COMPASS test (American College Testing Program, <http://www.act.org/compass/advant/index.html>) including reading and writing—but not ESL—sections. MC does not use that section of the test. The students are asked to self-identify if they are foreign born or US-born. The chief academic administrator at MC stated (July 28, 2009) that all students there comply with this, and if the tests scores of foreign-born students show they need more help in reading or writing before entering English 101, they are automatically placed into the sequence of ESL courses, not developmental communications. If students self-identify as being US-born and their reading and writing scores show they need more help in reading or writing before entering English 101, they are automatically placed into the sequence of developmental communications courses, never ESL.

During the fall 2009 semester, I personally placed a revised letter to faculty members and student club advisors into their campus mailboxes and awaited contact. No club advisors contacted me, but several faculty members in both programs did. Once

again, I visited classes and many students completed the survey. No students completing the survey were eligible, however.

Waiting in the hallway at Metro College one day, I was able to overhear two different instructors talking to their classes with the classroom doors open. In my field notes from that day, I recorded this interesting scenario: an instructor in one was screaming at the students to actually say the grammar term out loud or the class “could not proceed.” She wanted them to say "coordinating conjunction" so she said "AGAIN!!!" five times until a few students said it under their breath. Then she went on. Based on a voice coming from a classroom on the other side of the hall, I recorded this scenario: an instructor was talking about the papers she was handing back to students. The assignment had to do with coming the US to study. After talking a little bit about grammar and organization problems in the papers, the instructor stated this, very clearly “but the important thing is how brave you are—coming to a different country and going to school—that is very brave!” She continued talking about this, saying she didn’t think she could be that brave. She added, “I think you should all give yourselves some applause.” At this, the room erupted into clapping.

After three weeks, I requested that the chief academic administrator at MC allow me to place reminder letters in the mailboxes again, and I completed a brief amendment to the Loyola University IRB for permission also. This was approved by both parties, and mid-semester I placed the letters into the mailboxes and awaited word.

Additional faculty members contacted me, and I proceeded with the visits and surveys once again. After collecting many surveys, I was able to determine that only one

student (interview #5) was interested and eligible. Although this student did not fit the correct age group, she did fit the rest of the profile. In addition, she wished very much to be interviewed because she wanted to help her community, namely immigrants from Mexico. I interviewed this female student, following all approved procedures and completing all forms as required by the Loyola University IRB. Again, tapes were transcribed, and this subject received a copy of her interview.

As a follow-up, I asked again if I might place reminder letters into the mailboxes of the faculty members and student club advisors. Once again I sought approval from the chief academic administrator at MC. I also completed a brief amendment to the Loyola University IRB for permission also. This was approved by both parties, and I placed the letters into the mailboxes and awaited word.

Only one additional faculty member contacted me. I visited three of his classes, and some students completed surveys, but none were eligible or interested in being interviewed for the study.

There were two interesting results of the surveys I had not expected. First, the surveys revealed that some students in the developmental communications courses were foreign-born, not US-born, despite the placement policies at the college. It was unknown how they had gained access to the courses for native speakers, whether they had eschewed the ESL track to avoid stigma, or perhaps whether they had been placed into the other track as exceptions (e.g., having superior skills in another academic area or having superior conversational skills in English with no discernible accent). Second, there were three students who indicated their interest in the study and provided thorough

contact information, two being female and one being male. However, even after I contacted these three students twice, they did not reply to my email messages (See chapter V regarding student reluctance to participate).

The first two forays into the field had produced only 5 total students and interviews. I decided I would need to follow up on the acquisition of students because the original approved target was 12. The sample of 5 was too small to reveal sufficient information.

### **The Third Foray into the Field: Return to Grassland Community College**

Because the first two forays into the field had yielded only 5 total students, I decided to approach GCC again to see if I could return. The senior research officer at GCC looked at the return as an extension, rather than a new study requiring an IRB amendment at GCC. The senior research officer at GCC also serves as the chair of the IRB at the college.

The Loyola University IRB required an amendment, including an email from the senior research officer at GCC indicating agreement to let me return to seek more students. To simplify the process, the college could submit my request letter to faculty members in the two programs and to student club advisors themselves electronically. Emailing would save time. The Loyola University IRB approved the return to GCC, and I was contacted by the advisor for the Hispanic Cultures Club.

I attended the following meeting of the Hispanic Cultures Club and saw some of the students I had interviewed the previous semester. I was invited back to additional meetings. To the second meeting, I brought a tray of petits-fours for the students, for I

felt they were being hospitable and it would have been wrong of me to not respond to their kindness. The students spoke to me mainly in Spanish, in fact asking me to make my presentation in the language. The majority of the members of the group are Mexican or Mexican American and they all are able to speak Spanish, and they do so in varying amounts with people, depending on whom they are addressing. As an Anglo middle-aged individual, I may have been facing some distance from the group of Latinos who are officers and members of the GCC Hispanic Cultures Club. However, each time I was welcomed by a student from the club when I was simply walking down the hall I was reminded I was becoming a known player in the lives of these students' environments. In addition, the fact that the students spoke to me in Spanish showed I was becoming a member of their group, an element some qualitative researchers feel is essential to be able to get more reliable data (Creswell, 2007, p. 132; Willis, 2007, pp. 206-207). Their comfort in speaking Spanish with me, my use of their language, and then my bringing the treat to the group were important elements in becoming a member of the group, my being there not just to see how much information I could get from them as interviewees but also to take part in a sort of reciprocity that is not only valued but expected by many Mexicans (Farr, 2006, p. 206).

This return to GCC yielded six additional students for the study, 3 males and 3 females, all of them as a result of presentations made at the Hispanic Cultures Club meetings. Because some students who were already in English 101 at this point had all of the rest of the criteria I was seeking in their profiles, I included them in the study. I interviewed these six students, recording all sessions onto audiotapes. All procedures

were completed and forms signed as required by the Loyola University IRB. Once again, the tapes were transcribed, and subjects received a copy of their interview. No faculty members in either academic program ever contacted me, however, with permission to visit their classes and make the presentations in their classes.

I had now engaged in three forays into the field, including visits to two different Illinois community colleges in the northeast corner of the state. The total students interviewed had now reached 11, with 7 males and 4 females. It is perhaps significant to note that although all 11 students were given the opportunity to answer the interview questions in Spanish, and have me pose the questions in Spanish, none of them agreed to use Spanish, insisting in all 11 cases to use English in the interviews.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis is an attempt to explain the meanings of the data gathered in a study. There are several types of data analysis, even within the approach called phenomenology (Creswell, 2007, p. 159). According to Creswell, the main steps are to: 1) first describe personal experiences with the phenomenon under study; 2) develop a list of significant statements; 3) take the significant statements and then group them into larger units of information, called “meaning units” or themes; 4) write a description of “what” (textural description) the participants experienced with the phenomenon; 5) next write a description of “how” (structural description) the experience happened; and 6) finally write a composite description of the phenomenon incorporating both the textural and structural descriptions.

Looking for, and at, themes, takes various time-consuming steps, again varying on the school of thought and the overall approach to conducting data analysis. For example, in phenomenology the researcher analyzes data for significant phrases, develops meanings and clusters them into themes, and presents an exhaustive description of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007, p. 160).

This study also employs a relevant sub process from grounded theory, which uses detailed procedures for analysis of data regarding specifically the themes, as explained by Creswell (2007, p. 160), including the completion of three procedures for developing categories of information (open coding), interconnecting the categories (axial coding), and building a “story” that connects the categories (selective coding).

After coding, the researcher presents a narrative and includes in it theoretical statements about the themes which have emerged from the exploration. These sub processes fit within the process of exploring and determining themes, Creswell’s third step of data analysis (2007, p. 159).

This study includes coding passages “by hand” rather than use of a computer software program. Creswell states (2007, p. 165) that although computer software is adept at storing huge quantities of data and can process and sort it much more quickly than a human can, there are advantages to the researcher coding by hand. One important point is that the computer software may not be as flexible as a human researcher.

There are three reasons flexibility is important in this case study. First, I hold a graduate degree in the Teaching of English as a Second Language—and I speak Spanish—and am therefore familiar with language interference issues that might mask or



confuse the issues of themes. Second, the interviews may include some responses from the participants—and some prompts or clarifications—in Spanish rather than in English. Third, the software may not have the capacity to de-emphasize certain themes, combine others, separate some of these, and then amplify others during the coding process.

In keeping with what Emerson, Fretz and Shaw state, it is acceptable to focus on certain themes and ignore other ones (1995, p. 173). Sometimes participants instead of directly answering an interview question speak about topics more interesting to them. Although it is possible for the researcher to ask for clarification in order to attempt to have the participant return to the subject at hand, the participant may insist on returning to the different and preferred topic.

Weiss refers to these other topics, these unplanned topics in the interview, as “markers,” and the researcher may list them, choose to further explore them, or ignore them (1994, p. 95). It is possible to make them part of the current study, based on number of occurrences across participants. In some cases, these markers may come to replace some of the original themes of the study. In other cases, they tend to be de-emphasized if both the interviewer and participant lose interest in them for the current purposes of the conversation. It is possible also to enumerate them and discuss them briefly in both the discussion section and the section for further research. Some markers might become research themes in their own right. Unexpected information of this sort is discussed later in this study. For example, anxiety in a math class emerges as a possible theme once more than one student mentions it in interviews. Because this topic relates to research question three, it is explored in the results.

Some themes based on recent studies and planned for the interviews emerge as being important; others do not. It is essential for the researcher to be flexible and consider new options and relationships when looking at the themes and the nascent narrative across participants in a case study. This fluidity in thematizing and revision is important in qualitative research (Kvale, 1996, p. 97).

### **Data Reporting**

In order to report the data gathered, I endeavored to tell a rich story about the participants' experiences. I reported on the results of the interviews in a narrative format. I attempted to make the experiences of the participants seem as real as possible by providing a "thick description" of what I had been told during the interviews (Denzin, 1989, p. 83). I hoped to focus not just on the words recorded, but also on any emotional responses of the participants, including their tone of voice and their gestures. In order to make the stories complete and contextualized, I had to use several technical terms in my narrative.

I defined all technical terms important to the study in the first chapter, including vocabulary from English as a second language, sociology, psychology, and second language acquisition fields. The term "language" as used in this study refers to English, and it is applied to the learning of English by the participants of the study. It does not refer to "foreign languages" (e.g., French or Spanish as being learned by native speakers of English) unless the term foreign language was used specifically in the passage in question (e.g., regarding indigenous languages of Mexico, as occurred in some interviews).

In addition to the narrative I provided to report the findings, I included a table to clarify statements made regarding the results section of Chapter V to illustrate specific relevant data on each student participant. I attempted to collect this data during the interviews with each student. The table provides this information on characteristics: main home language spoken, age of arrival, study, grade started in U.S. school, ESL and/or bilingual and/or English classes in U.S. high school, year of U.S. high school graduation, previous and current ESL and/or bilingual and/or English classes in the community college, and age at time of interview.

### **Issues of Confidentiality and Trustworthiness**

Throughout all stages of the qualitative research process, it is essential to adhere to all procedures assuring confidentiality, to value the accounts reported by participants, and to develop good rapport with those interviewed (Creswell, 2007, p. 44). Participants provide not only their accounts but also their time; they deserve to be treated fairly and ethically throughout the research process.

Ethical issues will be considered and appropriate general guidelines will be followed in this study in keeping with accepted research procedures (Kvale, 1996, pp. 110-120). Qualitative researchers must endeavor not only to conduct their data analysis carefully but also to report the data accurately.

Confidentiality is ensured throughout the research process by several checks and balances: the commitment of the researcher and the dissertation committee; the Loyola University Chicago Institutional Review Board; the senior academic or research officer of each community college; the cooperating institution letter granting approval to conduct

the study; the participants' informed consent form; the use of pseudonyms for participant and institutional names; and the secured storage of all files, notes and tapes for two years after the completion of the study (at which time they are destroyed). All these materials are secured in a locked cabinet devoted to this study.

Specifically to further protect the students, the pseudonyms chosen in this study are very much different from the students' real names. To avoid confusion, the pseudonyms used here are ones which were not used in the Oudenhoven study (2006).

Although I have visited the campuses of both Grassland Community College and Metro College and am familiar with the demographics of the students, I have no other relationship to these institutions. I have never served either college in any consulting or teaching capacity. This distance from both campus communities helps ensure both the confidentiality of the study results and the anonymity of the participants.

Trustworthiness is another essential component of research, and four criteria should be used for assessing soundness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985): credibility; transferability; dependability; and confirmability. Marshall and Rossman (1999) speak at length about credibility, which deals with the inquiry being conducted in such a manner as to ensure that the subject was accurately identified and described. One method for monitoring accurate reporting of information is a process called "member checking," described below; Lincoln and Guba consider this to be the most important technique for establishing credibility (1985, p. 314). In addition to helping double check for language difficulties during and after the interviews, I followed these essential steps to ensure accurate member checks:

- The participant received a copy of his/her transcribed interview;
- The participant was asked if he/she would care to read the transcript and determine its accuracy—any responses on the returned copy serving as documentation the participant has approved it;
- The participant was informed that I am available to meet with him/her personally to make corrections, as well as by telephone and/or email;
- The participant was also informed that if I do not hear from him/her by a certain date I would assume the transcript is acceptable.

Transferability relates to whether findings can be applied to other, similar participants, contexts or phenomena (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although generalizability is not a main goal of qualitative research, it is important to provide enough detail in reporting data that application to another participant's experiences could be seen as related. In my narrative, I provided a "thick description" of what I have been told during the interviews (Denzin, 1989, p. 83). I hoped to focus not just on the words recorded, but also on the emotional responses of participants, including their tone of voice and their gestures. I hoped that such richness would provide so much information that themes of other students' experiences would perhaps be seen as interconnecting with those revealed in my study.

Dependability relates to how accurately the story of the students' experiences echoes the intended statements and responses they have revealed in the interviews. The story told should be the one presented by the students in the interviews. There is no experimental design, as such, and one essential area to consider is the element of change.

Interviews can be impacted in a variety of ways, and the story may include twists and turns not expected at the beginning of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Confirmability has to do with whether results can be replicated, based on the available data, and through the use of a different researcher. In other words, it is important that another researcher reveals similar outcomes of the research. According to Lincoln and Guba, confirmability is synonymous with objectivity (1985).

### **Issues of Researcher Positionality**

The researcher is a foreigner, an external force only slowly becoming a member of the Grassland Community College community. By engaging in this study, I entered into a dynamic world—one in which immigrant students of another culture are learning (or not learning) to adjust to a U.S. institutional culture. There were some important potential problems to consider.

First, it was essential to consider the reality of cultural differences, such as the fact that I am a middle-aged, Anglo male from the higher education research field. I could represent the “establishment” to participants, students who are navigating the waters between their own culture and one which is foreign to them in more than one way. One way to counter this appearance is to make sure early on that the participants know I speak Spanish. This can serve to break the ice and to show that I realize how difficult it is to learn another language. Another way to perhaps break the ice is to remember that I was focusing on participating in a conversation (Kvale, 1996) rather than in a one-sided, highly-structured interview. Utilizing a sense of humor, casual manner and dress, and discussion of my doctoral studies also seemed to help students to look at me more as a

fellow student and less as a member of the higher education faculty or administrative community. Once the students saw I was interested in their experiences and their lives—not just completing my study—they opened up and shared, welcoming me into their community more with each visit. As mentioned before, students invited me to future meetings, and each one of them greeted me in the hall every time they saw me on campus for interviews or other purposes.

Second, given current fears about retaliation against Latinos—and especially Mexicans—because of the furor and debate about illegal immigration status, my entry into these community college settings could be interpreted by some persons as threatening. Because of my physical appearance, I might be looked at as being in reality a police officer or lawyer or immigration official posing as a graduate student. I had been referred to in these roles by Latinos who did not know me in other venues. One student even volunteered the idea that perhaps some students were reluctant to meet with me because they might think I was a police officer (See Chapter IV, Interview #7 of “Timoteo;” Chapter Five, “Recommendations to Researchers”). I wanted to avoid increasing any anxiety for students, and there are experts who maintain that there is a strong correlation between legal status and anxiety for college students (Bada-Garcia, personal communication, September 22, 2009).

Third, although I am a member of the greater higher education community, I am not a member of the Grassland Community College community or the Metro College community. As mentioned previously, I have had no consulting or teaching experiences at the college. At the beginning of my visits to both campuses, I was a complete outsider.

I did not know where the classrooms, offices or labs were located. I had to ask for directions.

Fourth, I could assume there are cultural differences that cannot be addressed, nor bridged. However, understanding other cultures can contribute to the efficacy of the researcher. Because I could speak Spanish, know many individuals and families from Mexico, can joke in Spanish using some slang only used in Mexico, and had read about Mexican culture, linguistic traditions, and perspectives on understanding and dealing with stress, the obstacles to acquiring authentic responses to questions during the interviews were perhaps lessened somewhat.

Fifth, it was important that as a researcher I monitor my assumptions regarding the extent to which I may project that I could receive affirmation about the existence of students' anxiety in the registration process, difficulty adjusting to the community college, or anxiety or stigma in the ESL or developmental communication classroom. I was attempting to approach this research objectively, trying to remember that although the literature had discussed student anxiety and stigma, these students were all individuals who would have their own stories to tell. It would be entirely possible these themes would never surface in the conversations with the participants. It would be a challenge for me to remember that the reality is "out there" to be discovered in an objective way, free of my assumptions and values (Neuman, 1997, p. 64).

Finally, it was important that as a researcher I consider two other processes that can help me check for objectivity: epoche and bracketing. "Epoche" is a process which ranges throughout the study (Gearing, 2004)—from its conception to its completion—and



has to do with the experiences and emotions I share with the participants. These can lead to my personal involvement in the reporting of the stories. For example, I had difficulty adjusting to studying abroad in Austria as an undergraduate student because my proficiency in German was at a basic level when I first arrived in the country. I was able to rely on English because I found individuals who spoke English. The culture shock of being in an almost all-German speaking environment in the Styrian Mountains could make me feel overly sympathetic to the participants in the study. What I must do, then, is weigh any such possible past experiences and feelings against the sort of conclusions I will draw when reporting on the students' stories. I must balance my personal story against the "units of meaning" that are the students' stories.

"Bracketing" occurs during coding (Patton, 1990) and is the process of checking for themes but more importantly weighing the grouping and naming of themes against my possible assumptions and biases because of any experiences and emotions I have shared with the participants. During a later stage, reintegration, the researcher can combine objective results and personal experiences to compose an integrated account of the students' experiences and my own, and this integration should be explained as such.

### **Potential Limitations**

The results of this study represent cross-cultural and community college student experiences for only 11 individuals—a small sample from only one very specific context. In another institution, even with students from very similar cultural and linguistic similarities, the results of such a study could be different. It is important to remember that each individual has separate and distinct stories. All persons are individuals and that

the term “Generation 1.5 Mexican American community college students” cannot represent each and every individual in a huge and growing population with broad, rich and complicated cultural, personal and learning differences.

As stated above, it was difficult to know which emotions would surface for the students or which exact themes would predominate the conversations. In keeping with the principles of phenomenology, it would be important to attempt to “make the invisible visible” (Kvale, 1996, p. 53) but only in as much as the content of the student experiences seems to fit the cultural context in which they occurred—meaning the community college setting for the student participants.

Immigrants are individuals, and they face their own unique challenges and obstacles when attempting to adjust to new cultures and settings such as mainstream Anglo America and the U.S. community college. There remains very little written about this specific group of immigrants to the United States, and it is important to remember that “The variation in academic orientation and achievement is complex, as are relationships among factors producing that variation” (Stepick & Stepick, 2003, p. 155). There is still little known about Generation 1.5 Mexican American community college students, even in 2007. Hinkle speaks of the important policy issues and the general need for more accountability on the part of all educators and institutions serving Generation 1.5 students (2006, pp. 255-267). Perhaps my study will encourage others to explore the various challenges and obstacles faced by the recent immigrants to the United States considered “Generation 1.5 Mexican American community college students.”

