Defying the Statistics: Latinx Students' Journeys from ESL to the Honors College at the Community College

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DEFYING THE STATISTICS: LATINX STUDENTS’ JOURNEYS FROM ESL TO THE HONORS COLLEGE AT THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

By

Juan Carlos Morales

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty of the University of Miami in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

Coral Gables, Florida

May 2018
UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

DEFYING THE STATISTICS: LATINX STUDENTS’ JOURNEYS FROM ESL TO
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Defying the Statistics: Latinx Students’ Journeys from ESL to the Honors College at the Community College

Abstract of a dissertation at the University of Miami

A dissertation supervised by Dr. Debbiesiu L. Lee and Dr. Carol-Anne Phekoo.
No. of pages in text (183)

This qualitative study explored the factors that contributed to community colleges students’ successful completion of the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program for English Language Learners (ELLs) and entrance into the Honors College at Miami Dade College. The purpose of this study was to develop a mid-level theory about the factors and processes that facilitate this success for these students. A phenomenological and grounded theory approach and analysis was used to discover the lived experiences of these students and to construct a mid-level theory that helps capture their experiences. The study was conducted at a mid-size campus of a large, Hispanic-serving mostly two-year institution (HSI) located in Southeastern Florida. Data was gathered from students using a one-on-one, semi-structured interview format designed to identify the factors that contributed to participants’ journeys from the EAP program to the Honors College. The major themes and processes that led to the students’ journey are explicated from their interview data. Implications of the study including findings for community college administrators, Honors College administrators, faculty and support services are discussed.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Geraldine M. Morales, who has been my greatest cheerleader in my every endeavor. I am also deeply grateful to my father, Carlos Morales Carazo, for challenging and inspiring me to fulfill his dream for me to one day complete a doctorate. Mamá y papá, thank you for everything I know. To Ernesto, Bianca, Bianca Sophia, Benet, and Kai, thank you for being a source of laughter, hugs, and enormous affection. To Renaldo T. Smith, you remind me what it was like at the top of the world.

My University of Miami family has also been a great source of support. To my Chairperson, Dr. Debbiesiu Lee, thank you for your unparalleled positivity and guidance, and for your ability to inspire and encourage. To Dr. Carol-Anne Phekoo, my gratitude for your belief in my work in this program and for pushing us in just the right way. To Dr. Soyeon Ahn, thank you for being a fantastic professor who helped me grasp the language of research. To Dr. Melissa Baralt, my gratitude for your willingness to be part of this team and for your support. To Seanteé Campbell and Melody Dunbar, little did we know three years ago that we would become each other’s buttresses. The time spent with you getting ready for comps and working on this dissertation gave meaning to this experience, and I can't imagine having gone through it without you.

Finally, I would like to thank Miami Dade College, and especially my team of Heidi Calderon, Karen Chavez, and Niurka Leon, for their constant support. To the students who participated in this study, I am grateful for your willingness to share your experiences openly and without fear of judgment. I hope that this work shines a light on your voices, and that it will lead to positive change for others like you.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

The leaking pipeline - a metaphor suggested by Hernandez and Lopez (2004) to describe the challenges in retaining Latinx college students in higher education - has been a key to understanding the challenges faced by Latinx students as they embark on their journey to and through higher education in the United States. The Pew Center reports that in 2014, 35% of Latinx students between the ages of 18-24 were enrolled in a two or four year-college, representing an increase of 13% in just ten years and showing greater growth than any other ethnic minority groups in the United States (Krogstad, 2016). At the same time, Latinx four-year degree attainment lags in comparison to other groups. This lag is most likely due to the propensity of Latinx students for enrolling in public two-year institutions, wherein they represent the highest share of any ethnicity (Krogstad, 2016). In other words, while increasing numbers of Latinx students are entering higher education, the majority are still having a difficult time finding their way to successful completion.