### Overview of Chapter Four

The following chapter introduces each of the 11 students interviewed and shows their main responses to the basic questions asked. It also includes any information they volunteered, plus certain topics they themselves raised in response to the “flow of the conversation.” This section of the chapter is followed by a discussion that is organized by the four research questions and that reports on the major themes, the minor themes, and some unexpected information that arose and not solicited by the questions. The chapter ends with an overview of Chapter Five.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### INTERVIEW FINDINGS

#### **Introduction**

The one-on-one interviews of the 11 students revealed interesting themes and patterns, that were both related to and unrelated to the earlier dissertations described and to the research questions in this study. Although the approved questions served as a guide, the interviewer and the participant in several cases went on to other topics as the interview became more of an informal conversation. The themes, the patterns that emerged during each conversation, are discussed immediately following the student profiles below. They are organized in the order of the four research questions guiding the study.

Casual conversations before and after the interviews also sometimes raised other themes and topics; these are mentioned as they seemed to be significant. The interviewer made notes in some cases, before, during and after the interviews as interesting comments or questions from the students arose. The interviewer spoke in Spanish very often with the subjects, all of whom knew before the time of the interview that the interviewer was able to speak and understand Spanish.

However, all of the interviews took place in English, sometimes with words or phrases being discussed briefly in Spanish for clarification. It is perhaps significant to note that although all 11 students were given the opportunity to answer the interview

questions in Spanish, and have me pose the questions in Spanish, none of them agreed to use Spanish, insisting in all 11 cases to use English in the interviews. This was the case even when it became clear the subjects had some difficulty with English, including recall of vocabulary specifically needed to answer questions.

As mentioned before, in order to protect the students, the pseudonyms chosen in this study are very much different from the students' real names. To avoid any confusion, the pseudonyms used here are ones which were not used in the Oudenhoven study (2006). The profiles are presented below in three clusters alphabetically:

- A-D, the first four students from Grassland Community College;
- J: the sole student from Metro College; and
- S-Z, the last six students from Grassland Community College.

### **Results of Eleven Interviews**

#### **Antonio**

*I wanted to go (back to visit my family in Mexico) since I came here, but I can't go, you know, I can't go.*

The first student interviewed at Grassland Community College during the spring 2009 semester was Antonio. Coming here at the age of 13, he entered a U.S. high school as a freshman. Having lived in a small village in Mexico, he now lives in a large suburb of Chicago. He had studied some English in Mexico, but claimed he hadn't learned much because apparently the program didn't include much speaking practice. In high school here, he skipped level one and took ESL II and III. He said he really couldn't speak or understand English when he first got here, even though he had studied the language in Mexico.

Antonio felt anxious when he first came here based on three areas of difficulty: he had trouble dealing with English, with the feeling everything here was so new to him, and also with his new surroundings. “Like uh... like I couldn’t get used to it, like because I didn’t know the like the activities from here you know because I couldn’t, I couldn’t get used to that. It was all like very different to what I were used to in Mexico,” he tried to explain. He didn’t participate in any clubs or other activities when in high school because he had to work. All time not in school was spent working.

During high school, he had noticed that some students didn’t speak to other students and they tended to keep to their own groups. He felt that some people “looked down on Mexicans” and they assumed he and other Mexicans were not as smart as other people. His teachers encouraged him, though. One of his high school teachers convinced him to go to college instead of going back to Mexico after graduation. In contrast to high school, he feels that at Grassland Community College “...most of the students are from other cultures” and that there are not as many Latinos as there were in his high school.

At Grassland Community College, Antonio is a freshman and is now taking ESL 090 Writing and ESL 094 Reading, and he feels he needs them to improve his skills in English. He spoke factually about both courses, explaining that in the writing class the teacher gives the students many topics to write about and in some cases the students get to write about anything they wish. In the reading class, the emphasis is on new words and reading a lot, including articles from newspapers.

In a previous ESL class, Antonio had worked with other Spanish-speakers to help each other do the assignments. In high school, he tended to hang out with other Latinos.

Now, there are a lot of people in the class who do not speak Spanish, and the teacher uses a lot of body language to communicate. Regarding his ESL teachers here in the United States, he feels they really love what they do and "...they really love helping other people." In contrast, he said his English teacher in Mexico was not very effective, but did claim to speak the language. He added, "But, I think that he didn't really speak English because I didn't learn anything from there."

Antonio spoke at length about a qualifying exam ESL (the WACT) students apparently must pass at the community college to be able to enter English 101. He knew the cutoff score and the exact format of the test, one for which an essay must be written. He gave the example of how one must take a stand on a topic such as whether cell phones must be turned off during class time. Then he explained how one must use a thesis, develop the argument in the body of the essay, and so on, including the warning that grammar errors can hinder one's ability to pass the test and go on to 101.

Antonio mentioned there were marked differences in his living situation now that he is living in the suburbs. For one thing, he has two jobs, and his schedule is more hectic now than when he was in Mexico. Even though he is making about 10 times as much per hour as he did in Mexico, he mentions that there are high costs for living here, including the need to have car insurance. Here, he lives with one of his brothers.

He comes from a very large family, and several of his brothers are here in the area, but they are scattered out in other suburbs. He does not see them often, but they do talk on the phone just to ask "What's going on?" He works long hours because he does

not want the brother he lives with to have to pay for his school, car, insurance, and other costs. He speaks Spanish with his brother every day at home.

He mentioned that his parents and some more of his siblings are still in Mexico, and he has not seen them since he came here. One obvious difference he sees with U.S. families is that “They don’t want to have a lot of kids.” He stated that in contrast to Mexican families, “Like um American families they are more closer to each other like they communicate more, or like they are more open mind to tell things to each other like Mexican families are kinda scared to, to share personal things, I mean in my experience...” Antonio went on to say that people in large U.S. suburbs seem to be more open-minded and much more open to new things, while people from small villages do not like to share personal information and therefore keep to themselves more.

Antonio did openly state that he had crossed the border by coming through the desert as his brother had done before him. Although he would like to go home to see his parents and the rest of his immediate and extended families, he fears that he might not be able to get back over the border. He did not say how many times he had come here, and the interviewer did not ask. However, he did use the phrase “the first time I came here” when he was talking about crossing the desert. He told how he had come here – like taking a field trip one day – and he came here based on his mother’s insistence that he seek opportunity in the United States. He explained that at the time it seemed like an adventure to come through the desert, but that later he realized how dangerous it really had been to do this. He mentioned that at the time he “...wasn’t really scared because I didn’t know that I was risking my life. Then after that, I was like, ‘you almost died, you



almost die when you're there, because you didn't have water, you don't have food, or sometimes people are there for one week, you never know...' ” He said it is basically “luck” regarding whether people make it over the border this way alive. He explained that when people leave Mexico “...you're saying bye and you don't know if you're saying bye for... forever or you're saying bye for some time, but all the time, it's not because they want to, it's because they have to” because coming here is essential to be able to feed one's family. Coming here allows Mexicans to make enough money not only to survive here, but also to earn enough to send some back to the family.

He told the dramatic story also of the young man from his same village who experienced some sort of panic attack during the journey. The man seemed to turn “crazy” and then look depressed. Suddenly, “he just started looking around,” and the group tried to calm him down. He was afraid of what was going to happen, and after a few minutes “...he ran away, li-like crazy; they couldn't stop him, and then he got lost, they don't know...” Apparently the family has not heard from the young man since.

Antonio's desire to return to see his family is matched by his hope to stay here in the United States and not jeopardize what he has achieved so far. He is afraid that if he goes to visit his family, he won't be able to get back over the border, more stringent checking now occurring to keep persons without documentation from entering the country. He states he wants to hold onto his chances to move forward with his life here in the U.S. and will lose everything if he goes back “...because I know that if I come with my school I'm going to get something in the future, and if I go back I'm going to lose everything, I'm gonna, I'm just gonna go there and like start, start all over again from the

starting point, from the start...” The above having been said, Antonio misses his family very much and misses Mexico.

Antonio is in a classic situation referred to in Spanish as “Ni de aqui, ni de alla,” meaning that a person doesn’t fit in here or back in Mexico, no longer having any home. He explained this at length, including reference to Maria Elena Velasco’s movie of the same name, in which she comes here and becomes financially successful, but always wishes to return to Mexico. However, when she does return, after a very short time she wishes to be back in the U.S. Antonio gives examples of Mexicans who wish to go back and enjoy visiting their relatives at home. However, the individuals soon wish to return to the U.S. because they miss friends, family members, and other persons and things here. The person starts talking about missing the United States and people here. Family members in Mexico sense the conflict. According to Antonio, it is typical for the visitor to be happy to see every one and enjoy catching up on family and local news, “...but at the same time you don’t feel okay, inside of you, because you don’t want to let your family know that you are not feeling okay with them, you know? Because they are going to be like, wh-why did you came with us? Just to be complaining?”

Antonio has career goals, and he does not wish to lose his chance to achieve them. Asked what advice he would give to a young Mexican thinking of coming to the U.S., he said the person should come here, and should immediately go to school to move forward and take advantage of the opportunities here. Immigrants come here for opportunity and to feed their families, not to steal jobs from Americans, according to Antonio. Nor are they trying to take land back, such as the states that used to be part of Mexico.

Regarding differences among people, Antonio did say some people here believe Mexicans are trying to take all the jobs. He also feels there is racism here, and that there is prejudice against Mexicans based on color and language differences. U.S.-born Latinos discriminate against Mexicans, Antonio claimed. On several occasions, they have refused to speak Spanish with him to help in stores and other places. They want to act as though they are somehow “better” than Mexicans born in the homeland, and they seem to look down upon people like him, he said.

During the interview, Antonio expressed no stigma or feelings of embarrassment for being placed in ESL courses, in fact stating he felt he needed them. He did not mention feeling anxious at the community college or in classes.

After many of the interviews, I spoke to the students as I packed up the tape recorder and other items. This student and I had pleasant conversations both before and after the interview, and I found him to be affable and very open about his life and his hopes. When I talked to Antonio more about the incident of the lost man in the desert, he agreed it was a terrible thing and he asked me, “Can you imagine how that boy’s mother must feel, never knowing what happened to him?” The anxiety experienced by that young man who had left his home behind for an unknown future is hard to imagine.

### **Beto**

*Um, but the most painful stuff, it’s the way... starting from when you leave your house and you close the door until you’re in the... until you’re like where you have to be.*

The second student to be interviewed from Grassland, Beto came here from Mexico when he was 13 years old and entered high school. (Because of problems with the recording of the interview, some details such as what grade he entered in secondary

school here are inaudible.) He did say, however, that he started learning English from the very first day he arrived here and started taking ESL right away in high school also.

In contrast to the U.S. high school where Beto was able to do more things that he was capable of, he felt like the system in Mexico did not work and that his “potential is not being used correctly.” He was surprised at his high school experience here, and thought back to his Mexican high school in this way: “Like the system, or the way they teach, was holding me back.” In the U.S. high school, he tried soccer but felt he wasn’t in good enough shape for it. He dropped out of wrestling because he “was not really into hurting people” and dealing with the intensity of one-on-one fighting. He finally found that dancing was his favorite hobby, and he became an expert in Latin Dance, including Cumbia and Salsa, both very good exercise, he agreed.

When he first arrived at Grassland, Beto realized he didn’t have any friends there, so he decided to get more involved in order to help himself. He asked one of his teachers how to start a club, and he started the dance club at the college. Now he teaches dance to other students for special events at the college. Even though he is only 19, he teaches dance even to “older guys and girls.” He feels this experience has helped him and he “got to like have a real different stability in me.” He also belongs to the Hispanic Cultures Club and told of the work the group had just done to buy Christmas presents for poor children at an agency in Chicago. He also spoke of the events the club sponsors, and other work they do, like circulating petitions. He did the choreography recently for an event held by the club on campus during an international cultures festival.

Interesting to note is that when he was interviewed in an area youth leadership program for Latinos, Beto chose to be interviewed in Spanish. This interview was held entirely in English, though he had been given the choice of using at least some Spanish. He says he always speaks Spanish at home, and that his mom speaks about “30 percent” English but his father speaks English “like barely.”

Beto is taking an ESL class he considers too easy for himself, and he guessed it was because he felt sick the day of the placement test. However, since he is learning some things he didn’t learn in his high school ESL classes, he said, “I think everything happens for a reason...” He said the placement test had been “a bunch of reading that we had to do” and his ESL class also focuses on reading. Students complete their reading homework, and then they come to class and the whole group goes over the chapter. In addition to having a lot of reading homework and answering the questions at the end of the chapters, there is basic information on grammar, such as prepositions.

Beto seemed to feel somewhat isolated in his reading class, stating that he is the only Latino and “everybody, everyone else, is like Korean and like Middle-East...” He said it feels weird that there is little interaction with students outside of class and that “... ‘cause it’s just one class and then you trying to take as much attention as possible from teacher so you can learn...” He mentioned that the other students do not speak Spanish and he does not know if the teacher does either. He did not reveal any feelings of stigma being placed into the ESL class instead of a higher English class, such as 101. However, he did mention being sick for the placement test, and that could mean something.

He has been getting his homework done easily because—unlike in high school—he has only one other class, a math class. He felt he was getting perhaps an 80% or 85% average in the reading class. He did say he felt the class was going too slowly and that even though the teacher seemed to know what she was doing, he felt weird in the large class, saying, “I don’t know; I don’t know how to explain it.” He also said he didn’t like the grading system here, but he had trouble explaining the system here and what he didn’t care for. To summarize, he does not like the grading system because it is unclear to him.

Although he had no problems with his reading class, Beto did seem to have encountered some feelings of anxiety in his math class, focusing mainly on the way the instructor handles the class. He spoke at length about his current math class and the fact he cannot understand the instructor’s accent. He said the man is European and “...it takes me a little while to kind of figure out what he’s trying to say.” By the time Beto has deciphered the message, the class has moved on, and he has to try to catch up. The instructor puts questions on the board and waits for someone in the class to answer. When Beto would raise his hand and answer, “...I’ll have the answer but it’s wrong.” Beto said the instructor would tell him to be quiet and “...he once told me that if I don’t know, then just don’t talk.” When Beto challenged the instructor to explain why he had answered incorrectly, the instructor told him to shut up, according to Beto. After that, Beto decided to not raise his hand in class anymore, waiting instead for somebody else to answer. According to Beto, this silence in the class angered the instructor: “And he got upset because nobody wanted to talk anymore, because they were like afraid they might have the wrong answer. So he got kind of upset that, ah, that nobody talks.”

Interestingly enough, when asked about similarities and differences in his math classes here and in Mexico, Beto said that regarding Mexican teachers “They don’t have like, they don’t worry about being creative or the way to teach.” He said a big difference between Mexican and U.S. teachers is that “Here, they try to find out what’s wrong with you, if you have something wrong, ah, if you have an issue at home, if you seriously need somebody to like, somebody for you to teach you without anyone else,” in other words help you if you need tutoring, apparently. He went on to say that they worry not just about the whole class but also about the individual. A similarity in school is that, as an example, “...math doesn’t change” and is the same in both countries.

He hoped to attend summer school, but he did not know if he would have enough money, or money for fall semester either, saying, “Um, or maybe I’ll just get two jobs and work a lot, but...” He thought he might not have enough money for all the classes. He then told of a certificate program with a large scholarship from a public university in the state. Although this would be the exact kind of opportunity he would seem to pursue, he did not explain why he had not entered it or whether this was a plan for the future.

We then moved to the topic of similarities and differences between living in Mexico and the United States. He focused on differences and said one major one is the concept of freedom. He said he really misses the freedom one has, living in Mexico. For example, if a young boy wishes to buy beer, nobody will question him—not the store clerk and not a police officer. In fact, people, would not call the police, according to Beto. “In Mexico, it’s more like, um, it’s more like a huge amount of freedom in many ways.” This aspect of Mexico is something he valued. That having been said, he feels

safer here in the U.S. because there are laws and people have rights. He said, “Um, it makes me feel like if I wanna do something with my life where, or have something, um, nothing or no one could take it away from me.”

He talked about the great opportunities here in work and in education, and he stressed that even older people here can work. This is not so much the case in Mexico, where older individuals have more trouble finding jobs, according to Beto. He said he is happy overall to be here, and he is working hard to help his family and to move forward with his life. His parents may go back to Mexico, but he may stay here, at least for awhile. The family’s plan was to save up some money and for the parents to go back. That was Beto’s plan to, and he accepts the hard work needed to take advantage here of the chances to get education for a career.

Anxious feelings surfaced as Beto told of his bold decision to accept his father’s challenge and make the dangerous trek north to the Chicago area. Although the interview had ended, I told him we had a few moments more if he wanted them to send a message to the people who would read my study. He chose to talk about leaving Mexico to come to the United States without documents, and he started by saying, “Um, the most painful stuff is the way you come.” And he explained that at his age it was hard to get information about coming here. He insisted that the most painful part is the dangerous people, those who attack and kill others in the crossing of the border. The ordeal teaches one a lot about life, “Because you see everything. You see these people killing for no reason. You see violence, you see how fake and how like two-faces (sic) people can really be.” It also shows a person how hard people will fight to get here and realize their



goals. Beto went on to say, “I came here illegally and, ah, and that kind of was a real big cross in my life because, um, I started to use all my potential and I realized I was better than I thought I was...” He said that after going through the dangerous journey from Mexico that “nothing should be hard for me anymore.”

Even though he felt he was somewhat innocent because he had always been around his home and been protected by family, he decided to take the risks of going north. He also said, “Um, but the most painful stuff, it’s the way... starting from when you leave your house and you close the door until you’re in the... until you’re like where you have to be.” The decision to come here is a hard one, and the illegal journey presents many deadly dangers for many Mexicans who undertake it. He tells of the lesson one can learn from the crossing: “Ah, I think when, if you’re somebody that has never, like, that doesn’t have an experience of real danger or real evil, I think moving from your house, like moving from Mexico to the United States as the way I did it, it’s the best way to learn about it.”

Beto says he still remembers knowing he would have to start over again, and said he would do so to show other people. He was glad his chances for education and work here changed him, “But I still had that, that pain inside of me like experience of coming here. Of coming here and, um, and starting everything all over again.” Though he never explains further, he also explains how it is hard to love something that you can’t do for a living, having to do something else in order to make money. He does not say whether this has to do with being a dancer or with his career goals that are personal and that he spoke about at length.

His feelings of anxiety had more to do with leaving Mexico and crossing the border illegally than they did with arriving in the United States, reaching the doors of the community college, or opening the door to his ESL class. However, they did seem to arise again when faced with the situation in the math class.

Beto's anxious encounters with the math instructor are reminiscent of persons who have been through some trauma, such that later they have trouble coping with a difficult situation. Post-traumatic Stress Disorder comes to mind. Although he does speak of his pain and what looks to be anxiety, he does not speak about stigma, instead focusing on how proud and resolute he is as he endeavors to pursue his careers, saying "It could take ten years to reach my goals."

He is very thankful for the chance to attend college and work on building a career. He is glad for those things, and states, "Experiences makes [sic] me love school so much that, ah, that I feel like a part of me now, makes me feel like, um, there's nothing more important out there than education." He feels that what he has learned in Mexico and the United States "helps me put it all together." He also sends in his message this note: "And something I learned is that you can lose everything in life, everything, ah, even the clothes you're wearing, but your education and your knowledge, that's like, ah, that's the only thing you will have that nobody can take away from you..."

Beto's pain and anxiety stood out in the interview and he was able to speak about them. Despite what he went through, he seemed to be resolute in his pursuit of more education and he seemed to enjoy being in the U.S.

**César**

*I do want to go back to Mexico but just to say “hi” to my family, like my uncles, my grandma. I have nothing to go back and give [sic] over there.*

The third student to be interviewed at Grassland, César came to the U.S. at the age of 16 and got a job. A year later, he entered a suburban high school as a freshman.

When in Mexico, he lived in a rancho area of a town; he now lives in a large suburb of Chicago. He had taken one English class in Mexico but said he hadn't learned much in it and then didn't talk about it further.

He had never met his father, who had come to the U.S. when César was only 3 years old. One reason he wanted to come to the Chicago area was because he wanted, finally, to have a father. He planned to work here for one year, save his money, and return to Mexico. Once he got here and had worked for a year, his brother tried to persuade him to go to school. César eventually agreed, and he started attending high school. Now, both his parents and the entire family are here, except for one older sister, who is still in Mexico.

In high school here, César took four years of ESL, and he said it was so difficult going to high school full-time because he was also working full-time. In addition, he struggled with English in his classes: “Well, they were kind of bad for me because... I already said it...ah, I hadn't enough skills to make sense and I didn't really, like I went to a school that was real real different. It was bad for me to study a different language.” He did move up through the levels, however, so he was making some progress.

He takes ESL classes now at Grassland, and he said it is different in college. For example, “Well the difference is in high school the teacher helps more. Like they do

more, like more things to do you know, cause you have more...” He explained that in high school the ESL classes meet every single day, while in college the class meets less. The main similarity is that at both schools one must study a lot of vocabulary to be able to use English more. In his current ESL class, he had just studied about making outlines of readings, and the class had also worked on skimming reading passages for general information. They also worked on discovering the meaning of unknown vocabulary items by looking at “clues” in the passages. He said he would recommend his current ESL class and that the instructor is “...a good teacher of vocabulary.”

César had trouble finding the right words at several points in the interview. However, he insisted on using English instead of relying on Spanish. Here is an example, regarding how high school and college ESL classes are similar: “And how they are.. they compare... I don’t know how to say it.” Despite this statement, he did go on to talk about the similarity being the need to learn more vocabulary.

In talking about his middle school experiences in Mexico, he said the teachers didn’t seem to care as much as in the U.S., and one simply attends school although there is little support for the student. He said he didn’t like the school, and reported, “I took it as a joke because I didn’t really study and I didn’t really, like... you know ‘cause in Mexico it’s like, it’s still\* different from here...’cause in Mexico you just go to school” (\* perhaps meant “really” because the Spanish adverb “ya” means “already” or other times “quite” or “really” and he may have been confused). He said another big difference is that there are tutors in the schools here, something that he didn’t have in Mexico.

Another big difference is the amount of freedom one has back home as opposed to here, he said. “There’s no law that told me that I’m 14 years old, I’m not allowed to work,” and that is not the case in the U.S. Also, he said kids can hang out without curfews in Mexico, whereas here young people are not allowed to do that and the police would pick them up.

He specifically mentioned that there are gangs in his suburb and he doesn’t like the gang members hanging around. According to César, they hang out and “do nothing” and tend to get into trouble, fighting and writing on buildings.

Yet another difference is that he played sports in the middle school back home. Here, he doesn’t have time. Asked if he would like to be playing sports at the college, he said, “I want to but I can’t because my... because of my legal status.” He said he has to work hard to support himself plus have money to pay his tuition. Although it is possible to make 2 or 3 payments, according to César, he always pays right away. He works 20 to 30 hours each week, depending on the schedule.

At Grassland, César is focusing on improving his English and getting through his ESL reading class so he can take not only regular English and speech courses but the courses he needs to get his two-year degree. With that, he has plans to go on further because his chosen profession will demand more degrees above the associate’s. He is glad to have the opportunity to pursue more education, has career goals, and feels the education and jobs are better here than in Mexico. Pursuing more education will be a challenge, however, given his situation. “The difference is that it’s going to be hard because of my legal status...”

César wanted to talk more about his experiences first coming to Grassland. He told how all of his friends were going to attend college, so he decided to get information about classes at the community college. He brought a friend along to help show him where things were located and how to register. He took the placement tests and was enrolled into two different ESL classes—one for writing and one for reading. He later dropped the classes because he was working two jobs and couldn't handle the schedule. However, he decided to come back the next year and try to take a couple courses each semester to get through the ESL sequence.

In his classes, César has met people from many different countries and explained that if you are nice to them, they will be nice to you. "You can learn about their culture, their food, dances, what they do, what they celebrate. And then I can tell them about my culture." He said he is not an expert dancer, but does go out dancing with his girlfriend about once a month and can dance the cumbia, meringue, and bachata.

Asked about differences and similarities in holidays, customs, and food between Mexicans and Americans, César said that Halloween is somewhat similar but that instead of getting candy people in Mexico get yams or cupcakes. Another difference is that Mexicans pray for their dead ancestors for the "Día de los muertos" (Day of the Dead). He stated that Christmas is the same, except for perhaps the food. When asked what kinds of food Americans eat at Christmas, he replied, "Just like, probably like... well American food is always like pizza, hamburgers. I don't know." He said they go to Italian restaurants and other and "They get different types of food to eat, I guess." When I said it would be interesting to ask them about this, he admitted, "Yeah, I have no idea."

When asked about returning to Mexico, César said he would only like to visit: I do want to go back to Mexico but just to say “hi” to my family, like my uncles, my grandma. I have nothing to go back and give [sic] over there.” He definitely wants to stay here because he feels his future is here, and his school is here. When asked what he would do if his family went back, he said he would “Tell them ‘good luck.’ “ To follow up, I asked if he would not go with them. He responded, “No. I’m already making my future here: school.” He said he has cousins from both sides of the family here in Chicago, and he has relatives in other states also.

I decided to ask him what sort of advice he would give to someone in Mexico thinking of coming to the U.S. or thinking of coming to study at a U.S. community college. He stated, “Well, I would tell them to come,” and he mentioned the opportunities in school and work here in the U.S. that according to César do not exist in Mexico.

### **David**

*I'd say like don't come alone; come with your family. Because leaving alone is like hell.*

David was the fourth and last student interviewed at Grassland during the spring 2009 semester. The interview was very casual, with David laughing and joking throughout the conversation. He had come to the U.S. when he was 13 years old, leaving a very small Mexican town. He came here alone and now lives with his aunt and uncle. His parents and the rest of his immediate family live in Mexico still. Here, he entered a large suburban high school as a freshman and took two years of ESL there.

Regarding differences between Mexican and U.S. schools, he focused on the classroom resources as being very dissimilar, including “all the equipment and everything that they have here, like even the classrooms are different,” plus the tutoring program for students. He mentioned also that the instructors at Grassland “are really good teachers because they really try to like teach you...”

David said he hadn't studied English in Mexico and arrived here unable to say anything: “Not no English, okay, nada.” He remarked he was so surprised to find so many people here who could speak Spanish, including at McDonalds, one of his first encounters with Americans. His uncle had ordered in English, so he tried to do this also. When he couldn't, his uncle told him to order in Spanish since the worker had a nametag with a Spanish first name on it. This worked, and the worker had a heavy American accent when he responded in Spanish.

It seemed as though he was embarrassed he too has a strong American accent in Spanish. Language loss carries stigma among many immigrants, and for some parents it is a sign of lack of respect of the home culture and of the family. Children lose their native language more quickly than adults do, and there is a correlation with second language acquisition: the more one learns the second language, the more it is possible they forget the first one (Major, 1997; Silva-Corvalan, 1994). David provided examples of some sounds he no longer says correctly, such as the rolled “R” as in the word “churro,” using instead a version of the Midwestern American English “retroflex r.” His mother and the rest of his family tell him “You don't speak like you used to speak,” and they ask what happened to him. Although he can speak Spanish, he really only uses the



language with his family, speaking it about 70% of the time. With all his friends, most of whom are Mexican, he speaks only English. He has some cousins here who are half-Mexican, and he speaks English with them also.

He took the placement test at Grassland and was told he needed to take one developmental course before taking English 101. He did not exhibit any signs he felt any stigma or anxiety in taking the placement test or being in the developmental course. He described the course as being “an essay class” and told how the students read a good essay as an example, discuss it with the teacher in class, and then write their own essays. There are quizzes and tests in the class also, and he is doing well on them. He said it had taken him three years to be able to speak English. David is also taking U.S. History and a biology course, for a total of 12 credits. He called the history course “a reading class” and says homework and class work are basically more reading. He works about 35 hours a week, and he admits he should study more.

David had to take a pre-algebra class but completed it and is now in college algebra, one of the many mathematics courses he will need to take because of his major and his career goals. He plans to pursue a four-year degree after he gets his associate degree from Grassland.

When asked about a typical class period in the math class, he showed some anxiety and embarrassment about not being able to answer the questions posed by the instructor, who puts problems on the board to be solved during each class period. The students spend the rest of the class time trying to solve them. He stated that he would start thinking about an answer, and then eventually he would admit he didn't know the

correct answer, stating this out loud. He said he didn't know why, but the math instructor "kinds of pick on me because I don't know many of the stuff." If the students don't answer the problems before the end of class, the instructor puts them back onto the black board the next class session, and the students must continue working on them. When asked why this would happen, David laughed and said, "Because we aren't trying to do all of it."

Although he joked and laughed throughout the interview, he gave very specific and serious advice to anyone from Mexico who might be considering coming here. For example, he said they should study English before coming here, and they should prepare for Chicago by bringing a "really good jacket" because "it's terrible outside" during the winter. He emphasized, "So there's actually not a good weather here!"

Asked if there was any more advice, he stated, "I'd say like don't come alone; come with your family." Then he added, "Because leaving alone is like hell." When I asked, "Really?" he responded, "You miss everybody. You start thinking that you're not going to miss anybody but then it comes to you really hard. Like you start to remember what you used to do with your family, like going out, ah, I don't know... your mom yelling at you for something. And, ugh, now I don't have that because I don't live with them. But, yeah, I miss them. For sure. They shouldn't come alone."

David had been back to visit his family for about two weeks a year before the interview. He plans to stay in the Chicago area once he has his four-year degree, and he says he would go back to Mexico again to visit but not live there. David said he would

stay here because he “kind of likes it here.” He added that he would go back to Mexico, but only for a vacation.

When asked about his journey to Chicago, he said it had been “an adventure” and required a three-day bus ride, during which his legs were asleep. He gave no information about his legal status; nor was he asked about it.

As if to summarize the interview, David said, “to me it’s all this stuff in the past. I don’t actually remember Mexico.”

### **Julia**

*I need to balance my time, my job, my family, my kids. But, um, I think there’s more opportunity to study if you can pay.*

Julia is the one and only student from Metro College in Chicago to be interviewed, and we had our conversation during the fall 2009 semester. She was also the oldest student in the study, already 28 when she came here and now in her late 30s. The decision was made to interview Julia because she met all of the other criteria in the profile, and because she wished so strongly to participate. She felt she could help her community by being interviewed. As it would turn out, many of the themes emerging from her interview were similar to those of other students in the study. For example, she spoke at length about the differences in time and schedules here and in Mexico. According to her, people here are always in a hurry to get somewhere, and in Mexico life is much more relaxed.

Julia was an adult when she got to Chicago. She was also the oldest student of the 11 to be interviewed. She is in her late thirties, and she is married with children. Her experiences reflect coming from a large city in Mexico and living in the bustling city of

Chicago—unlike the first four students in the study who live a somewhat less hectic suburban life near Grassland Community College. Because of her job and her interest in the study, she asked to be interviewed.

Her current work is in healthcare education, in a special program run by an area university. In addition to telling young Latinas about issues in health and pregnancy, she provides resources to them. She became interested in this study because she conducts similar ones for her job on a regular basis. She thought it was imperative she be interviewed so she could share her perspective in order to help her people. She explained, “I’m interested about this study for the questions for the Spanish community.”

Although administrators at her high school in Mexico had tried to dissuade her, she signed up for nursing school before graduating and started taking courses. By the time she got her high school diploma, she had already gotten her nursing degree. She had come from a large city in Mexico, similar to the size of Aurora, Illinois she said, where she had earned her nursing degree. (Aurora has about 175,000 residents.) Arriving in Chicago, she realized she had to immediately start studying, and learning English. She completed the GED course—in Spanish—and passed the state test.

She then started taking ESL courses. She had taken only a conversational English class in Mexico. Now, she is taking two ESL classes, one for grammar and writing, and the other for speech. She spoke at length about her work, and she explained the kinds of resources she is supposed to provide to the women who are her clients. With her clients, Julia speaks either Spanish or English. With her boss and other staff members in the clinic where she works, she must speak English. She said she was already receiving

offers for practicum sites for her nursing education, in addition to offers of promotions at her current workplace. Although she was tired, she insisted on speaking in English during the interview, and agreed it would be good practice in support of her ESL studies.

At home, Julia speaks Spanish with her mother, who came with her from Mexico, and she is hoping her children will learn both languages. Her son speaks more English than Spanish, but her daughter “speaks very well two language.” She speaks to her children in both languages. She said she is very proud of her heritage, and she celebrates by preparing “typical food” and wearing folkloric dresses, of the style of the Indians of Mexico. She said the dresses might look funny: “Funny to another person but it’s my identity of Mexico.” Asked if she could speak one of the indigenous languages, she replied, “No. Because we are in the city. Unfortunately, no.” She seemed proud as she spoke about Indian culture, and she described some of the apparel and the style used by Indians in the rural areas in different parts of Mexico, such as Oaxaca and Michoacan.

Regarding advice she would give to people thinking of coming to Chicago, she reported what she had said to her cousin: “I say you can, but you need to pass one winter here.” Julia spoke of the ice and snow, and how she had to learn how to walk and drive on slippery streets. She also told of how ill she had become with the flu the first winter here. She hadn’t been prepared for the Chicago weather.

Julia also explained that the person coming here would have to be ready for the hectic schedule of the city: “Every morning you need to go outside very fast. You know the time.” She told how everything here runs on a tight schedule and there is a great distance to travel between home and school, home and work. She said that another big

difference between Mexico and Chicago is that here everyone drives so much more. In Mexico, people walk more, and they eat better food. Another difference is that in Chicago “On every corner there is a McDonald’s” and there are also many pizza restaurants. In Mexico, food is more healthful, and there is less fast food.

Despite the need to learn more English—which she looks at as being her biggest challenge—Julia is determined to get her nursing degree and be able to help her community more. She did not seem to be anxious about her studies, and she admitted she has to work hard to master English. She did not mention any embarrassment about taking ESL courses and did not talk about her legal status. At several points in the interview, she returned to talking about her job, and she tended to link this talk with learning more English. For example, when asked what she has to do in her ESL classes and what kind of experience it is, she replied, “Well, it’s good because I try to learn a new language... and I have a lot of responsibilities in my job and would like to have a little more time for my education.”

### **Socorro**

*For some reason I’m not so thrilled to be living here. I’m not used to it.*

Socorro was the first of three female students to be interviewed on the return to Grassland Community College during the fall 2009 semester. Interviewee number 6 out of a total of 11, she had come from a small town in Mexico and now lives in the suburbs of Chicago near the college. Unlike other students interviewed, however, she has been back and forth to Mexico in her educational career: she started elementary school there; came here as a child and attended fourth grade; went back to Mexico and finished elementary and middle schools; and when she came back to the U.S. she enrolled as a

high school freshman. This back-and-forth school career is very common among some Mexican families for a variety of reasons (Farr, 2006, pp, 111-112). In addition to her one year of school here using English, Socorro always used the language with her stepfather, who is American.

Of all 11 students interviewed, Socorro was the most fluent in conversation, had the best English grammar, and sounded most like a native speaker of English from suburban Chicago. When I mentioned that she sounded like she “had been born here,” she replied that people usually said that because of her English.

Socorro explained that in rural Mexican schools some teachers do not work hard at their jobs, some teachers “just don’t care at all,” and some students do not try very hard, either. She said she thought she spoke more English than her teacher in the Mexican middle school she attended and where she took one year of the language.

In the U.S. high school, she took two years of ESL, one freshman year and then one sophomore year, along with a regular sophomore English class. The sophomore ESL class was harder for some reason than the regular one, she said, but she did not explain further.

Socorro took the placement tests at Grassland and said she was placed into a special type of English 101 that is specifically for non-native speakers. There are many students from Mexico, Poland, and other countries. In the class, students are working on the last of six essays, this one serving as a summary of earlier work done in the course. “Our class is just composition; it’s just writing,” she said. She added that the class is easier than her high school ESL classes, maybe because she already had experience in

doing a lot of writing before she came to Grassland, and the teacher for this class provides both written and spoken instructions on the essays. With five essays already done and another one coming up, Socorro laughed, “So we pretty much write all the time.”

She is taking three other classes, including sociology, anthropology, and mathematics. Although the first courses are very similar in content, they are taught differently. The instructor for the math class is “not so motivational,” according to Socorro. She is too anxious to answer questions and is not motivated to do so. She added, “Because he will either scream at you or just ignore you.” After students avoid answering questions because they don’t wish to or are afraid they have the wrong answer, the instructor becomes angry and lectures at them, insisting they try to answer the questions. She also felt “so disappointed” in the math class, saying about the instructor “And he also has an accent, so for me it’s kind of hard to understand what he’s talking about.” This disappointing math class was echoed in some other interviews.

Talking about differences in people between Mexico and the Chicago suburb where she now lives with most of her family, she stated that back home people tended to gossip more, and people were perhaps a little less friendly. Here, if you smile, people will smile back; if you say “hi,” they will say “hi” back.

Talking about major cultural differences between Mexico and her Chicago suburb, Socorro mentioned that the food is more healthful back home and people walk everywhere, many people not having cars, and food is purchased more often. Here, people seem to drive everywhere, and fast food is one of the staples in Americans’ diets.



Her own family, she noted, eats a lot of pizza, in addition to hamburgers—two foods they would not eat when in their little village in Mexico. She also mentioned that the clothing choices of young Mexican girls are still more conservative and less revealing than here. She stated that although jeans and lightweight tops are more common now in larger Mexican cities, they would still not be seen as often in small towns. Clothing for girls and young women is becoming more like it is here in the Chicago suburbs, with “spaghetti strap” blouses becoming allowed more by parents in Mexico.

Regarding Grassland, she said, “College here has been a really great experience,” and people were not as aloof as she had feared they’d be. She was surprised to find out that people in high school were more that way than people at Grassland were.

Socorro talked about her definite career goals and how she plans to attend a four-year institution in Illinois once she completes her two-year degree at Grassland. She had already chosen her two possible schools. She said she might stay here, might go back to Mexico. She had not decided, and the decision would hinge on the economic conditions once she had her four-year degree and the possible opportunities in both countries. However, she stated that if her family decided to go back to Mexico, she would definitely go with them. She automatically thought of living with family members, and said she probably would not stay here and stay with her father’s American parents because they are elderly. She did not mention living alone. Asked twice whether she would really go back, she explained, “Uh, I haven’t been really accustomed to living here. For some reason I’m not so thrilled to be living here. I’m not used to it.” She felt she had not yet really “made a home here” and would like to be living somewhere in Mexico, if she

could. She went on to say, “I mean, I like living here and everything, but it’s not my home.” If she wound up working and living in the U.S. for some reason, she said each summer and at Christmas she would be visiting in Mexico, agreeing, “Ah, yes. That would be the plan.”