Problem Statement

For many Latinx English language learners (ELLs), the community college, with its open admissions policies and affordable tuition, is the most attractive place to begin the journey to higher education in the United States. Completion rates for students who begin as ELLs, however, are nothing short of dismal (Belcher, 1988). Belcher (1988) found that the graduation rate of ELLs at Miami Dade Community College, the former name of the institution that is the focus of this study and one which also serves one of the largest populations of ELLs in the country, was 3% as compared to 20% for the college as a whole. Belcher (1988) also found that there is a correlation between the course
level of English at which students begin and their rate of completion, with lower levels leading to lower completion rates. As Almon (2012) explains, few studies have investigated ELL student success in academic ESL (English as a Second Language) and content courses. However, research by Patthey-Chavez, Dillon and Thomas-Spiegel (2005) has shown that students who began their studies in remedial courses had the most difficult time meeting their goals. While ESL students are not remedial students, they share the commonality that both are delayed in their ability to take credit-bearing courses that lead to a credential. Undoubtedly, having to take foundational ESL courses makes the college experience more challenging by extending the length of study for the ELL student. This impacts their time commitment to completing a credential, as well as their access to financial aid, as a degree can rarely be completed within two years when additional coursework is necessary. As a result, many students, despite an earnest desire to earn a credential and continue onto credit-bearing courses that lead to a certificate or a degree, find themselves having to leave their studies behind as they respond to the pressures of family, work, and finances.

For a student who begins his or her language study while at Miami Dade College, the research site for this study, the minimum amount of time to complete the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program for a complete beginner who starts at level one is four semesters, but only if the student applies and is selected for an accelerated course of study. The majority of students would have to take courses for a minimum of six semesters (or two full years including fall, summer, and spring semesters), assuming they are enrolled as full-time students and successfully pass all their classes. For many students who do not have financial aid available once they reach the summer semester,
the amount of time in the program can therefore become even longer. Moreover, even in the best-case scenario, at the end of those six semesters, these students will have earned between zero to a maximum of four credit-bearing courses outside of their level 5 and 6 EAP classes, which count to meet elective requirements. This means that even after completing the EAP program, their path to an A.S. or A.A. degree starts them almost back at the beginning.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study seeks to help community colleges better support EAP students as they begin their journey in higher education by asking some key questions. First, how do some EAP students successfully persist to not only complete their EAP courses, but also gain admission to the most selective program in the community college, the Honors College? Additionally, what can we learn from these students’ stories that will allow us to better understand how we can improve the retention of EAP students at community colleges leading to completion? The answers to these questions are important for college administrators and even for EAP students themselves, yet the research available that guides our understanding in these areas is largely nonexistent.

Until now, research on ELLs at the community college focused on students’ experiences within the ESL program itself and is minimal at best. This study combines both a phenomenological approach to understanding students’ lived experiences as well as a grounded theory methodology to build a mid-level theory to explain their educational journey. Using a phenomenological perspective, this study looks to highlight the voices of successful EAP students as they navigate through the EAP program and the Honors College. Aligning with grounded theory, this study’s aim is also to move from categories
and resulting themes generated based on students’ responses “into the realm of [an] explanatory theoretical framework, thereby providing an abstract, conceptual understanding of the studied phenomenon” (Lewis-Beck, Bryman, & Liao, 2003, p. 441). Thus, a qualitative approach that emphasizes the “collection, analysis, and interpretation of comprehensive narrative data to gain insights into [this] particular phenomenon” best matches the goals of the current research (Mills & Gay, 2015, p. 7). As Mills and Gay (2015) explain, a qualitative approach allows the researcher to not “readily accept the view of a stable, coherent, and uniform world” because meaning “is situated in a particular perspective or context” (p. 7). The ability to “interact extensively and intimately with participants during the study, using time-intensive data collection methods such as interviews” was especially attractive considering the lack of research that has been done with this specific group of students (Mills & Gay, 2015, p. 7).