Asked if she would advise her cousins to come here, Socorro said they should “because schools in Mexico are not that great.” She stressed that if they adapted well to their new surroundings and really liked being there that only then could they stay for awhile. Otherwise, she thought they would get homesick. She had some friends who are homesick because “...they either miss their home (laughs) and families and because the cultures are way different.” She was perhaps nervous and that is why she laughed; however, the reason was unclear. She admitted she did have some friends from Mexico who are here and who feel homesick.

Socorro said she didn’t really have any special message to send to people who would read this study. She did not report on her legal status and was not asked about it.

### **Timoteo**

*It made me so sad to come here... I feel I don't belong here, and I want to go back.*

Interviewee number 7, Timoteo was the next student interviewed at Grassland Community College during the second visit to campus during the fall 2009 semester. He made it clear throughout the interview he planned to go back to Mexico. He had come from a good-sized rancho at the age of 14 and now lives in the suburbs of Chicago near the college. His father had already been up here, working six months of the year and spending the rest of the year with the family in Mexico. According to Timoteo, his father

had gotten tired of not having his family with him, so he arranged for and got papers for his son and the rest of the immediate family. If he wanted to, Timoteo could stay here much longer because he would be here legally, with documents.

He said a lot of people thought it was ironic he wants so badly to go back to Mexico. People feel he is “spoiled” and should take advantage of the opportunities here he could have with documents to be here. He said he understands how many Mexicans feel, but he does not want to stay in the U.S. Trying to make this clearer, he said, “I have the same standard of living in Mexico as I do here.” He explained that his family owns three houses back home and he can stay in one of them. “Why would I want to stay here when I have the same thing over there?” he asked.

Timoteo had completed seventh grade in Mexico and then came here in the middle of his eighth, entering eighth grade here in the middle of the school year. Timoteo took ESL in eighth grade. He had studied some English in Mexico before coming here, but he did not elaborate.

In high school, he took three years of content-based ESL that included social studies and other topics in the classes. He found the courses very interesting because they were not just writing and reading like many English classes seem to be. However, he took levels I and then III and IV, skipping level II. Timoteo explained, “I kept telling them I knew all of that stuff already, but they wouldn’t listen to me.” He did so well at the end of the year that they moved him into III the next year. Senior year, he got to take regular English. Up to that time, he had been taking only ESL classes and therefore only met people who didn’t speak English. The last year of high school “he started meeting

more people.” He felt strange, saying that he almost felt like a freshman student in the high school.

Timoteo took the placement test at Grassland and got placed into two English courses, one regular 101 for writing and a developmental communications class called 094 for reading. He enjoys the writing course, and he is “one of only about three students who listen to the instructor.” Because there are computers in the room, most students are on Facebook, My Space, or You Tube. A lot of the students talk in small conversations, including Timoteo, sometimes. Timoteo finds it interesting that the instructor tells them how to break the rules for essay-writing that he had studied in high school. Regarding the format of an essay, for example, one can have three or four paragraphs instead of the five paragraphs they learned to set up in the high school English classes.

In his reading class, during the first 10 minutes the students read quietly while the instructor checks off whether they have done their homework, reading a passage and then answering questions on it. During this time, everybody keeps quiet. Then, the entire class goes over the assignment, “so we can see what we got wrong.” The instructor corrects all the errors. Timoteo explained, “That’s the whole class.”

In addition to the writing and reading classes, Timoteo has two other courses, one a math class and the other one relating to his chosen major and career interests. One thing he dislikes about college in the U.S. is the need to take so many courses outside one’s major—different from how things work in Mexican higher education. He explained, “Over there, you start with the courses in your major right from the beginning.” No matter the major, one starts with major courses. “That’s one of the

reasons I want to go back—because I don't want to pay for a bunch of courses I don't want to take.”

Timoteo and his entire immediate family came to the U.S. He does have family members in Mexico, but his mother advised him against living with them. He plans to live in one of the family's houses back home, but he will have to pay the utilities. He will study at a Catholic university there and will work to pay his expenses. He has already talked to his family about his returning to Mexico.

He definitely wants to go back, and he plans to do so early summer 2010. Since he's going back, he's “not going to take any more English or math” at Grassland during the spring 2010 semester. He wants to get back to Mexico before the soccer playing heats up. This is an area of great interest for him, and he explained that in the U.S. that particular sport is not as popular as it is in Mexico.

In terms of other differences between Mexico and the U.S., Timoteo explained that time concepts and work are very distinct. He said that in the U.S., one has to work or study. He told at length the differences in his schedule in Mexico where he was able to go to school early in the day and then spend the rest of the day playing with friends, hanging out, or working—in short, doing whatever he wanted to do. Here, though, he has to go to school and be home by 6:00 each night, his mother insisting he obey this rule. He said he did not understand the rule, and he mentioned that his mother is “just like that.” He feels like he is “locked up” all the time.

Regarding advice to Mexicans who are considering coming here, he said that they must be ready to work or go to school. “It's not like in Mexico where you can just hang

out and waste time.” He said that people from Mexico coming here would be okay as long as they would keep busy with school or work. He did warn, though, that if they come here to stay, “You will hate it.”

### **Verónica**

*Maybe a good question for you to ask would be “What experiences did you have crossing the border?”*

Verónica was the second of three female students to be interviewed on the return to Grassland Community College during the fall 2009 semester. Interviewee number 8, she had left a good-sized city in Mexico at the age of 12, alone, and is now 18, living in the suburbs of Chicago near the college. She was the fourth student to speak candidly about her legal status, mentioning three times in the interview that she is “undocumented.”

She had taken English for six months in Mexico, but she had not learned much, saying that the teachers back home “speak English in a funny way” and learned it there, apparently meaning they do not have experience speaking the language with native speakers. She felt the teachers here are much better. She added that in high school she had taken four years of ESL, but she did not elaborate.

Verónica took both the ACT and the placement test at Grassland, and she said the placement test was much too difficult. She took it with other students who she knew were much more advanced in their English skills than she was. She insisted, “This was really unfair!” Something else that seemed unfair was that some of her high school classmates who were much better in English got to Grassland and wound up being placed with her in the same class—even though she knew they were very skilled in English.

“They worked so hard in high school, and then when they got here they got held back and put into ESL.” Verónica thought it must have been because of the ACT and the placement test.

Verónica is the only student who spoke about the stigma of getting “held back” by being put into ESL courses instead of being moved up into English 101. This is significant because the literature on Generation 1.5 students is rife with examples of students feeling the stigma of being either put into ESL yet again in college—after having taken regular English by the end of high school in some cases—or being put into ESL for the first time. After all, many high schools do not have ESL programs or developmental courses/tracks or bilingual education. Some Generation 1.5 students wind up in such courses in higher education after graduating from a U.S. high school in which they have spoken, read, and written English on a daily basis for four years.

This semester, her first at Grassland, Verónica was placed into two ESL courses but did not know the exact course names or numbers. However, she told that one is for writing and the other for reading. In the writing course, they read sample paragraphs and essays and then have to write their own, choosing their own topics. In the reading class, they have to read a variety of stories, one recent one being about a family who built a house underground to save energy.

One big difference she noted between Chicago and Mexico is the weather. The winters here seemed terrible to her, and she stressed, “During the winters here it gets cold, cold, cold!” She found it depressing here, with the bad winter weather and the fact she feels like she is always locked up in her house with all the rain and snow. In Mexico,

by contrast, “I am more used to it there. You are used to being outside all the time.” She explained that December in her part of Mexico is cold, and so is January, to some extent, but that’s all. The weather is not as extreme as here.

Families in Mexico and Chicago are very different, according to Verónica, with Mexican families being closer than American ones are. She seemed to miss her sisters and parents in Mexico very much, and she seemed depressed when she spoke about them. Since she does not have papers, the idea of going to visit them is out of the question, with the possibility of not being able to get back to Chicago now because of the more stringent checking along the border between the two countries.

Verónica may be suffering from depression, and she did seem to be upset about having to leave Mexico to come here. In the suburbs, she is staying with her aunt and uncle, not seeming to enjoy living there, however.

“I don’t have my papers,” she explained, and therefore cannot work a “real job.” Instead, she babysits children in the neighborhood and enjoys doing so. The money is not enough for what she wants to do. She planned to keep studying, however, and has definite career goals. Because of her legal status, she cannot receive scholarships or student loans, and she must work to pay her tuition. Despite her difficulties, she said she was determined to get her degree and have a professional career.

Regarding messages she would send to those who read this study, Verónica had several ideas. For example, she hoped someone could solve the problem of the difficulty in securing papers for immigrants from Mexico to come here. She also hoped people would be more understanding of Mexican students and see that they are not coming here



to take the jobs away. She said her people are not criminals; they are just looking for a better life. “We just want to work and make some money,” she insisted. “The only bad thing we did was come here the way we did.”

### **Xavier**

*Right now, I'm just focusing on my future and my career. And probably in the future, get a job and get married.*

Xavier was interviewee number 9. He was younger than most of the students in this study when he arrived in the Chicago area, being 11. He had come from a rancho, part of a small town in Mexico. His rancho was complete with cows and pigs “in the streets.” He now lives in a large suburb of Chicago near the college.

Xavier had completed fourth grade in Mexico and when he got here entered fifth grade, staying in ESL classes throughout elementary school. He also took one year of ESL in high school, which included content, such that he studied math, science, and other topics in ESL. The students in that program had to take tests and quizzes, complete lab work, and write essays. Essays were shorter than those in the regular English class, he stated. He said it was a very large ESL program, and the students, “they’re from like every part of the world.” He said it was a very large high school, too, adding, “It’s a diverse school. Very diverse.”

He had taken the ACT and gotten a score of 20, he thought. Taking the placement tests at Grassland, he got placed into English 101. He completed that course and the following one, English 102. He is now taking a speech course. This class requires students to give several different types of speeches, including a persuasive one. For that assignment, he did a speech on why students should join the Hispanic Cultures Club, of

which Xavier is a member. He is taking two other classes and is a part-time student. He also works part-time, about 25 hours per week.

In terms of differences between Mexico and his Chicago suburb, he mentioned that the climate is very different, with his hometown being very hot and dry. A similarity arises in the people, according to Xavier. He said his part of Mexico is just as diverse as the Chicago suburb, and he knew people in his area of Mexico who were from Japan and Korea, with a nearby town full of Anglo people. He said his suburb is diverse also, with people from many countries, and "...they speak a lot of different languages."

Xavier saw prejudice here, and he said if people see a Latino—for example a Peruvian—the people here will assume the person is Mexican. He guessed it is maybe because the majority of Latinos here are Mexican. Also, he said that the people here would tend to assume the Latino works in a restaurant or other similar job rather than having a professional position.

He said he always speaks Spanish with his parents and they do not speak English. He speaks "Spanglish" with his friends and with his brother who is very close to him in age. Asked why he tends to mix the two languages, he replied he did not know why, saying it is just something that "came up." He speaks English with his younger brothers and younger sister so they can learn the language faster. Although he speaks English fluently, it was very difficult to understand some of his pronunciation, including the name of one of his classes and the four-year major he intends to pursue.

He has definite career goals and has chosen the Chicago university he wishes to attend. He said he might live in the city near the school because he has family near it. He intends to complete the two-year degree at Grassland and then transfer.

He wishes to remain in the Chicago area but would go back to Mexico to live and work if he got a good job there. He also has family members who live in Mexico and said he could stay with them. He did say, however, that his parents and the rest of his family would probably stay here—even if he got a position in Mexico—so his two younger brothers and his younger sister could complete school here. Plus his parents have good jobs here. He mentioned that he goes back to Mexico every summer to visit.

He would advise people from Mexico to come here. However, he thinks they should speak English as much as possible or they won't learn it as quickly. He did not mention his legal status and did not seem to exhibit any issues of anxiety or stigma.

### **Yolanda**

*Yeah, the most wonderful thing happened to me: high school. Yeah, they had ESL!*

Yolanda was the third female student of three to be interviewed on the return to Grassland Community College during the fall 2009 semester. Interviewee number 10, she is a classic generation 1.5 student who had come from a small village in Mexico and arrived here at age 14. She entered 8<sup>th</sup> grade here in a school that had no ESL or bilingual education program. She then entered a secondary school that had a very large content-based ESL program. She now lives in the suburbs of Chicago near the college.

She told stories of how hard it had been to be in a class that was completely in English—and she had never studied the language back in Mexico. She was glad to get

out of that school: “Yeah, the most wonderful thing happened to me: high school. Yeah, they had ESL!” She really enjoyed her high school ESL classes, and the teachers even “spoke a little bit of Spanish.” Unlike her eighth-grade experience, in her high school there were students from many countries, such as India, and she had a lot of friends from Korea and China. She met lots of friends, in fact, and said about the instruction: “The teachers were very good. I learned a lot.”

In high school, she took three years of ESL in a very large program that included content such as math in the ESL courses. Senior year, she took regular high school English IV—rhetoric—and had to write ten-page essays, plus write surveys for students to take and then write up the results.

When she got to Grassland, however, Yolanda did not get placed into English 101—despite three years of high school ESL and a writing course. She thought she had gotten a score of 17 on the ACT and she took the placement tests for reading, writing, and math at Grassland. She is taking an ESL writing class her first semester at the college, a pre-algebra course, and other classes adding up to full-time study. In ESL level three writing, she has to learn about ways to organize paragraphs and essays. In her other ESL class, she has to study more English grammar and reading. She was determined to get through all English courses, and also the math courses because math is essential in the field she hopes to get a two-year degree in and work in.

She is also taking a sociology course and a math course, which she really enjoys. Right now, the students are working on interesting formulas for figuring capacities for air

conditioners and other applications she likes. A full-time student at Grassland, Yolanda also works about 38 hours each week, with three jobs.

She and her brother are the only two family members here, and she said nothing about her legal status. Although her older brother took six months of English, he is not currently going to school. When they are together, they always speak in Spanish, even though her brother can speak some English. Overall, she said she speaks Spanish 75% of the time. At Grassland, she has met a lot of friends from other countries, and she speaks English or Spanish to them, depending on where they are from.

Yolanda has career goals and is working hard to pay her own tuition. She has another brother who is in a field similar to the one in which she hopes to work, but she did not say where he was living. She might go back to Mexico to work in her field or she might stay here—she is undecided.

Going back to Mexico? Yolanda and her three best friends from Mexico are slowly losing contact with each other and she tries to keep in touch with them. She would like to go back to visit them, her sisters, and other people she misses. Tears began to well up in her eyes as she recalled her childhood friends. Some are married now, with children, and others have had to go to other parts of Mexico to work in order to help support their families back home in the village they came from.

Regarding major differences between Mexico and the suburban area she lives in, she said food is obviously different. For example, in her part of Mexico people eat very spicy food. Here, people eat blander fast food, such as pizza, cereal, and chicken

nuggets. While Mexican parents cook, the parents of many of her American friends do not, opting instead to go out to eat “the whole time.”

Another difference was the amount of freedom, and the feeling it was safer in her village in Mexico, where she could walk to school every day. She shared, “Like you could go anywhere and nothing would happen to you.” Everyone knew each other there, she said, so that helped make it safer.

Regarding advice she would give to Mexicans about coming here, Yolanda said that if young people are getting help from their parents, they should stay in Mexico. However, if they are not getting help, then they should come here. School is cheaper there, Yolanda stated, “So it’s just easier.” She also had advice for people who want to understand Mexicans better, saying that her people are here for opportunities—not to take jobs away from others.

### **Zeferino**

*When I got here, I had to look for a job very fast. I didn’t have the age to work. I had to get a “fake visa.”*

Zeferino was the last student to be interviewed on the return to Grassland Community College during the fall 2009 semester. He was also the 11<sup>th</sup> and final student in the study. He had come from a very small town in Mexico at the age of 14 and now lives in the suburbs of Chicago near the college. He is now 19 years old, studying toward first a two-year degree and taking advanced courses already in his major and then toward a four-year degree.

His small town is very different from the Chicago suburbs, and there is no bridge over the streams that surround his hometown. During the summer, the streams often

flood and there is no way to get across. The rest of the year, they ford the streams at certain spots, and it is better to do this by horse than by car. He said if he won the lottery he “would help my town” and he explained that there are no roads—only dirt that turns into mud when there is heavy rain.

The big difference with living here is the concept of time and schedules. Typical days spent back in Mexico consisted of getting up early, going to school, and then coming home to help his grandfather with the trees and animals on his small farm. When he goes back to visit over winter break for two or three weeks, he will again help his grandfather with chores, and he will live in the house his family owns there. Here in the U.S., life “is faster.” Here, Zeferino says everything is rushed, and he is always looking at his watch and thinking, “Oh my God! ...because I have to go to work!”

Although he had studied English in middle school in Mexico, Zeferino said he didn’t learn anything in the class. In high school, he entered ninth grade when he arrived in the Chicago suburbs. He took four years of content-based ESL courses, remembering topics such as science, climates, and “earth-warming.” He said all of his English teachers have been helpful, with one major exception, and he would send them the message: “Thanks for everything!” He explained that in high school the first day he “didn’t know anything” and couldn’t speak English. The next day, he woke up and didn’t want to go back to school. Back in Mexico, he had attended a small rural school with 70 students. Now, he was in a foreign high school with perhaps 1,000 students. Since he couldn’t speak English yet, and didn’t have any friends, he didn’t want to hang out at the school. However, one of his teachers helped him very much and encouraged him. One student

would make fun of him often because of his lack of English skills, and one day Zeferino got so mad at him “I almost beat him up.” Now at Grassland, Zeferino claims he has lots of friends from that same country from which the student he disliked had come from.

Although one high school teacher kept him going, another one was hated by the students from Mexico. An ESL teacher, this foreign-born—non-Latina—teacher often spoke badly about Mexican students, Zeferino said, and one day she said that all students coming from Mexico wind up joining gangs. He got very mad at her: “So one day, I just get out of my class!” He had to go to the dean’s office, and he received a detention.

“Fake visa” is the term used by Zeferino to explain how he got a job at the age of 14 in this country. “I didn’t have the age to work,” he mentioned, explaining that despite this fact he had to get a job fast to make some money to live.

Zeferino was already working as a 14-year-old high school freshman learning English. At that old job, he got a lot of help from a manager who would correct him and explain to him how to say things in English. He said he learned most of his English from having that job, and he came to understand spoken language very well, he thought. Regarding his English skills then and now, he explained, “I understand all things, but I can’t speak it.”

At the end of high school, he took the longer-version of the ACT, meaning he was allowed extra time to complete it, and he claimed he got a 22 or 23 on the test. However, the college would not accept the test, he explained. He took the reading test at Grassland, having to choose vocabulary words, and the writing test, having to write a five-part essay



on a topic that was provided. He didn't remember if the placement test had a name on it. As a result, he was placed into three ESL classes for this, his first semester at the college.

Zeferino enjoys the classes at Grassland and the diversity of the students. He said he now knows students from Poland, China, and India, in addition to many students from Mexico. He says he speaks English with all his friends who do not know Spanish, but he does speak Spanish with any students who understand it. He says he speaks Spanish about 70% of the time if it is a week with no school and only 30% of the time is there if school. He says everyone in his town back in Mexico speaks Spanish, no local languages. However, there are people in nearby towns who speak Mixteco, and he has some friends who can speak this Indian language. Asked if he can understand that language, he said he knows a few words, and joked that he knows "only the bad words."

At Grassland, he is taking three different ESL classes: reading, writing, and grammar. In addition, he has advanced courses already in his major and is very talented in his chosen field. He definitely plans to go on to the four-year degree after the community college. He had trouble coming up with some of the vocabulary related to his major, but he was able to give examples of some of the work typically done in the courses needed for the major, and he explained some of the important concepts and processes he is learning right now.

Regarding how often he studies, he was not clear. At first he said he studies one hour a day. Then he said he studies one hour a week. He did admit he "used to study lot more" but did not elaborate.

One major difference between the culture of rural Mexico and suburban Chicago is the food, he claimed. He talked often of his mother's excellent skills in making tacos, especially "barbacoa," and he spoke with love about the way she makes tortillas by hand instead of buying them in the store. In his neighborhood in the suburbs, most of the families are Mexican, he claimed. In his home, he eats Mexican food, but sometimes pizza, too. Asked if he knew what Americans eat in their homes, he replied, "I don't know... pizza... hamburgers... I don't know."

Another major difference is the concept of time and schedules, as mentioned before. He added, "Life here in the USA goes faster than back there." In his opinion, it is also true that "Time goes faster here." He claimed that even though he has been here for five years it seems like he just got here from Mexico "like yesterday."

The student's whole family is here, and when asked whether he would stay here after getting his four-year degree, he said he "was thinking of going back to Mexico." When asked why he planned to return, he replied, "I don't know...because I'm from there?" When he goes back, the rest of his family will go back with him. The four-year degree he plans to get here will count as appropriate preparation for the same professional position there, he explained. He explained that when he is back in Mexico, he will be doing his work in Spanish, not in English.

He stated that most Mexicans think of coming north as if they were going to "Heaven" and that it is so very easy to get money fast. Regarding giving advice to his younger Mexican cousins about coming here, Zeferino's response was very interesting. He made two definite statements. First, he advised that "If they really need to come here,

really have to, then they should.” However, he added, “If they don’t need to come here, they shouldn’t.”

Zeferino’s anxiety during the interview may have been related more to a lack of fluency and ability to call up vocabulary more than a case of him not knowing of examples or of the answers that might fit the questions posed. At several points, he would laugh, shrug, and say, “I don’t know” and at other times “I can’t explain it.”

Zeferino’s anxiety during the interview may have been related instead to his legal status and the fact this made him nervous. Admitting information about one’s life to a stranger might be anxiety-provoking to many students. Further, some experts on Mexican students without documentation have claimed there is a correlation between legal status issues and anxiety (q.v., Bada-Garcia).

### **Findings of the Interviews based on the Four Research Questions**

#### **Introduction**

The study is guided by four core questions: 1) What are the adjustments to U.S. culture in general? 2) What are the adjustments to the culture of the community college classroom and corridor? 3) Does the student encounter any feelings of anxiety in the language-learning process? and 4) Does the student encounter any feelings of stigma in the language-learning process? This same order is used to organize the major themes, the minor themes, and some unexpected information that arose but had not been solicited by the questions in the protocol. The examples of each are illustrated in Table 2.

Major themes are topics and issues mentioned either by several students or in an intense or dramatic way by a few students. There is no exact number of students—no

threshold—for this determination when coding themes. Minor themes are those topics and issues related to one or more of the research questions and mentioned by one or two students. Minor themes differ from unexpected information because they relate more clearly to the original study emphasis and assumptions of responses—for example, those based on earlier studies. Unexpected information is data that does not relate clearly to the original study emphasis and assumptions of responses. An example of unexpected information in the present study is the revelation of the anxiety related to the trauma of crossing the desert without papers to arrive in the US.

**Question 1: What are the adjustments to U.S. culture in general?**

Regarding adjustments to U.S culture, most of the students made statements that are more in the psychological realm than in a cultural one. For example, students expressed their happiness—a positive state of mind—as they continued to embrace the opportunities available to them. They stated in various ways they were glad to be in this country, had clear goals, understood cultural differences, and were overall very happy to have this chance for a future that most of them said they could not have in Mexico.

In fact, the greatest theme evident in the interviews was this sort of “euphoria” students felt about being here and taking advantage of the opportunities available—in some cases because of the education here, in other cases because of the good careers in the U.S., in most cases both. The majority of the students were relieved to be in the U.S., were glad to be in school, and were optimistic about their futures (e.g., Zeferino) even though some did not come here with a visa and therefore will have problems getting most

professional jobs and attending many more advanced educational programs (e.g., Veronica).

Another way to speak about this euphoria is to frame it as a “lack of homesickness” which was revealed in almost all cases, even though some students did miss some of the people and surroundings of Mexico. This is another psychological adjustment—taking on the US as their home and leaving behind their attachments to and memories of their homeland. Beto said, “I do want to go back to Mexico but just to say hi to my family, like my uncles, my grandma. I have nothing to go back and give [sic] back there.” David explained, “To me it’s all this stuff in the past. I don’t really remember Mexico.” The lack of homesickness was a surprise, given the fact so many students in the other studies cited (e.g., Oudenhoven, 2006) talked about homesickness at length, treating it as a major theme.

Yet another way to frame this theme of euphoria is the achievements of these students. Most of the students had adjusted to life in the U.S. very well and were functioning in academic, personal, and work relationships. Most of them interviewed had jobs and money. Some had cars, many had more than one job. Some had a boyfriend or girlfriend, all talked about friends, and many had other family members here—in many cases someone from their immediately family and in still other cases the whole family was here. There seemed to be a correlation between the high number of supports (Schlossberg, 1997; Schlossber, Lynch, & Chickering, 1998) students could claim and their happiness (e.g., Antonio, Zeferino).

The higher the number of supports, the greater happiness. By extension, it can also be claimed: the lower the number of supports, the less happiness (e.g., Veronica). The main exception to these two rules was Timoteo. Even though he had a girlfriend and his whole family was here—and with papers—he was the least happy about being in the U.S. He did not want to take courses outside his major, was unhappy he had come here, and was planning to get back to Mexico in time to enjoy this coming summer's soccer season there. These again have to do with psychological adjustments more than with culture, as such.

The students also did speak of some factors that fall more within the realm of cultural differences. For example, adjusting to the great differences between the Mexican and U.S. cultural concepts takes some work. For example, one major theme—the difference in the concepts of time and schedules—was mentioned by students as being one that was particularly hard to get used to. Julia mentioned this, and she also mentioned all the time it takes driving from home to school and from home to work. In Mexico, there is more time to “waste time” and hang out, to savor the day and play with friends. In the U.S., however, everything is on a schedule, and students talked about always having to rush to be at the next place. This U.S. obsession with time and schedules was so strong for Antonio, for example, that he even spoke in terms of how long it takes to shower, eat, and get ready for work and school each day. Zeferino said he is always looking at his watch and thinking, “Oh my God! ...because I have to go to work!”

Another big cultural difference is the amount of diversity here in the Chicago area, and students noticed this. There was a major theme of interest in diversity. Many of the students said they now had friends from other countries, such as China and Korea (Yolanda). Others had met students from Poland, India, and England. They spoke of the respect people had for each other and how one can not only learn about the cultures of others but also how one can tell those people about your own culture. Diversity seemed to interest many of the students.

Another major cultural contrast is the huge difference in food. Almost all students spoke of food in Mexico being fresher, more healthful, and better because everyone walks to the store instead of driving everywhere. In Mexico, people shop more often, and greater care is taken in the preparation of meals. Here, fast food is the daily diet, and Americans eat a lot of pizza and hamburgers, according to students. Some really had “no idea” what else Americans eat (Beto) and had never been in the home of White people here in the Chicago area. Some students spoke very fondly of the tacos their mother makes (Zeferino) or the special way their grandmother prepares certain foods.

Within psychological realms again, one minor theme that arose was the idea that the adjustment to living in the U.S. did not seem to be worth the trouble. Of the 11 students interviewed, two seemed to indicate this, with one saying (Zeferino) he was definitely going back to Mexico, and one saying (Socorro) she would go back and has really never adjusted to being here. A third student, Timoteo, is also sure he will go back. They are outliers in this study.

Another minor theme that arose was the idea of Americans feeling Mexicans were here to take other people's jobs away from them. Only two students mentioned this, and one of these two mentioned that some people discriminate against Mexicans because they look and speak differently. One student told how some Latinos here in the U.S. will refuse to speak Spanish with immigrants—perhaps in some way making themselves feel “better” or “more important.”

**Question 2: What are the adjustments to the culture of the community college classroom and corridor?**

Another major theme was the general euphoria about the teachers, the curriculum, the resources, their ESL classes, and the college experience in general—except for Verónica's feelings about the placement tests and people being “held back” by the ESL classes. Psychologically, students help the belief that their college was of benefit to them and had resources to offer them. The students said only positive things about college as it relates to their ESL, developmental communications, speech, and English classes. The one main exception was the case of Timoteo, who did not seem to be interested in learning English, and who said he was definitely going back to Mexico to study and start his career there. His main complaint about English and other courses was that they are not important for his major, at least not according to him. A minor exception was that one student said his teacher was “a good teacher of vocabulary” but did not expound on this. Perhaps this meant the instructor did not teach the rest of the content or skills well. However, the student did not have specific complaints about the course or the teacher.



Students enjoyed their ESL, developmental communications, speech, and English classes. In addition, they were also very aware of what was happening in those classes, from daily assignments to exit requirements. They had built into their minds these requirements and had embraced the importance of meeting them. They could cite sample assignments and topics, the number and type of them required, and how to go about completing them, overall. They were generally able to describe a typical class session in these courses and explain how the teachers taught. In addition, most were able to recall recent topics of readings and the topic they had chosen, such as the speech persuading people to join the Hispanic Cultures Club (Xavier). Students were often not able to provide the exact name or number of the courses—maybe proving that these are not important details when one is a student, or at least that these particular students did not think so.

Another major theme was the lack of euphoria for their math class. Many students even felt anxiety about the way the instructor teaches the class, yells at students, and then is upset that students will not participate by offering possible correct answers to his questions. One student said she was “disappointed” with the class. This discussion was certainly unexpected, but the details seemed to be consistent from student to student. The theme is explored further below, under question number 3.

Another major theme evident in the interviews was the students’ lack of excitement about the schools in Mexico, and most of the students expressed displeasure with their experiences. They generally felt the teachers “didn’t try hard” and were maybe only there for the money. They also spoke about the lack of other resources, such as

tutors and technology, and how they had learned very little English there. In some cases, as recorded above, the language was candid and pointed about the poor schooling students had received in Mexico.

Another major theme that came across was that of cooperation and assistance from the students. Students showed their concern for the researcher, and the need for the researcher to be able to complete the study. Students were interested in the interview process, the purpose of the study, how these related to the dissertation, and how long the entire process would take. Many asked what the researcher wanted to do once the dissertation was done and the degree awarded. Some of these discussions occurred in the interviews, while others happened during the Hispanic Cultures Club meetings or simply in the cafeteria in very informal circumstances. As mentioned before, students always greeted me when they saw me, in many cases asking how I was, how the interviews were going, and how the dissertation was going. I explained the dissertation as being a “very long comparison-contrast research paper,” and this was a good way to describe it to students who were so involved in their English classes. They understood I was looking for their experiences and that different students have different stories to tell. They looked at me as a fellow student. In one case, as mentioned elsewhere here, they tried to refuse the \$25 stipend for participating in the interviews.

Another way to frame this theme is to call it “camaraderie.” Other roles emerged for me at Grassland Community College during the fall 2009 semester visits to the meetings of the Hispanic Cultures Club. I had a sort of role called “friend” because I was a fellow student, and the Grassland students asked me a great deal about my study, the

dissertation, and other information. Not only did I see the students before, during and after those meetings, but I would also see them in the cafeteria near the small meeting room they used each week. Many of the members were also there on other days of the week in the same part of the building. If I bought a cup of coffee when I was on campus, I almost always saw at least one of the students, more likely a group of them together, playing computer games, working on homework, or talking about something they shared.

A minor theme emerging was students' "concern" about my study. Students spoke to the difficulty of my finding students—and they did this in the interviews, in the Hispanic Cultures Club meetings, and in informal chats as we would pass each other in the hall or in the cafeteria. Even though I did not bring up the topic, they were aware I was always looking for more students. They often asked how many students I had and some offered ideas as to why students were not participating. All of this was on their initiative. I certainly did not raise the topic, and I did not ever provide details on how many students I had already interviewed or would interview on a given day when I was on campus.

Another minor theme was "helping." For example, Julia wanted to do the interview in order to help their people. Some saw it as a way to participate in a formal way in higher education and send a message to people about the difficulties faced by Mexican students—and Mexican people in general who are here studying and/or working. Others felt it was a way to send a message to teachers about the need to be "patient" with students who will "learn English someday."

Another, unexpected, role was one of “counselor” to the students. Often students would ask me about transferring to other institutions so they could continue their studies. I felt compelled to help them somehow, so I spoke in general terms mostly, always insisting it was very important to talk to people in the counseling office at Grassland and the people at the receiving institution. One student, especially, asked what an “honors program” was and why the university he would attend had invited him to be a participant. I explained it was a good thing, telling of the possible more interesting courses and better opportunities for learning. He asked if it would be “harder” than usual courses and said if so he would not want to participate. I carefully responded “maybe” and then told him how honors programs tend to work, from what knowledge I had of them. He also asked me questions about visiting the receiving institution, including questions about student loans. He also had to fill out some online forms for scholarships, loans, and housing, but had not gotten to that because he “had so many essays to write” at Grassland. I jokingly told him to “just sit down and do them sometime” so he wouldn’t have to “worry about them” anymore. I told him several times how essential it was for him to get appointments to speak with people who would have the specific answers he needed. For some reason, however, he felt he could ask me instead. Finally, upon one visit to Grassland, when he asked me more questions, I asked him, “Did you do the applications yet?” He replied he had already done them and was so glad I had told him to “get to work on them” and he was glad I had “told him to get serious and be more responsible.” I was surprised because I had not been this direct with him. I knew this because my field notes showed those particular conversations as being more general and certainly more

polite than this. I said I didn't think I had been so insistent. He responded he "knew what I had really meant" and he felt I was "being insistent, but in a polite way." He said he was so glad I had helped him and he needs somebody to give him good advice.

**Question 3: Does the student encounter any feelings of anxiety in the language-learning process?**

Although students had exhibited some anxiety in the classroom where the teacher was ridiculing them in front of others for not doing their homework, anxiety in the language classroom or laboratory did not emerge as a major theme. Students, in general, were very happy with their teachers, almost euphoric, and most of them spoke of the teachers' devotion, hard work, and interest in their language students.

However, anxiety within the math class of several students did in fact emerge as a major theme. This theme, coupled with a sort of disdain and lack of respect for their math instructor arose for several students, all of whom were taking the course the same semester and several of whom were actually in the same section. Their anxiety of being called on, "yelled at," or told off seemed to be pretty clear. This anxiety may be related to earlier traumas, such as their crossing the desert to enter the U.S. without papers (Beto). The students' way of coping with the anxiety was to laugh about the class, refuse to answer, or not try very hard to get the problems on the chalkboard solved by the end of class. This was unexpected information resulting from the interviews.

More unexpected information was the anxiety some undocumented persons may experience while being interviewed in such a study. While this idea was not explored in the study and would have been difficult to approach, it is essential to explore. Some

experts on undocumented Mexicans in the U.S. (Bada-Garcia, personal communication, September 22, 2009) feel there is a strong correlation between daily feelings of anxiety and the lack of documents to be in the country. It remains hard to understand why two community colleges with so very many Mexican young persons who fit the profile never completed the optional survey to begin with. Further, as was mentioned elsewhere in this study three students at Metro College who did fill out the survey indicating interest did not ever answer the emails sent to them. Concentrated into two main categories of courses, Mexican students were easy to reach on the campuses. However, they were not easy to convince to get into the interviews, for some reason or combination of reasons. Although the exact number of visits to classes was not recorded, it could be estimated that between the two colleges 25 sections received the information in the presentation. In a similar study, it is recommended that all such data be kept, including what category of course (e.g., ESL) is being visited.

Another major theme was the great anxiety related to the trauma some of the students have gone through to get here. Five students divulged they were “undocumented” persons and another student hinted at this. Although questions related to this topic were not asked in any of the interviews, students self-disclosed their legal status—in some cases talking about it at length (e.g., Beto). The trauma may or may not be related to depression in some cases (e.g., Veronica). Students may not be admitting all of their feelings, and they may be talking about some other ones in an effort to cover up others. The pain of leaving home (Beto) is maybe repressed by some and those who are

here without papers know there is the distinct possibility that they won't be able to get back to Chicago if they go to Mexico to visit family members (e.g., Antonio).

The danger of crossing the desert to get to the U.S. was discussed by students candidly—in some cases from personal experience (e.g., Beto) and in other cases about the stories of other people who had been through some terrible ordeals (e.g., Antonio's story about the boy who panics and is lost in the desert).

The anxiety caused by the dangers of coming through the desert illegally to cross into the U.S. was a strong theme in three interviews, and the story of the boy who had experienced the panic attack and run off into oblivion was a dramatic one. The recounting of this story by Antonio shows how people do not forget about the members of their community and the struggles they share while trying for a better life. The dangers involved in crossing the desert with the use of “coyotes” who often rob, beat, rape, murder, and extort the immigrants as they cross the border into the U.S. have been documented not only in this study but also in the literature and in the media—and recently in a feature-length film in Spanish called “7 soles” (Seven Suns).

7 soles is not the only story available about persons from Mexico making the journey into this country without documents. Crossing the border into the U.S. is a dangerous endeavor that has been explained extensively in different media in the last few years. Those wishing to cross hire a “coyote” to get them to the other side, and the crossings into this country are often dangerous, chaotic, unorganized, and sometimes deadly. Factual accounts of such crossings are profiled in *Dying to get in: A film by Brett Tolley* (2007) with the actor serving as a participant observer for several months in the

actual crossings and in National Geographics' *Wetback: The undocumented documentary* (2004) with extensive information such as statistics of those arriving in this manner. A factual and dramatic story of the dangers of crossing the desert without papers is told in the recent film *Border* (2008), directed by Chris Burgard. Another factual film is *POV: Farmingville* (2003), a documentary about the recent hate crimes against Latino immigrants on Long Island and the challenges of both these people and the American residents to get along as a community. Fictional films—most based at least partially on real-life events—include: *De nadie* (English title: *Border Crossing*, 2006) that tells of the great dangers of coming through the desert; *Mojados: Through the night* (2005) [the English word for *mojados* is *wetbacks*] that includes information on illegal activities and other difficulties arising from crossing the desert and arriving in the U.S. with no documents; *La tragedia de Macario* (2005) that shows what happens to a man who comes to the U.S. without papers in order to earn enough money to give his wife a better life; and *Under the same moon* (2008) that chronicles a boy's journey into the U.S. to find his mother who is living and working here without papers.

On March 10, 2010, the fictional film *Coyote* was released, showing the impact serving as a coyote can have on White Americans. In this new film, two men help some Mexicans cross safely into the country and then realize the positive role they could play by safely bringing more persons into the U.S. Human nature being what it is, however, the characters have to deal with some challenges they had not foreseen when they took on the job of "coyotes." The film does not provide all positive messages about how people react under stress and when faced with large financial profits.



Crossing the border is also discussed in several books, among them: *187 reasons Mexicans can't cross the border: Undocuments 1971-2007* (Herrera, 2007) that provides poems, commentaries, and short stories on the topic; *No one is illegal: Fighting racism and state violence on the U.S.-Mexican border* (Akers-Chacón & Davis, 2006) that advocates for treating undocumented persons with more humanity and civility; *Los pies de Miguel* (in English: Miguel's Feet, 2008) a novel in which the author Esteban Romero-Jiménez presents and discusses 22 different decisions an undocumented immigrant must consider making, given his predicament; and, finally, *Las manos de Miguel* (in English: Miguel's Hands) that takes the story of the first book further into discussion of cross cultural differences and questions (Romero-Jiménez, in press). Cross cultural differences and the longing to connect families across the border are profiled in the dramatic film *Al otro lado* (in English: On the other side, 2005). On the factual side, the American writer Ted Conover immersed himself in the cultural aspects of coming through the desert and reported on this in his book *Coyotes: A journey across borders with America's illegal migrants* (1987). Yet another true story is profiled in Lee Morgan's *The reaper's line: Life and death on the Mexican border* (2006).