In addition to the qualitative nature of this study, this study also embraces the concept of counter-storytelling as a means of completing the picture that the research literature has painted up to now. In the research that recounts the experiences of Latinx students in the American Higher Education pipeline, a great amount of focus has been paid to a deficit model of understanding, one that focuses on what Latinx students lack or have difficulty gaining access to explain minoritized students’ inability to match non-minoritized students’ educational attainment. (This work refers to these students as minoritized, as Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye (2016) suggest, because this wording “makes clear that dominant groups enforce minority status on non-dominant groups, thereby acknowledging issues of privilege, race, status, and class” (p. 20).) Not only does this paint a picture that focuses squarely on failure, it also creates a space for only one
story, one that mirrors the statistics that have led to the metaphor of the leaking pipeline. The anti-deficit framework that guides this study, on the other hand, seeks to expand our understanding of Latinx students not through the lens of the non-minoritized student, but rather through the lens of an expanding understanding that different students bring with them different abilities, talents, and skills, some of which may be deemed “of value” by the majority culture. As Tullis (2014) suggests, “Instead of focusing on blaming students for what they have not been given, shouldn't we be helping them explore what they bring with them from their culture and their upbringing?” This study seeks to move beyond the deficit model of understanding to a research model that focuses on students who construct their own successes so that we can better learn how to pave the road to success for others who may follow in their footsteps.

This study focuses on a population in the city of Miami at Miami Dade College, an institution whose EAP students are mostly immigrants and who most often come to the United States without having to face the additional challenge of being undocumented. Because this study’s focus is on a population that resides in Miami, a city where two-thirds of all Cuban-Americans in the United States live, it highlights the voices of students who belong to the fourth largest group of Latinxs in the U.S., cited as representing 3.7% of the total Latinx population in this country (Motel & Patten, 2012). It is worth noting that 68% of Cuban-Americans hold U.S. citizenship and boast the highest educational achievement among Latinxs (Núñez, Hoover, Pickett, Stuart-Carruthers, & Vazquez, 2013). Unlike the rest of the United States, where two-thirds of Latinxs are from Mexican backgrounds and about one fifth are from Puerto Rico (Saenz, 2010), by including the voices of students from other parts of the Caribbean and South America as
well, the diverse stories from this study expand the range of nationalities and migration stories that have previously been the focus of the limited studies on ELLs in this country.

**Theoretical and Empirical Literature**

There is minimal existing empirical literature that focuses on Latinx EAP completers as they transition into their next program of study at the community college, with Almon (2015) and Chavez (2015) focusing on non-traditional EAP students’ college experiences, while Kanno and Cromley (2013, 2015) used longitudinal data to trace ELLs’ access to, attainment at, and pathways to four-year colleges. No research to date has been published examining the journey from EAP to the Honors College at a community college. The literature that may lend some insight into the experiences of these students includes research on Latinx college student experiences and enrollment patterns, Latinx student success, and expanding access to the Honors College for non-traditional students.

Research shows that Latinx college students are more likely to be first-generation students, tend to have lower educational aspirations than other ethnicities, lower high school academic achievement, and have the lowest expectations for degree attainment, despite the great value that is placed on education by their parents (Park & Hossler, 2015). Because they face a wide degree of challenges when they begin their studies, these students often naturally turn to community colleges, institutions that are in general considered to be low-cost, less-selective, and are located near their homes. Many of these community colleges are HSIs (Hispanic-Serving Institutions), which have open
admissions policies, are public institutions, and are located in communities with large Latinx populations (Park & Hossler, 2015), all of which contribute to Latinx’s disproportionate enrollment in two-year colleges.

While these institutions continue to attract more Latinx students, retaining them continues to be a challenge. Crisp and Mina (2012) explain that community colleges’ inability to raise admission standards to influence retention, their limited opportunities for student engagement in comparison to four-year institutions, the wide amount of variance in goals for attending college among their students, and continuing challenges regarding financial resources all contribute to the inability of community colleges to move the needle on their retention statistics. Research by Almon (2012) on ELLs at one institution found that while students performed well academically as measured by their GPAs, they did not complete ESL or academic programs at a high rate. In fact, the graduation rate for this group of students was 10% lower than that of the whole community college. Almon cites her own 2010 research in suggesting that outside factors, including lack of financial resources, full-time employment, and family obligations, are often the deciding factors that lead to the abandonment of the pursuit of a college credential.

Despite these challenges, however, there are students who are successfully navigating the journey to degree attainment in college, and many are doing so at the highest levels of academic success. It is important to remember the great value that an education holds for many of these students. While not specific to the community college experience, Hernandez and Lopez’s (2004) study on Latinx college students explains that for many students dropping out is not an option, as they are acting on a sense of responsibility and a belief that they “owed a debt” to their parents, with some even
deeming their completion of a degree as their “contribution” to their family. The researchers go on to explain additional conditions for success, such as self-concept, involvement of the family, campus climate, and on-campus involvement. Further work by Crisp, Taggart, and Nora’s (2014) meta-analysis of the existing literature on factors that contribute to Latinx college students success focuses on seven key factors, including (a) sociocultural characteristics; (b) academic self-confidence; (c) beliefs, ethnic/racial identity, and coping styles; (d) precollege academic experiences; (e) college experiences; (f) internal motivation and commitment; (g) interactions with supportive individuals; (h) perceptions of the campus climate/environment; and (i) institutional type/characteristics. These studies clearly point to the need to address more of these questions regarding Latinx student success through a qualitative lens, one that allows the students’ voice to narrate their lived college experiences.

Researchers like Almon (2012, 2015) and Chavez (2015) have heeded this call. Almon’s 2012 study on ELL retention at the community college led her to identify demographic characteristics that are likely to contribute to student success (e.g., female, traditionally aged, full-time students). Almon’s 2015 study on the persistence and engagement of mature ELL’s created a space for student voices to identify obstacles and the means to overcome them, such as academic support, personal motivation, and perseverance in learning a new language. Chavez’s (2015) study on the community college experiences of non-traditional ELL women identified themes that allowed the participants to make positive transitions to the world of higher education. These include notions of self-initiative and resilience which led them to persevere in their attainment of educational goals, despite their own challenges with language and acclimation to the
educational structure of the college. While many of them cited a sense of support from their families, parents and relatives were often unable to provide valuable knowledge for the transition to college. A key to their success was the idea of mentorship through tutors, instructors or classmates who could provide a support network.

The lack of research on the transition of EAP students to a subsequent program of study has led to a great gap in our understanding of these students’ experiences. Trucker’s (2014) study on honors and the completion agenda is one of the few works of research that takes a success-based approach to understanding the trajectory for non-traditional students, in this case those White and African-American students in an urban community college in Maryland who travel from developmental (remedial) education to the honors program. As he explains, students in honors programs “have perks such as smaller classes, excellent faculty, additional advisement, transfer visits, conference opportunities, social events, a designated study space, in addition to the intangible benefits of joining a group of motivated peers” (Trucker, 2014, p. 77). Because the Honors College boasts some of the greatest results in retention, completion, and transfer, Trucker (2014) explores how more students can be afforded the opportunity to become part of the program.

There may be little similarity between the students in Trucker’s 2014 study and those who are the focus of the present study at first glance, yet both studies consider the role of the two-year honors college as a possible agent of change. Both studies contend that honors programs have the power to place students on a trajectory of impressive academic results in comparison to that of the traditional two-year college, as honors programs retain students in much higher numbers than do remedial and EAP programs
and support them toward completion and eventual transfer to a four-year institution. By honoring the wealth of attributes, talent, and potential that second language learners bring to our institutions, this study, like Trucker’s, expands the notion of who has and should have access to the Honors College, as well as what the Honors College is and can do, especially in the context of a Hispanic-serving institution.