Lastly, there is a song by the group Maldita Vecindad titled *Mojado* (1994) that discusses the difficulties of being in the U.S. without papers and the challenges of making a new life while at a great disadvantage. There is also a musical group from Matamoros, Mexico, called *Grupo Mojado*.

**Question 4: Does the student encounter any feelings of stigma in the language-learning process?**

The “stigma” of being placed into ESL again was revealed in this study as being only a minor theme. Verónica is the only student who spoke about the stigma of getting “held back” by being put into ESL courses instead of being moved up into English 101. This is significant because the literature on Generation 1.5 students is rife with examples of students feeling the stigma of being either put into ESL yet again in college—after having taken regular English by the end of high school in some cases—or being put into ESL for the first time.

The stigma of the immigrant experience presented itself in the culture as a theme by students who felt many Americans feel Mexicans are here to take all the jobs. Some students felt discrimination—not just from Anglo U.S. citizens but also from U.S.-born Latinos who refuse to speak Spanish with newcomers or help them in public, such as helping them to find items in a store.

### **Overview of Chapter Five**

The final chapter contains a restatement of the purpose, questions, and methodology of the study. Included also are a summary of the study, important conclusions drawn from the interviews and the rest of the study, and four sets of recommendations. The recommendations are meant for: 1) community college administrators; 2) community college faculty members; 3) community college students; and 4) researchers. The chapter also explains some of the implications of how the study could be expanded and adapted to other populations and locations.

CHAPTER FIVE  
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Introduction**

Following are a summary that includes a restatement of the purpose, questions, and methodology of the study. Included also are major conclusions drawn from the interviews and the rest of the study, in addition to four sets of recommendations. The recommendations are meant for: 1) community college administrators; 2) community college faculty members; 3) community college students; and 4) researchers.

It is hoped this study will contribute in various ways to a better understanding of the lives, studies, and experiences of Generation 1.5 Mexican American students who are learning English in two Illinois community colleges and that some of the results may be generalized to other institutions, counties and states with similar populations (e.g., California, Texas), and students from similar countries and experiences (e.g., Guatemala, Honduras). It is also hoped the study will be not just significant in itself but rather will carry implications for future studies on this, and closely-related, topics.

**Summary of Study**

The number of recent immigrants to the United States has increased dramatically in the last few years, and more of these immigrants are members of a group often referred to as “Generation 1.5” students. These immigrant students were born in another country, came to the United States at the age of 13 or older, and graduated from high school in this

country. This qualitative research study occurs within two Illinois community colleges that require some students to enroll in courses below regular English Composition I as indicated by one or more placement tests. These courses are English as a Second Language (ESL) or developmental communication courses.

It is documented that Latinos in general have faced a variety of obstacles in attempting to obtain a college degree (Gonzales, 2008; Firmen, Whitthuhn, Riggins, & Carson, 1997; Hunter-Anderson, 2008). It is hoped this study will help college faculty and administrators understand any obstacles more fully.

This study attempts to explore the experiences of these immigrants and their adaptation to new cultural surroundings, through the use of four research questions: 1) What are the adjustments to U.S. culture in general? 2) What are the adjustments to the culture of the community college classroom and corridor? 3) Does the student encounter any feelings of anxiety in the language-learning process? And 4) Does the student encounter any feelings of stigma in the language-learning process?

This research is designed as a dual-site study, emphasizing interviews being conducted as “conversations” with the participants (Kvale, 1996) and drawing upon selected open interviewing techniques (Rubin & Rubin, 2004). The study explores the experiences of the particular group of community college students participating in the study. No attempt is made in this design to generalize to the experiences of other students given the nature of the approach (Stake, 1995). This research approach is a reasonable and thorough one for gaining a deeper and more complex understanding of student experiences because case studies are by nature “naturalistic,” meaning they are

about real people and situations, are “particularistic” meaning they focus on a specific context, and are appropriate for producing “thick descriptive data” about the specific phenomenon (Willis, 2007, p. 238).

There is an established formal protocol for securing participants in any research study (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In this particular study, I agreed to establish and then follow several steps in order to secure and interview participants, among them being:

- Approached community college administrators to ascertain their interest in serving as a site and obtain their approval to contact their faculty members in both ESL and developmental communications, in addition to student club advisors;
- Once their approval was obtained, completed the required IRB application at Loyola University Chicago to be allowed to proceed with the study;
- Contacted the community college faculty members and student club advisors to gain access to their classes or club meetings;
- Administered an optional survey in club meetings and in class sessions that was meant to determine student interest in and eligibility for the interviews;
- Asked students to sign consent forms—in English or Spanish—to participate in the interviews;

- Held interviews, using the approved protocol of questions for the interviews; and
- Took field notes—sometimes extensive—before and/or during and/or immediately after the interviews.

After these steps, a transcriber typed the recorded interviews into a Word file that was shared with both the dissertation director and with each individual student, as part of the member-checking requirements, in case students wish to give feedback on the file.

Later, the themes that seemed to emerge were coded in a three step process, starting broadly and then more precisely. This process was done by hand. In order to report on the profiles of each student, a chronological approach was used, generally and in most cases showing the students' experiences in Mexico, then their arrival and adjustment to U.S. culture and school, then their high school experiences. This was followed by their entry into the college setting, with such steps as completion of the placement tests. Then there is a section on their current ESL and other classes, plus information about differences between U.S. and Mexican culture and people. Then there is a section about their career and academic goals, followed by questions regarding whether the students plan to return to Mexico or stay in the U.S., often followed by the advice they would give to young Mexicans thinking about coming to the U.S., and closing with any special message they wish to send to instructors and others who will read the results of the study.

### Conclusions to the Study

The findings related to the research questions are grouped by major themes, minor themes, and unexpected information resulting from the interviews. The examples of each are presented in Table 2.

The findings related to research question #1 were significant, and showed the great adjustments students had made since their arrival—in most cases recent—in the U.S. (What are the adjustments to U.S. culture in general?) Students had to learn to deal with new concepts of time and schedules, new and less-healthy foods, harsh winters with icy roads and illness caused by the cold wet weather, and other differences between the Chicago area and their homeland of Mexico. In most cases, students were almost euphoric about the opportunities, wealth, hope, and careers they were beginning to embrace. In most cases, they did not wish to return to Mexico to live, instead wishing only to visit family and friends—and on a regular basis because of their strong family ties there. However, two students did wish to return because they disliked living here (Zeferino) and did not feel the adjustment to living here had ever really been successful (Socorro).

The findings related to question #2 were interesting (What are the adjustments to the culture of the community college classroom and corridor?) In most cases, students did not state they had any major problems with the new setting, with the demands of the classes, with the great cultural diversity, or the need to work long hours while taking heavy academic loads.

The displeasure with the math class stands out as a significant finding related to how well students are adjusting to life at one of the community colleges, Grassland. The anxiety caused by the instructor is another important revelation in the interviews. The students' difficulty coping with this anxiety-provoking situation is to be noted.

The findings under question #3 were significant, although they were related to anxiety within other settings and based on other causes, and not within or because of the English language-learning classroom of the process related to the learning (Does the student encounter any feelings of anxiety in the language-learning process?) The anxiety of being in an ESL or English class did not seem to emerge as a powerful force—being mentioned by only one student out of eleven. Instead, the anxiety revealed during the interviews related often more to the crossing of the border, the difficulty dealing with a math class, the need to work hard and long hours to get tuition money, and the need to adjust to different surroundings and a harsh winter during which “it gets cold, cold, cold” (Verónica).

The findings on question #4 were less prominent: Does the student encounter any feelings of stigma in the language-learning process? The stigma revealed during the interviews seemed to relate to cultural differences and the idea that some Americans discriminate against Mexicans. Some of the students in the study also felt that more “Americanized” Latinos were some of the worst culprits, perhaps trying to save face (Goffman) and appear to be somehow better or somehow more important than the newcomer who is trying to negotiate the new culture without the benefit of strong skills in English.



The results of the study and the richness of the students' responses show how engaged the students became as subjects in the interviews and as friends in the cafeteria with the researcher.

### **Recommendations**

The four sets of recommendations are meant for: 1) community college administrators; 2) community college faculty members; 3) community college students; and 4) researchers. Many of the recommendations, and examples related to them, come directly from the interviews; others were gathered from field notes and from impressions garnered by the researcher during the life of the study. There are a number of recommendations for the four different sets of persons reading this study.

#### **Recommendations for Community College Administrators**

**Recommendation Number One.** Community college administrators could find a way to better understand some of the trauma, shock, fear, and in some cases depression of how some of the students managed to get here and what they are now going through. The students are in some ways in shock, from the pain of leaving their homes, some of them still grieving over missing their family, recovering from a dangerous and illegal border crossing, and some of them dealing with the ordeals of living here without papers. Some of them want to go home and some of them do not dare attempt it or they may not be able to get back here (Antonio). Some feel the stress of discrimination and hope teachers will realize prejudice against Mexicans is real (Yolanda). These stressors are greater than those of the average community college student sitting in the class. Some of the students in the study have all of these stressors complicating their lives and threatening their well-

being, their mental health, and their futures. Some students may also be depressed or at least show some possible signs of this (Verónica) and may need not only the teacher's understanding in class but also possible referrals to counselors on campus and other professionals who can help.

**Recommendation Number Two.** It would be very helpful if the community college administrators and the staff members scheduled regular professional development sessions which show faculty members some of the ways to come to an understanding of the difficulties faced by the Generation 1.5 students, and students from Mexico, specifically.

**Recommendation Number Three.** It would be very helpful if administrators helped students to practice their English more by arranging for cross-cultural events and dinners where students from many countries could speak English together. Students would have to gain real value from the events, perhaps credits or points, to make it easier to get a sufficient number of students to participate. A key component is allowing these students access to a large number of native speakers of English at those events.

### **Recommendations for Community College Faculty Members**

**Recommendation Number One.** Faculty members—just like administrators—could find a process by which they could come to comprehend, at least to some extent, the trauma, shock, fear, and in some cases depression of how some of the students managed to get here and what they are now going through. The students are in some ways still grieving over missing their family, recovering from a dangerous and illegal border crossing, and others trying to handle the challenges of living in the U.S. without papers. Some of them

want to go home and some of them do not dare attempt it or they may not be able to get back here (Antonio). Some feel the stress of discrimination and hope teachers will realize prejudice against Mexicans is real (Yolanda). As mentioned above, these stressors are greater than those of the average community college student sitting in the class.

**Recommendation Number Two.** Community college faculty could be patient, as specifically mentioned, regarding the difficulties the students may be having with English: “Ah, be patient. He will learn English eventually” (David). Another student, Xavier, stated this also, saying that realizing a student is having problems with English is important, as is the need to try to explain some things “one-on-one” to make it clearer to the students what the teacher is saying. Timoteo reminds teachers this patience could be helpful because the students have left so much behind and “We had to change our lifestyle, our way of doing things, and our traditions” in order to come here and try to make a go of it.

**Recommendation Number Three.** Community college faculty members who have a good understanding of the kinds of danger, trauma, and difficulty faced by this group of students can help them deal with the daily challenges of learning English in a variety of courses. According to the students in the study, in 10 out of 11 cases, teachers were profiled as being helpful, resourceful, caring, and kind to the students. Teachers of different courses (e.g., speech, ESL) can share information and can convince the community college to hold special meetings to discuss a variety of topics related to studies such as this one. Some topics could be: Generation 1.5 students; students from

Mexico; a typical day in a developmental reading class; differences in cooking and food choices from several different countries; and the stress of immigration.

**Recommendation Number Four.** Any community college faculty member who has experience with other cultures, with learning another language, or with any other such educational adventure can share this information—not just in formal ways such as workshops or meetings—but also in informal ways. Being a model instructor who helps explain the world to other colleagues is an honorable thing indeed. All persons in higher education can think of certain people we consider as resources on various topics. Being someone who can help others understand the trauma of crossing the border dangerously or leaving everything behind can be a great resource to the community college.

### **Recommendations for Community College Students**

**Recommendation Number One.** Above all else, Generation 1.5 students who are in this country without documentation must consider the issue of divulging their legal status—when to do so, and to whom. Although this study is confidential and is protected at various levels from external threat, the study nonetheless did include the self-disclosure of the legal status of five, perhaps six, of the students interviewed. It is recommended that students without documentation take all steps to ensure they can confide in a researcher or other person who is conducting such a study. In all cases, the students are advised to see written documentation of the confidentiality of the study and be sure they understand their rights related to the study and their possible self-disclosure of legal status. This is especially true of any study including questions directly related to this topic.

**Recommendation Number Two.** Although students wished to be interviewed in English rather than in Spanish, several of them had difficulty coming up with the key vocabulary needed for the conversation. Many of them admit they use Spanish predominantly—some using English only in class or only with their friends or relatives who cannot speak English. Students who fit the profile of those in the study should try to learn more about the language and culture of the Chicago area. Speaking more English is a way for students to put to use the vocabulary items, pronunciation rules, and grammatical structures they are studying in a variety of communication courses. Visiting an American family and eating dinner in their home would be an interesting way to not only learn more about U.S. culture and more vocabulary in English but also a way to make new friends. This might be a project that could be facilitated by various campus clubs, with some way devised to get students of all the different cultures to participate—not just students from Poland, China and Mexico but also students from Chicago. While some of the students interviewed said they had learned about the culture of people from different cultures, most of them did not know much about American food or traditions, in one case admitting the student really had “no idea” (Beto).

### **Recommendations for Researchers**

**Recommendation Number One.** For researchers to be successful in getting access to the students who fit a similar profile, it will be essential to enter the Mexican community – whether it be housed within a neighborhood or a higher education classroom. 1) The ability to speak Spanish and establish good rapport is essential, for these open the doors to the interviews; 2) Being Latino would be more helpful, or even better, being a female

interviewer and researcher could perhaps allay the fears of more of the students, especially the females—remembering that some female students will never go into a room alone with a middle-aged White male whose first language is English; 3) Utilizing an interviewer who is female, especially if she is Latina, speaks Spanish, and is Mexican, is another way to bridge the gap between cultures. The strong traditional values and rules of many Mexican families, coupled with the fears regarding deportation for those students who do not have documents, make all three of these important things to consider, with the third issue being perhaps the best approach that would have helped my research the most. In addition, the Latina would need to be a vocal participant in the presentation to find students. This shows we are being progressive and this will be noticed by more modern independent female students in the group. At the same time, she should not be the main or sole speaker during the presentation – for this would look unbalanced to those students expecting Mexican traditional values to be shown during the presentation. In any event, the literature should be consulted before making any decisions on the approach. Another important piece to the puzzle could be asking the exact sort of group who will be asked for interviews about their own beliefs on this cultural angle. Focus groups could be used of groups of students who fit the profile of those the researcher wishes to interview. Marcia Farr (2006) talks about the distance between cultures. She interviews Mexicans from Michoacán and Chicago, and she is American, northern European, and in fact someone she is meeting for the first time asks her the specific ancestry. The majority of the researchers on Mexican culture and the

bigger issues in this and similar studies are Latino, and many of them are of Mexican heritage (e.g., Bada-Garcia; Gonzales).

**Recommendation Number Two.** Based on the difficulty students had with English in the interviews, it would make sense that a Latin person—preferably a Mexican—provide the option of letting the students be interviewed IN SPANISH. The students may not wish to speak Spanish with a White person. They are probably doing this to save face (Goffman, 1958) and may not even wish to use Spanish if the White person is there and they are being interviewed by both persons. The data suffers, as has been shown in interviews where the students just cannot recall some of the key vocabulary they need in English to address very specific questions, in fact even saying things like “I can’t explain it.”

**Recommendation Number Three.** Establish good rapport. Good rapport is essential in order to get access to the students, get them into a room to interview them, and help them to open up enough to talk about a wide variety of information, including some personal information. I was lucky to be able to speak Spanish and joke with the students, including using some slang terms in Mexican Spanish. Although the study is over, I could probably get invited back if I contacted them for a follow-up study or to ask to observe one of their events. Veronica, the 8<sup>th</sup> student interviewed, told me when going into one of the meetings of the Hispanic Cultures Club the people in the group thought I was “cool.” After I had interviewed her and her boyfriend (Timoteo, # 7) and we had commiserated about being poor college students, they did not want to take their \$25 gift certificates. In fact, they were trying to refuse to accept them. When I explained it was

part of the process, they agreed to accept the gift certificates, immediately handing them back to me, saying I should just give them to the next two students I interviewed. The only way I was able to convince them was by saying it was a requirement and I would be in trouble if I did not follow this part of the study agreement.

**Recommendation Number Four.** The faculty members should perhaps be left out of the approval process. If it is considered essential to have them involved, then the researcher should perhaps meet with them at their departmental meetings at the start of the semester to explain the study thoroughly, completely, and officially. For a variety of possible reasons (Chapter Three) administrators, faculty members, and club advisors either did not contact me to participate or did contact me in order to state they were not interested in participating. No persons contacted me simply to receive more information about the study even though they were told they could do this without obligation. It is unknown why, exactly, there was such a lack of interest from the first three colleges after only one telephone conversation all the way to several telephone conversations and visits to the second college and many telephone conversations at the third college. In the case of the third college, the difficulties there do not speak well for cooperation and professionalism among members of the higher education community. The reluctance to participate, mainly on the part of faculty members, was a definite impediment to the timely success of the project, stalling it for months in more than one case. Without the approvals, there could be no study. The faculty members could be left out of the study entirely. Or if it is considered essential to have them involved, then the researcher should perhaps meet with



them at their departmental meetings at the start of the semester to explain the study thoroughly, completely, and officially.

**Recommendation Number Five.** The researcher should perhaps make use of a campus-wide or program-wide quantitative survey, as mentioned above. This could produce a large quantity of objective data. Then, students could be contacted if they indicate their interest in participating in an interview. For various reasons apparently, many students who fit the profile at both institutions chose to not fill out the survey, while others chose not to hand it in at the end of the presentation. Still others filled it out, complete with their contact information, only to subsequently ignore email messages seeking their participation in the interviews. There could be a variety of culture and gender reasons for the reluctance of students to participate, and a legal one—namely whether the students have papers to be here. The legal status of the students being asked to participate in the interviews must be considered. Some experts who regularly study Mexican students in higher education (e.g., Bada-Garcia, 2009; Cavazos et. al., 2007) feel there is a correlation between lack of documents and the presence of anxiety. One of the students interviewed, Timoteo, volunteered this information after interview # 7, going so far as to say that many students were most likely afraid to show interest, get involved, go into a room with me, and be interviewed. He volunteered this freely, and he spoke openly about the fears.

**Recommendation Number Six.** The researcher must be prepared to handle information revealed in the interviews that relate to the legal status of each student and also to the students' experiences and feelings about the legal status they disclose. Because five

students, and perhaps six, disclosed their lack of papers to be in this country, this topic is one which seems to have significance in studies with this particular profile of students. This topic was raised by 5, perhaps 6, of the total 11 students interviewed in this study.

Ignoring the issue of legal status seems to make no sense, given the power of the questions related to it and the pain, danger, and fear connected to crossing the desert to arrive in the Chicago area. The study questions walk around a proverbial elephant in the living room as we talk about the cultural and educational aspects of immigration while at the same time we do not ask about the immigration itself.