Conceptual Framework

A tension exists within these studies that pertains to the framing of the ELL experience. Is being an ELL a deficit because students’ primary language does not match the language of the academy or is it an advantage because of the students’ capacity to bring extensive cultural and linguistic knowledge to the academy and contribute to its richness? In considering the theoretical framework for this study, it is important to understand the concept of culture as capital, as first proposed by Bourdieu (1977) and later challenged and redefined by Yosso (2005), to discuss social and racial inequity in education. Bourdieu referred to cultural capital as an accumulation of cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities possessed and inherited by privileged groups in society. Bourdieu further asserted that the acquisition of cultural capital (education, language), social capital (social networks, connections), and economic capital (money, other material possessions) could be acquired either via one’s family or by formal schooling (Yosso, 2005).

Using Critical Race Theory, Yosso (2005) challenged the “narrow range of assets and characteristics” (p. 77) of Bourdieu’s capital theory by asking whose culture has been deemed to have capital to begin with. In her work, Yosso argues against research that views Communities of Color as deprived. She contends that the deficit thinking that is
prevalent in much of education leads to faulting minoritized students and their families for students’ not having normative culture and skills and their parents for not valuing or supporting their child’s education (Yosso, 2005). She further expands the notion of capital by identifying additional forms of capital that are part of Communities of Color, including aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial and resistant capital, all of which build on one another in what she deems a Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) framework. Because this research looks at ELLs as being part of such a community, it hopes to better understand how the self-described experiences of these students may align with and possibly expand the notions of cultural wealth as proposed by Yosso in her research.

In 2010, Harper created his Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework for Research on Students of Color in STEM, a framework that took existing areas of theory such as cultural capital and social capital theory, stereotype threat theory, attribution theory, campus ecology theories, self-efficacy theory, theories on college student retention, possible selves theory and Critical Race Theory and put these “popular theories” to use “in uncommon ways to advance the study of minority student achievement,” in this case in STEM (Harper, 2010, p.71). While Harper acknowledged that the questions asked by previously published research on his group of students were important, he also stressed that focusing on “racial achievement gaps and attainment disparities” is essential, but that asking questions that focus on lack of attainment “amplifies minority student failure and deficits” (Harper, 2010, p.64). As a result, researchers focus so much on deficiency that they end up ignoring those who are able to navigate through the process successfully, and, as a result, know very little about what contributes to their success. Harper (2010)
suggests, therefore, changing the way research questions are formulated, moving from a deficit-oriented approach (e.g., Why do so few Black male students enroll in college?) to an anti-deficit reframing of the same question (e.g., How were college aspirations cultivated among Black male undergraduates who are currently enrolled?). Harper’s (2010) suggestion to use “instead-of queries” allows the researcher to move away from “relying on existing theories and conceptual models that repeatedly examine deficits” to focus on student success through discovery of new information (p. 68). Both the development of the research questions for this study and the questioning protocol for the individual participant interviews (found in Appendix D) fully embrace the spirit of Harper’s framework. As a result, the questions focus on the participants’ ability to identify what contributed to their success and how they were able to overcome challenges on the journey from EAP to the Honors College. In addition, the questioning protocol also allows for student reflection on their experience through the lens of success, while still allowing for students to identify obstacles that they may not yet have overcome.

**Research Purpose and Research Questions**

This study focused on how Latinx EAP students successfully entered the Honors College at a two-year community college. The goal was to understand the lived experiences of EAP students who became honors students, and to construct a mid-level theory describing how EAP students succeed to the Honors College in a community college setting. As part of this work, therefore, the study explores student experiences as through the lens of participants who are both EAP and Honors students, as well the factors that impact student success in transitioning from EAP to Honors. The study seeks to understand the hallmarks the journey from EAP to Honors and how the participants
experienced this journey. In doing so, it focuses on success and overcoming challenge, asking the participants to focus on their experiences prior to entering the EAP program, their progression through the program, their desire to enter the Honors College, their pathway to admission, and, for the participants who are graduates, their road to completion.