**Recommendation Number Seven: Future Research.** Researchers could conduct further research similar to this study. The following are only examples of the possible ways to further investigate the experiences of this group of students. Seven possible studies come to mind that would relate to the current one:

1. A qualitative study that looks at a similar profile of students in a similar institution (another Illinois community college or a community college in an urban/suburban area with a large number of Mexican American Generation 1.5 students, such as Dallas, Houston, or Los Angeles) and again uses interviews of students but that broadens participation by including students who are in any community college course—not limited to ESL or developmental communications;
2. A quantitative study that gathers campus-wide data in a confidential manner (online or by submission through an email process) of all Generation 1.5 students on a campus so that sufficient data would be

collected. In this way, the researcher could look at more sensitive issues such as legal status to be able to explore some of the issues that come up in this study;

3. A statewide (e.g., Illinois) quantitative and confidential study of ESL and developmental programs that explores the cross-cultural training and experiences of the administrators and faculty members who deal with the issues faced by Generation 1.5 students on a daily basis, with specific questions about the perceived literacy skills of the students as opposed to the—or in concert with—the oral fluency of the students. This would perhaps further the research related to the imbalance between and among students' writing, speaking and cross-cultural skills talked about by experts such as Krashen and Cummins;
4. An in-depth exploration of a community college ESL program AND developmental communication program to see how Generation 1.5 students' particular needs are being met, including focus groups of students, online training and testing of faculty members, a rigorous look into the assessment results of the institution, and an annual follow-up on the successes of the students after graduation for a period of at least three additional years;
5. A study looking at anxiety issues of Mexican-American Generation 1.5 community college or university students from a psychopathological perspective that attempts to look at such factors as: etiology; age of onset

and a correlation to age of trauma-inducing incident (e.g., crossing border in the dark); current coping skills; specific phobia and general anxiety issues; comorbidity with substance abuse (e.g., males and alcohol use as a coping mechanism);

6. Any sort of study that would compare two related but distinct groups to look at similarities and differences in adjustments to mainstream U.S. culture and at similarities and differences in adjustments to the community college experience for first-generation students. An example would be group 1 being Mexican American students who were born and raised in the U.S. and who have never visited Mexico and a group 2 being Mexican American Generation 1.5 students who have arrived in the U.S. within the last 10 years; and
7. A study combining a variety of the components above, but focusing on students from a similar country (e.g., Guatemala) in addition to—or instead of—students from Mexico.

It is to be emphasized that the use of Spanish (or other languages) be facilitated, given the difficulty some students had. As mentioned above, this could be done through the use of a researcher who is a native speaker if interviews are included in the study design.

It is also imperative to be prepared for the issue of legal status to present itself within this population. As such, it would be wise to have a set of questions that could be used in order to get richer data by following up on the revelation of the legal status. For example, questions about how the student feels about not having papers or how the

student thinks about the legal status posed. Such a list of questions could be used only if the topic is raised by the students being interviewed—as was done with the questions on anxiety and stigma in this current study.

In summary, these major issues need to be considered. The recommendations for different members of such studies show how various members of the higher education community can respond in the future. Different studies, regarding students from similar (e.g., Guatemalan) but different locations and backgrounds, can help better inform members of the higher education community about not only adjustments of these students but also about their past and current experiences that continue to shape their worlds.

APPENDIX A  
COOPERATING INSTITUTION LETTER

## *Grassland Community College Letterhead*

Current date 2009

Thomas Hansen  
4503 N. Dover Street, Apt. 3  
Chicago, IL 60640-5567

Project Title: Immigrant Stories: Generation 1.5 Mexican American Students and  
English Language Learning in an Illinois Community College

Protocol #: 74013

Researcher: Thomas Hansen

Dear Thomas:

You have proposed a dissertation study for which you will serve as investigator. You have sent to our institution an application to the IRB of Grassland Community College to request approval to conduct your study on our campuses. We understand that an amendment will be registered with the Loyola University Chicago Institutional Review Board to show the addition of the college in the data collection efforts of your study during the spring 2009 semester.

The Institutional Review Board of Grassland Community College has reviewed your request to conduct the study on our campuses and granted approval. This letter serves as official notification of approval.

The focus of the study is Mexican American students who grew up speaking a language other than English at home, moved to the United States at age 13 or older (sometimes called Generation 1.5 students), graduated from U.S. high schools, and then came to the community college. The purpose of the study is to learn about their experiences as they prepare for college-level work through English as a second language or developmental communications classes.

As signatory representing Grassland Community College, I am granting you permission to contact faculty members in both the English as a Second Language Program and the Developmental Communications Program seeking their permission to enter their classrooms to conduct a brief survey. I am also granting you permission to contact student club advisors of relevant groups (e.g., Hispanic Cultures Club) to conduct the brief survey. The college understands you must conduct the survey yourself to safeguard

the confidentiality of students who may wish to participate in the interviews. I am also granting you permission to visit at least one departmental meeting of the members of the English as a Second Language Program and the Developmental Communications Program to explain your study to faculty.

We understand that the survey will:

- Be given in a reasonable number of sections to assist you in reaching up to 7 volunteers;
- Take a maximum of 15 minutes per section;
- Be used ONLY to ascertain student eligibility for, and interest in, participating in the research study.
- Proceed this spring semester.

In order to better understand the perspectives and experiences of this unique population of students, you will ask up to 7 students to meet for 60 to 70-minute interviews during the semester. You will ask that students sign a consent form (approved by the Loyola University Chicago IRB) in English OR in Spanish indicating their understanding of the study, their consent to participate in the interview, and their understanding they may withdraw from the study at any time. The study will start as soon as all necessary approvals have been received.

We also understand that the interviews will be scheduled outside of class time. We understand that the interviews will be audio taped and then transcribed. Tapes and transcripts will be housed in a locked, dedicated file cabinet for two years following the study. After two years, the tapes and transcripts will be destroyed. We understand that this process has been approved by the Loyola University Chicago IRB.

Student participation in this study is completely voluntary, and students may withdraw at any time and for any reason without penalty. At the conclusion of each interview, you will provide each student with a \$25 bookstore gift certificate. There are few risks to participation in this study. For example, students might become nervous after speaking about certain topics. If so, you will refer them to the counseling centers at the college (Room XXX; Telephone 000-000-0000). The most likely risk for a participant would be a breach of confidentiality.

However, to protect the privacy and confidentiality of each student, we understand that you will not share the original data with anyone else, will give each student a pseudonym in everything written, and will leave out any information that could identify any student, the identities of other individuals the students may mention, and the name of the college. To protect the integrity of the college, a pseudonym will be assigned so that readers will not know which educational institution has served as the study site.



The procedures of your research protocol are clearly understood, particularly related to recruitment, consent, and data collection. The following items are to be explicitly noted:

A staff member at the college will assist you in your participant recruitment efforts by providing email addresses to all faculty members in both the English as a Second Language Program and the Developmental Communications Program, in addition to student club advisors, to enable you to send email messages about your study;

- 1) Advise you when the faculty members in both the English as a Second Language Program and the Developmental Communications Program will be meeting and facilitate your entry into at least one of the meetings in each program this spring 2009 semester to tell faculty about your study.

As signatory representing Grassland Community College, I am granting you approval to conduct your study at our institution.

Sincerely,

---

Name  
Senior Research Officer  
Grassland Community College

APPENDIX B  
LETTER TO STUDENT CLUB ADVISORS  
AND TO FACULTY MEMBERS  
IN THE INTENSIVE ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAM AND  
DEVELOPMENTAL COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAM

4503 N. Dover Street, Apt. 3  
Chicago, IL 60640-5567  
[thanse1@luc.edu](mailto:thanse1@luc.edu)

Current date

Student Club Advisors;  
Faculty Members in the  
English as a Second Language Program &  
Developmental Communications Program  
Grassland Community College  
Street Address  
City, IL XXXXX

Dear Student Club Advisor or Faculty Member:

My name is Thomas L. Hansen, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education program at Loyola University Chicago. As part of the requirements for my PhD, I am conducting a study which will yield data to be included in my dissertation.

I seek your permission to enter your classroom or student club meeting to conduct a brief demographic survey on students enrolled in your course or participating in your club. The survey will be used only to ascertain student interest in, and eligibility for, participating in my research study. The interviews will not be scheduled at that time.

It will take students from 10 to 15 minutes to complete the survey. The survey will identify potential participants I will contact outside of class or the meeting later. The interviews will be conducted later, outside of class or the meeting. Completing the survey does not guarantee or require students to participate.

I must conduct the survey myself because of requirements regarding safeguards of confidentiality. I will not be contacting administrators or faculty in the Division of Adult Education because courses in that program are not within the scope of my study.

The focus of my study is on Mexican American students who grew up speaking a language other than English at home, moved to the United States at age 13 or older (sometimes called Generation 1.5 students), graduated from U.S. high schools, and then came to the community college. The purpose of the study is to learn about their experiences as they prepare for college-level work through intensive ESL or developmental communications classes.

In order to better understand the perspectives and experiences of this unique population of students I will ask 12 students to meet with me for 60 to 70-minute interviews during

the semester. The study will start as soon as all necessary approvals have been received from your institution.

Student demographics at your institution lend themselves particularly well to my study, and that is one of the main reasons I am seeking permission to conduct my study there.

Student participation in this study is completely voluntary, and students may withdraw at any time and for any reason without penalty. At the conclusion of each interview I will provide each student with a \$25 bookstore gift certificate. There are few risks to participation in this study. For example, students might become nervous after speaking about certain topics. If so, they will be referred to the counseling center at the college (Room XXX; Telephone 000-000-0000). The most likely risk for a participant would be a breach of confidentiality.

However, to protect the privacy and confidentiality of each student, I will not share the original data with anyone else, I will give each student a pseudonym in everything I write, and I will leave out any information that could identify any student, the identities of other individuals the students may mention, and the identity of your institution.

To protect the integrity of the college, a pseudonym will be assigned so that readers will not know which educational institution has served as the study site.

Please contact me at the email address above or by phone within ten days to let me know whether you will grant permission for me to proceed with my study and visit your classroom.

Thank you very much for considering this request. Please let me know whenever you have questions. You can also contact **Loyola's Compliance Manager (773-508-2689)** at any time if you have any concerns about students' participation in this study.

Sincerely,

---

Thomas L. Hansen

Researcher's contact information:

**Thomas L. Hansen, Student**

thanse1@luc.edu  
(773) 784-1101

Faculty sponsor's contact information:

**Dr. Terry E. Williams, Advisor**

twillia@luc.edu  
(312) 915-7002

APPENDIX C

DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY FOR POTENTIAL STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

*Student Survey*

---

My name is Thomas L. Hansen, and I am a doctoral student at Loyola University Chicago. As part of a study for my dissertation, I would like to talk with some of the Latino students who are taking the ESL and Developmental Communications classes I visit. **If you are a Latino(a) and grew up speaking a language other than English at home, please take a minute to complete this survey.** Please understand there is no major harm in participating and no embarrassing or threatening questions are included in the study. Please return the survey to me but keep the other pages. If you are interested in being a part of the study I will contact you again. Thank you.

---

Is English the language you usually speak at home? **Yes**\_\_\_\_\_ **No**\_\_\_\_\_

If you were **not** born in the United States, what is your home country?\_\_\_\_\_

How old were you when you moved to the U.S.? **Age**\_\_\_\_\_

When you started going to school in the U.S. what grade were you in? **Grade**\_\_\_\_\_

Did you graduate from high school in the U.S.? **Yes**\_\_\_\_\_ **No**\_\_\_\_\_

If yes, what year did you graduate? **Year**\_\_\_\_\_

If no, do you have your GED? **Yes**\_\_\_\_\_ **No**\_\_\_\_\_

Is this your first ESL or English class at this college? **Yes**\_\_\_\_\_ **No**\_\_\_\_\_

If no, how many ESL or English classes did you take before here? \_\_\_\_\_

You do not have to decide right now if you want to be in the study but is it OK if I contact you to tell you more about it? **Yes**\_\_\_\_\_ **No**\_\_\_\_\_

If yes, please complete the information below:

**Name**\_\_\_\_\_ (please print)

**Course name and number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**What is the best way to contact you?**

\_\_\_\_\_ Phone number:

\_\_\_\_\_ E-mail address:

*Cuestionario para Estudiantes*

---

**Me llamo Thomas L. Hansen, y estoy estudiando para conseguir mi doctorado de Loyola University Chicago. Para terminar mi título, tengo que escribir una tesis. Una parte de mi tesis tiene que ver con entrevistando unos estudiantes latinos que están tomando cursos de inglés segundo idioma y cursos del desarrollo de comunicaciones. Si Usted es latino o latina y no hablaba inglés en casa como niño(a), por favor llene esta forma. No hay ningún riesgo serio si termina la forma, y no hay ningún riesgo serio de participar en la entrevista. El estudio no incluye preguntas penosas. Si Usted termina la forma, favor de devolvérmela, pero guarde las otras páginas. Si Usted me avise que quiere participar en el estudio, voy a llamarle. Gracias.**

---

Habla Usted inglés en casa más que otra lengua? Sí\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_

Si Usted no nació en los EEUU, ¿en que país nació? \_\_\_\_\_

¿Cuántos años tenía al llegar a los EEUU? Edad \_\_\_\_\_

¿Entró en qué grado (nivel) en la escuela aquí? Grado \_\_\_\_\_

Terminó la escuela secundaria aquí en los EEUU? Sí\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_

¿Si? ¿En qué año? Año\_\_\_\_\_

¿No? ¿Tiene Usted la GED? Sí\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_

Es esta clase su primero curso de inglés aquí en el colegio? Sí\_\_\_\_

¿No? \_\_\_\_ Pues ¿cuántas clases de inglés o de inglés segundo idioma tomó

antes de matricularse en este colegio? \_\_\_\_\_

Usted no tiene que decidirse en este momento si quiere participar en el estudio pero está bien si yo me comunico con Usted para decirle mas del estudio? Sí\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_

**Si quiere participar, favor de llenar estos blancos:**

Nombre\_\_\_\_\_

Número y título del curso\_\_\_\_\_

¿Cómo es más fácil comunicarme contigo?

Por teléfono (número)\_\_\_\_\_

Por correo electrónico (dirección)\_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX D

SCRIPT TO BE READ TO STUDENTS AS THEY CONSIDER COMPLETING THE  
DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY FOR POTENTIAL STUDENT PARTICIPANTS



English script to be read to students:

Hello. My name is Thomas L. Hansen, and I am a doctoral student at Loyola University Chicago. I must write a dissertation in order to complete the requirements for my degree. As part of a study for my dissertation, I would like to talk with some of the Latino students who are taking the ESL and Developmental Communications classes I visit. If you are a Latino(a) and grew up speaking a language other than English at home, please take a minute to complete this survey. It is okay if you do not wish to complete the survey. This has no impact on your grade for this class. If you do complete the survey, please return it to me but keep the other pages. If you are interested in being a part of the study I will contact you again. Thank you.

Spanish script to be read to students:

Hola. Me llamo Thomas L. Hansen, y estoy estudiando para conseguir mi doctorado de Loyola University Chicago. Para terminar mi título, tengo que escribir una tesis. Una parte de mi tesis tiene que ver con entrevistando unos estudiantes latinos que están tomando cursos de inglés segundo idioma y cursos del desarrollo de comunicaciones. Si Usted es latino o latina y no hablaba inglés en casa como niño(a), por favor llene esta forma. Está bien si Usted no quiere llenar la forma. No tiene nada que ver con su nota en esta clase. Si Usted termina la forma, favor de devolvérmela, pero guarde las otras páginas. Si Usted me avise que quiere participar en el estudio, voy a llamarle. Gracias.

APPENDIX E

SUMMARY OF STUDY FOR POTENTIAL STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

SUMMARY OF STUDY FOR POTENTIAL STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

I am conducting a study on Mexican American students who grew up speaking a language other than English at home, moved to the United States at age 13 or older, have recently graduated from high school, are attending a community college, and are enrolled in intensive ESL or Developmental Communications classes. If this description fits you, I would like to learn more about how you decided to take the intensive ESL or Developmental Communications class you are in, what your experiences are like in the class, and how the class helps you to improve your English and get ready for other college classes.

The benefits to being in this study are that you will have a chance to share your thoughts and feelings about learning English, coming to college and being in college, which may also help you to better understand your own goals for school and work. Your ideas and experiences may also help me and other college faculty and staff learn how to make college better for Latino students. Also, when you complete the study I will provide you with a \$25 gift certificate to the college bookstore.

If you agree to be in the study I will ask you to: meet with me for one interview this semester to talk about your experiences. The interview will last between 60 and 70 minutes. If we need more time, I will ask if you would like to continue talking for no more than 20 additional minutes. However, you do not need to remain more than 70 minutes if you do not wish to.

I will be the only one who knows if you decide to be in this study. Anytime I use the information you give me (such as when I write anything about the study) I will give you a fake name to protect your privacy and keep your information confidential. All information about you (name, contact information, results of the interview, tapes, and notes) will be locked in a cabinet and then destroyed after two years. Also, it's OK at any time to change your mind and decide not to be in the study. If you decide you do not want to be in the study it won't affect your grade in your class or your relationship with your teacher.

The most important thing to know about this study is that there are no right or wrong answers. You are the expert because I will be asking you to tell me about your experiences. I hope that you are interested in hearing more about this study.

If you indicate you wish to participate, I will contact you to set up an interview time and date. The interview will take place in a private room provided by the college.

**Thomas Hansen**  
**thanse1@luc.edu**  
**(773) 784-1101**

## SUMARIO DEL ESTUDIO PARA LOS ESTUDIANTES PARTICIPANTES POTENCIALES

Estoy haciendo un estudio de los estudiantes mexicanos que no han hablado inglés en casa, que han llegado a los Estados Unidos a la edad de 13 años o mayores, se han graduado recientemente de high school, están asistiendo a una universidad de la comunidad (College), y están tomando cursos de ESL (inglés como segundo idioma) intensivo o uno de los cursos de desarrollo de las comunicaciones. Si esto describe a usted, yo quisiera saber más sobre cómo usted decidió tomar la clase de ESL intensivo o de desarrollo de las comunicaciones que usted está tomando, cuáles son sus experiencias en la clase, cómo la clase le está ayudando a mejorar su inglés y como la clase le está preparando para tomar otros cursos en la universidad (College).

Las ventajas de tomar parte en este estudio son que usted tendrá la oportunidad de compartir sus experiencias y sentimientos de su aprendizaje de inglés, al venir a la universidad y al estar en la universidad, le puede también ayudar a entender mejor sus propias metas de la escuela y trabajo. Sus ideas y experiencias pueden también ayudarme y ayudar a los profesores y empleados como mejorar los servicios del Colegio para estudiantes latinos. También, cuando usted termine el estudio le daré un cupón (vale) de \$25 para ser usado en la librería de la universidad.

Si usted acepta ser parte de este estudio le pediré conversar conmigo en una entrevista de entre 60 y 70 minutos. Si necesitamos mas tiempo para terminar la entrevista, le pediré que siga hablando conmigo, pero por no más de 20 minutos adicionales. Pero no necesita quedarse mas de 70 minutos si no lo quiere.

Yo seré la única persona quién sabrá si decide estar en este estudio. Cada vez que utilice la información que usted me de (por ejemplo cuando escriba cualquier cosa sobre el estudio) le daré un nombre falso para proteger su privacidad y para mantener su información confidencial. Todos los datos y las materias pondré en un escritorio guardado con llave por dos años. Después de dos años, lo destruiré todo. También, es ACEPTABLE en cualquier momento cambiar su decisión y decidir ya no ser parte del estudio. Si usted toma la decisión de ya no ser parte del estudio, esto no afectará su calificación en su clase ni su relación con su profesor.

La cosa más importante que debe saber sobre este estudio es que no hay respuestas ni correctas ni incorrectas. Usted es el experto porque le pediré que usted me platique sobre sus experiencias. Espero que usted esté interesado en oír más sobre este estudio.