Because of the focus on looking at student experiences through an anti-deficit model, this study framed its research questions not through the lens of problems, but rather through the lens of success. Therefore, it focused on the following key research questions:

(1) How do Latinx EAP students describe what led to their success on their journey from completing the EAP program to the Honors College at the community college?

(2) How do they describe the challenges they faced on this journey and how they overcame them?

(3) How do these learners describe the EAP experience as compared to that of the Honors College?

These three key questions allowed the researcher insight not only as to the process of what led to these students’ success, but also allowed for a better understanding of the experience of traveling through two different academic programs, first as an EAP student and then as an Honors student, as part of the journey to degree attainment at a two-year community college.
Context and Rationale of the Study

According to Miami Dade College data from 2017, completion rates for EAP students continue to be challenge even almost 30 years after Belcher’s original 1988 research. As performance-based funding becomes more important as state appropriations continue to decrease around the country, the conversation around college completion has become the focus of higher education administrators at almost every level. For the cohort of students who began in the Fall 2008 Cohort, 32.6% of First-Time in College (FTIC) degree seekers completed a degree or certificate by Fall 2012 (Cubarrubia, 2017). However, for students who took at least one EAP course who began at the same time, the number of completers sinks to just 12% (Cubarrubia, 2017). At a 200% completion rate, or after 8 years of attendance, while the number of FTIC completers had grown to 44.5% of students, the number of completers who began as part of the cohort with at least one EAP course still lagged far behind, with only 23.4% having completed a degree or a certificate (Cubarrubia, 2017). Indeed, if only approximately 20 out of every 100 students can complete a credential in eight-years’ time, the College needs to consider how to better support students who begin in EAP. It is worth noting that completion of the EAP program is not a “point of completion” that is equivalent to completing a certificate or a degree. In contrast, Honors College student completion statistics are nothing short of impressive, with two-year graduation rates between 84-87% in for the cohorts that began between 2008 to 2013 (Miami Dade College Institutional Effectiveness, 2016b). In gathering the data for this study, it became clear that Miami Dade College does not specifically track the number of students moving from EAP into the Honors College, making it not only more difficult to identify this population but also clearly pointing to
the small number of students who are able to make this transition. This provides yet another reason why it is important for researchers to investigate this group of students.

As recently as last year, Florida’s senate proposed a bill that would change how funds would be appropriated for community colleges. While the Florida Excellence in Higher Education Act of 2017 (SB 2) failed to pass, it is clear that the writing is on the wall, as parts of the bill have been brought back to life as part of Senate Bill 540, introduced in the 2017-18 legislative year. According to SB2 and now in SB 540, funding would be used to penalize public colleges and universities whose students take longer than the traditional timeframe of two or four years, depending on the school and degree, to graduate. This notion of “on-time completion” does not even begin to take into consideration the challenges that community college students face. By penalizing institutions for non-completion, this could ultimately challenge the mission of many community colleges to provide equity and access to students of low socioeconomic status, working students, and non-traditional students, including EAP students. If EAP students are not contributing to completion numbers, it stands to reason that the services provided to these students may be up for elimination in the near future. As a result, it is imperative for higher education administrators to look at those who are not only successfully completing the EAP program but also completing an A.A. degree in two years’ time, as does the great majority of Honors College students, as part of the solution. While it is acknowledged that not every EAP student will successfully gain admission into an Honors program, nor is it the goal of every student to even pursue this path, this study contends that there are lessons to be learned from the experiences of its participants that can benefit all EAP students.
**Intended Implications of the Study**