Si Usted me avise que quiere participar en el estudio, le llamo para planear la fecha y la hora de la entrevista. La entrevista tendrá lugar en un cuarto del colegio.

**Thomas Hansen**  
**thanse1@luc.edu**  
**(773) 784-1101**

APPENDIX F  
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

*CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH*

**(This form is to be signed immediately before the interview.)**

**Project Title:** Immigrant Stories: Generation 1.5 Latino Mexican American Students and English Language Learning in an Illinois Community College

**Researcher(s):** Thomas Hansen

**Faculty Sponsor:** Terry Williams, Ph.D.

**Introduction:**

You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Thomas Hansen for a dissertation under the supervision of Terry Williams, Ph.D. in the Higher Education program at Loyola University of Chicago.

You are being asked to participate because you have indicated you are a member of the specific group being studied in this project: Mexican American students who grew up speaking a language other than English at home, moved to the United States at age 13 or older (sometimes called Generation 1.5 students), have recently graduated from high school, are attending a community college, and are enrolled in intensive ESL or Developmental Communications 082, 084, 086 or 088 classes. The study aims to include 12 students from your institution.

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to participate in the study.

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this study is to find out more about the experiences of Mexican American students who grew up speaking a language other than English at home, moved to the United States at age 13 or older (sometimes called Generation 1.5 students), have recently graduated from high school, are attending a community college, and are enrolled in intensive ESL or Developmental Communications classes. The study looks at adjustments to U.S. culture, to the community college, and to the English language-learning process.

**Procedures:**

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to participate in an interview, answering questions about your experiences and adjustments to U.S. culture, to the community college, and to the English language-learning process. The interview will last from 60 to 70 minutes and will take place in a private meeting room or classroom on campus at your institution. I may ask you to stay longer, for a maximum of 20 additional minutes, to discuss your experiences more and answer additional questions. However, you do NOT need to stay longer than 70 minutes if you do not wish to. The interview will be audiotaped.

**Risks/Benefits:**

There are not many risks to being in this study, but there are a few. For example, you might become nervous after speaking about certain topics. If so, you will be referred to the counseling center at the college (000-000-0000). The most likely risk would be someone overhearing you tell another person you agreed to be in the study. However, I will not use your real name or the real name of your college when I write the dissertation.

There are no direct benefits to you from participation, but your story could help college instructors and administrators better understand how individuals adjust to changes, such as adjusting to U.S. culture, the community college, and the English language-learning process.

**Compensation:**

At the end of the interview, you will receive a \$25 gift certificate good for use at the bookstore of your college.

**Confidentiality:**

To protect your privacy and confidentiality, I will take these steps:

- I will not share the original data with anyone else (other than my professor and the person who will transcribe the tapes),
- I will give you a fake name in everything I write,
- I will leave out any information that could identify you,
- I will use a fake name for the institution you attend,
- I will keep the tapes, your name and contact information, and any other related information secured for two years; and
- I will destroy the tapes and all information after two years.

**Voluntary Participation:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to be in this study, you do not have to participate. Even if you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty. If you decide you do not want to be in the study it won't affect your grade in your class or your relationship with your teacher.

**Contacts and Questions:**

If you have questions about this research study, please feel free to contact me, Thomas Hansen, at 773-784-1101 or [thanse1@luc.edu](mailto:thanse1@luc.edu) or Terry Williams, Ph.D., the faculty sponsor, at 312-915-7002 or [twillia@luc.edu](mailto:twillia@luc.edu) for more information. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Compliance Manager in Loyola's Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

**Statement of Consent:**

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understood the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in this research study. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

---

**Participant's Signature**


---

**Date**


---

**Researcher's Signature**


---

**Date**

***CONSENTIMIENTO PARA SER PARTICIPANTE EN UN ESTUDIO***

**(Esta forma debe firmarse inmediatamente antes de la entrevista.)**

Nombre del proyecto: **Cuentas de Inmigrantes: Los Estudiantes Mexicanos de la Generación 1.5 en un Community College de Illinois**

**El investigador:** Thomas Hansen

**El profesor patrón del proyecto:** Terry Williams, Ph.D.

**Introducción:**

Le pido a usted que sea parte de mi proyecto (Thomas Hansen). Los resultados del proyecto pondré en una tesis para conseguir mi doctorado. El profesor Terry Williams, Ph.D., es el patrón del proyecto en el programa Higher Education, Loyola University of Chicago.

Le pido a usted que sea parte del proyecto porque ya indicó que es miembro del grupo de personas con quienes quiero comunicarme: estudiantes mexicanos que no han hablado inglés en casa, que han llegado a los Estados Unidos a la edad de 13 años o mayores (a veces llamados estudiantes de la Generación 1.5), se han graduado recientemente de high school, están asistiendo a una universidad de la comunidad (College), y están tomando cursos de ESL (inglés como segundo idioma) intensivo o uno de los cursos de desarrollo de las comunicaciones. Planeo incluir 12 participantes en en estudio.

**El propósito del estudio:**

El propósito del estudio es aprender algo sobre las experiencias de estudiantes mexicanos que no han hablado inglés en casa, que han llegado a los Estados Unidos a la edad de 13 años o mayores (a veces llamados estudiantes de la Generación 1.5), se han graduado recientemente de high school, están asistiendo a una universidad de la comunidad (College), y están tomando cursos de ESL (inglés como segundo idioma) intensivo o uno de los cursos de desarrollo de las comunicaciones 082, 084, 086 o 088. Usted puede ayudar en el estudio, dando ejemplos de sus experiencias aquí, así como usted se prepara para tomar clases a nivel universitario a través de su ESL (inglés como segundo idioma) o clase de desarrollo de las comunicaciones.



**Proceso:**

Para conocerle mejor y entender sus experiencias en sus clases de inglés este semestre le pediré que usted haga lo siguiente: conversar conmigo en una entrevista de entre 60 y 70 minutos. Si necesitamos más tiempo para terminar la entrevista, le pediré que siga hablando conmigo, pero por no más de 20 minutos adicionales. Sin embargo, Usted no necesita quedarse más de 70 minutos si no quiere. El estudio consta en su participación durante la entrevista. Planeo hacer una banda de la entrevista.

**Riesgos/Beneficios:**

No hay grandes riesgos de ser parte del proyecto, pero sí hay algunos. Por ejemplo, Usted podría sentir un poco nervioso después de haber hablar de algunos temas. Si esto le pasa, le recomendaré que llame al centro de consejeros (000-000-0000). El riesgo más probable sería que alguien escucha que usted dice que quiere ser parte del proyecto, pero no voy a usar su nombre verdadero, ni el nombre verdadero de su colegio, al escribir la tesis.

No hay ningún beneficio inmediato del proyecto, pero su amable participación podría ayudarles a los profesores en colegios y en universidades a saber como los individuos pueden adaptarse a la cultura estadounidense, a la cultura de los community colleges, y al proceso de aprender inglés.

**Recompensa:**

Al final de la entrevista, le daré un certificado para la librería del colegio que vale de \$25.

**Confidencialidad:**

Para proteger su privacidad y confidencialidad,

- Yo no compartiré los datos originales con otra persona (fuera de mi profesor y la persona que transcribirá las bandas),
- Yo le daré un nombre falso en todo que escriba,
- Yo quitaré cualquier información que podría identificarle,
- Yo usaré un nombre falso para su colegio,
- Yo guardaré las bandas de la entrevista, datos sobre Usted (como su telefono o email, por ejemplo, y toda otra información sobre Usted) por dos años, y
- Yo destruiré las bandas y los datos personales después de dos años.

**Participación voluntaria:**

Su participación en este estudio es totalmente voluntaria y no tendrá ningún impacto en su calificación de la clase de inglés. Usted es libre si decide no continuar en cualquier momento y por cualquier razón. También, es aceptable en cualquier momento cambiar su decisión y decidir ya no ser parte del estudio. Si usted toma la decisión de ya no ser parte del estudio, esto no afectará su calificación en su clase ni su relación con su profesor.

**Contactos y preguntas:**

Cuando usted tenga preguntas sobre el estudio, favor de comunicarse conmigo, Thomas Hansen, a 773-784-1101 o thanse1@luc.edu o con Terry Williams, Ph.D., el profesor patrón del proyecto, a 312-915-7002 o twillia@luc.edu para mas informacion.

Cuando usted tenga preguntas sobre sus derechos como participante en el estudio, favor de comunicarse con el **Jefe de conformidad de Loyola (773-508-2689)**.

**Consentimiento:**

Su firma en esta forma indica que usted está de acuerdo en participar en este estudio, que ha leído todos los datos importantes arriba, y que ha tenido la oportunidad de decirme cualquier pregunta que tenía sobre el estudio. Usted recibirá una copia de esta forma.

---

**Firma del Participante**

---

**Fecha**

---

**Firma del Investigador**

---

**Fecha**

APPENDIX G  
STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

*Student Interview Protocol*

(Questions on Students' Characteristics, Courses, and Progress Underlined)

**Questions Related to U.S. Culture**

- Confirm following questions from survey: Where are you from originally (your home country)? Is this where you moved from when you came to the United States? When did you move to the United States? How old were you? What grade were you in? How long have you lived here and how old are you now?
- How far did you go in school in your native country?
- Did you live in a city or in the country? Do you live in a city or in the country now in the U.S.?
- Please tell me about differences and similarities you notice about people in your native country and people in the U.S.?
- What grade did you start at in your U.S. school? When did you start learning English? How much English did you know before you came to the U.S. (speaking, reading, writing)?
- To what extent do you speak Spanish or English at home, with friends, at work?
- Please tell me about your U.S. high school experience. Did you take ESL or bilingual education or similar classes? Did other students help you? Did you feel like you were able to keep up with other academic (content) classes?
- What year did you graduate from your U.S. high school here?
- Please tell me about differences and similarities you notice about high schools in your native country and people in the U.S.
- Please tell me about your family. Are your parents supportive of you coming to college? In what ways? What obligations do you have outside of school, at home or at work?
- (Explore sample anxiety questions or stigma questions if students raise comments in these areas.)

**Questions Related to the Community College Experience**

- What year did you begin college?
- Can you tell me how you ended up taking your Developmental Communications or Intensive ESL class? Did you take the Accuplacer Test? What score did you get? Did anyone explain your test results to you or advise you? Did you feel like you had a choice of what course to take? How did you know what to do?
- Which class are you taking now? What grade are you getting?
- Please tell me about your feelings about being in the class you are in.
- Are you taking any other classes other than your Developmental Communications or Intensive ESL class?
- Are you full-time or part-time?
- What is your educational goal (or major?)
- Please tell me about your friendships with other students in the class.

- Tell me how your class is going. What do you like or dislike?
- Tell me how you feel about your teacher. In what ways is your teacher helpful or unhelpful to you? What do you like or dislike about how s/he teaches the class?
- Tell me about the overall feeling of the class?
- Tell me how you fit into the class. How do you think you're doing?
- How is the class helping you to improve your English skills? What's been most helpful? Least helpful? Is there more emphasis on grammar or content? Do you get to revise your work? Does that help you?
- Please tell me how college is fitting in to your life – parents, family, work, friends?
- Is this what you thought college would be like? How is it similar or different?
- What advice would you give to another Latino student who is new to the college and still working on improving his or her English?
- Why would you recommend the class you are taking or a different one? Why should students have a choice—or not have a choice—of what class they can take or should students who are not native speakers? What changes would you make in the placement process?
- (Explore sample anxiety questions or stigma questions if students raise comments in these areas.)

**Follow-up Questions Related to Any Nervousness, Fright, Fear, Danger, Confusion, Apprehension or Anxiety Mentioned in Conversation**

- Please tell me how you felt.
- Explain why you felt that way.
- How bad did you feel? On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being not happy and 10 being terrible?
- What did the bad situation or event make you think of?
- Explain what you wanted to do—examples:
  - leave the classroom
  - tell the teacher about it
  - tell a priest or counselor
  - drop the course.
- What would have made the experience better for you?
- Did you tell other people? Friends? Family? How did they help you?
- What advice would you give to your teacher so that other students can avoid having these things happen? So that other students can avoid having those feelings?
- Do you plan to continue at this college even if you felt nervous in this class? Why or why not?

**Follow-up Questions Related to Any Embarrassment, Stigma, Feelings of Loss, Feelings of Depression or Negative Judgments by Others Mentioned in Conversation**

- Please tell me how you felt.
- Explain why you felt that way.
- How bad did you feel? On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being not happy and 10 being terrible?
- What did the bad situation or event make you think of?
- Explain what you wanted to do—examples:
  - leave the classroom
  - tell the teacher about it
  - tell a priest or counselor
  - drop the course.
- What would have made the experience better for you?
- Did you tell other people? Friends? Family? How did they help you?
- What advice would you give to your teacher so that other students can avoid having these things happen? So that other students can avoid having those feelings?
- Do you plan to continue at this college even if you felt nervous in this class? Why or why not?

APPENDIX H  
CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT FOR TRANSCRIBERS

TRANSCRIBER CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to transcribe the interviews for the doctoral  
(Insert Printed Name)

research of Thomas Hansen entitled “Immigrant Stories: Generation 1.5 Mexican American Students and English Language Learning in an Illinois Community College.” I will maintain strict confidentiality of the data files and transcripts. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- I will not discuss them with anyone but the researcher.
- I will not share copies with anyone except the researcher.
- I agree to turn over all copies of the transcripts to the researcher at conclusion of the contract.
- I will destroy the audio files I receive upon conclusion of the contract.

I have read and understood the information provided above.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Transcriber’s Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Researcher’s Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**



**TABLE 1: STUDENT GENERATION 1.5 CHARACTERISTICS**

**Table 1: Student Generation 1.5 Characteristics (including as much information as could be gleaned from each interview)**

Student Name & Number of Intvw.	Main Home Lang	Age of Arriv.	Grade started In U.S. school	ESL and/or Bilingual Ed. and/or English Classes in U.S. High School	Year of U. S. High School Grad.	Prior ESL and/or Bilingual Ed. and/or English Classes in U.S. Comm. College	Current ESL and/or Bilingual Ed. and/or English Classes in U.S. Comm. College	Age at Time of Intvw.
<b>ESL</b>								
Antonio 1	Spanish	13	9	3 years of H.S. ESL	2008	Yes, but No Data*	ESL 090 Writing & ESL 094 Reading	20
Beto 2	Spanish	13	8	Yes, but No Data*	2008	No	ESL Reading?	19
Julia 5 (MC)	Spanish & English	28	GED program	GED ESL courses	GED, but no year stated.	No Data*	ESL 098 & ESL Speech class	37
Socorro 6	English & Spanish	15	9?	2 years of H.S. ESL & 3 years of “regular” English, ESL II overlapping with English I	No Data*	No	English 101: “Writing concentration for non-native speakers”	19?
Verónica 8	Spanish	12	9	4 years of H.S. ESL	No Data*	No	ESL Reading & ESL Writing	18
Yolanda 10	Spanish	14	8	3 years of H.S. ESL	No Data*	Yes, 3 ESL classes	ESL Reading & ESL Writing	19?
Zeferino 11	Spanish	14	9	4 years of H.S. ESL	No Data*	No	ESL Grammar, ESL Reading & ESL Writing	19
<b>Develop. Comms.</b>								
César 3	Spanish	16	9	4 years of H.S. ESL	2007	Yes, but No Data*	Develop. Comm. 094 Reading	21?
David 4	Spanish	13	9	2 years of H.S. ESL	No Data*	Yes, 3 ESL classes	Develop. Comm. 090 Writing	18
Timoteo 7	Spanish & English	14	9	3 years of H.S. ESL	No Data*	No	Develop. Comm. 094 Reading & “regular” English 101 Writing	18
<b>English</b>								
Xavier 9	Spanish	11	5	4 years of elem. Schl. ESL & 1.5 years of H.S. ESL	2008	Yes, “regular” English 101 & 102 Writing	“Regular” speech class	19

**TABLE 2: THEMES AND UNEXPECTED INFORMATION**

**Table 2: Themes and Unexpected Information (revealed from reviewing and coding the results of each interview)**

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Major Theme(s)</b>	<b>Minor Theme(s)</b>	<b>Unexpected Information</b>
1) Immigrant students' adjustments to U.S. culture in general	<p>“Euphoria” students felt about being here and taking advantage of the opportunities;                      Achievements of students;                      Differences in concepts of time between Mexico and the US;                      Great diversity of people here in the US as opposed to Mexico;                      Great difference in foods in the US as opposed to Mexico.</p>	<p>Adjustments to living in the US not being worth it;                      The perception on the part of the subjects that Americans feel the Mexicans are here to take away their jobs.</p>	
2) Immigrant students' adjustments to the culture of the community college classroom and corridor	<p>“Euphoria” about the teachers, curriculum, resources, ESL classes, and college experience in general;                      Students' sharp awareness of the assignments and requirements in their ESL and developmental communications courses;                      Lack of euphoria for the math class in which several students were enrolled;                      Lack of excitement about the schools back in Mexico and the quality of English instruction;                      Cooperation and assistance from students to help the researcher complete the study;                      Camaraderie of the students identifying with the researcher as a</p>	<p>Student concern for the researcher not finding enough students for the study;                      “Helping” emerging as one of the students especially wanted to be interviewed to help her community and to help others understand that community.</p>	<p>Role of “counselor” that emerged for the researcher, especially for one student transferring to a four-year institution for the spring 2010 semester;</p>

No Data\* = In some cases, students did not answer this question directly or the topic was not raised because other topics seemed to be more important to pursue at the time. In still other cases, the response was inaudible.

MC = One student from Metro College, with different courses and numbers.

	fellow student.		
3) Any feelings of anxiety encountered by immigrant students in the English language-learning process	Anxiety exhibited by students in the reading class who were being ridiculed by the teacher.		Anxiety felt by students and difficulty coping with the instructor in the math class; Anxiety and pain of leaving home and coming to the US; Anxiety related to the trauma of crossing the desert without papers to arrive in the US; Anxiety perhaps felt by some students who became reluctant to be interviewed despite having filled out a survey indicating their interest and willingness to participate.
4) Any feelings of stigma encountered by immigrant students in the English language-learning process		Being placed into ESL classes when students are perceived by another student as being too advanced in their English language skills, not needing the lower course, instead being ready for regular English; Feelings of discrimination—especially by American-born Latinos who refuse to understand the students' Spanish and help them in stores; Perception that Americans feel Mexicans come here to take away all the jobs.	

No Data\* = In some cases, students did not answer this question directly or the topic was not raised because other topics seemed to be more important to pursue at the time. In still other cases, the response was inaudible.  
MC = One student from Metro College, with different courses and numbers.

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## VITA

Thomas L. Hansen was born and raised in Rockford, Illinois, and attended both Rock Valley College and the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he received a BA in French Language & Literature in 1979. Before attending Loyola University Chicago, he received an MA in English Linguistics with focus on the Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) from Northern Illinois University in 1983. He also attended several other Midwestern universities as a part-time student, taking courses in psychology, sociology, education, and foreign languages.

Mr. Hansen has taught at the community college and university levels, including courses in English, foreign language, and related fields. From 1992 to 1998, he was a full-time staff member at the Illinois State Board of Education, serving as the State Supervisor for Foreign Languages. In that position, he led the statewide team that wrote the Foreign Language Goals for the Illinois Learning Standards, the curricular guidelines for K-12 schools in the state. After that, he has served in consulting, grant-writing, and administrative roles for various colleges and universities.

In 1996, he received the Illinois Lieutenant Governor's Award for Contributions to Language Learning, was inducted into Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society in 2004, and received two graduate scholarship awards from Loyola University Chicago in 2008 and 2009. He has had over 80 essays, articles, and book reviews published, most on topics related to education. He speaks six languages.

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The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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