This study counters the data that focuses on the leak in the pipeline to focus on those who make it through the pipeline and to better understand the circumstances that contribute to their success. This adds uniquely to the literature that tends to focus on the failures of ELLs at the community college. While honors colleges at community colleges have been criticized by some as going against the mission of open access, others have argued that these honors colleges are selective in the spirit of open access. In other words, community colleges should provide opportunities not just for the academically challenged, but also to those who are academically talented but how may not have a chance to attend college in a different, costlier, more geographically distant setting. By collecting students’ narratives about their journeys to the Honors College and developing a model for their success, this study provides a pathway for college administrators, student services agents, and professors to facilitate the journey to college completion for these students.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Some qualitative researchers have argued against the use of a literature review before the research is conducted, so as not to influence the researcher in his ways of framing the experiences of his subjects (Mills & Gay, 2015). However, rather than ignore the existence of these theories and frameworks, this study begins by acknowledging the ways that prior research studies have given shape and meaning to the Latinx experience in higher education, and which have helped practitioners to better support Latinx students as individuals. There is very limited research that focuses on community college ELL students or on community college honors students, with the bulk of research being done for students while in the ELL program or as members of honors college at 4-year institutions, where the honors program is long established. Virtually no research has combined both these traits as part of a study, so that any attempt to combine existing theories in the literature for the purposes of explaining the experiences of the participants in this study can serve only as conjecture. In other words, while the literature that focuses solely on ELLs or solely on honors students contributes partially to our understanding of these groups, it is unclear whether these theories will apply to the population studied here, leading to the need for the creation of a mid-level theory that accurately describes these students’ experiences. Moreover, an understanding of these students’ perspectives on their own lived experiences is something that is lacking in the literature. By placing the focus on the participants’ stories, this study expands our understanding of these students’ journeys to success through their own eyes and words.

This literature review begins with a historical perspective of Latinx students in higher education, from the beginnings of a growing diversity in the American population to the
creation of Hispanic-Serving Institutions fifty years later. It looks at the community college as the main destination for the pursuit of a postsecondary education, explaining the factors that lead Latinx students to select this type of institution as their first choice. It also considers the need to address ways to support the growing Latinx population in higher education as this population becomes the largest minoritized population in American postsecondary institutions. It then turns its attention to Hispanic-Serving Institutions, community colleges, and Honors Colleges within community colleges to have a better understanding of the research location and the history behind such institutions. Finally, it considers the English language learner and the Honors College student as the subjects of this study and the unique qualities that these students bring to the community college.

**Historical Background**

**Latinxs in American higher education.** As the opportunities for access for an increasingly diverse populace in the United States have increased, so has the attention given to Latinx students grown in the literature. In their history of American postsecondary education, it was not until the era of mass higher education between 1945-1975 that Cohen and Kisker (2010) first mentioned the major steps to encourage the enrollment of Hispanic students as a direct result of growing numbers of minoritized and low-income students during the latter stages of this era. According to the 2010 census, 16% of the overall population was made up of the 50.5 million Latinxs across the United States, having surpassed Blacks as the largest non-White population of color in the year 2000 (Núñez et al., 2013). Also, in 2010, Latinxs had also surpassed Blacks in enrollment
in higher education (Fry, 2011), yet this increase was not yet proportional to Latinxs’ growth in population.

Today, the attention given to Latinx students has come into focus as shifting demographics have forced colleges to “face serious challenges as they seek to meet the needs of aspiring students who are increasingly diverse on a range of geographic, ethnic, economic and educational variables” while, at the same time, meeting their enrollment, retention, and completion goals (Bontrager & Hossler, 2015, p. 22). Indeed, as Bontrager and Hossler (2015) point out, between 2014 and 2024, the number of both Asian/Pacific Islanders and Hispanics, the terminology preferred by the authors, will grow comparably, with both groups showing a 38-40% growth in U.S. public high school graduates. However, because Latinx students represent a comparatively much larger number of the population than Asian/Pacific Islanders, it is imperative that colleges and universities rethink their strategies for supporting these students as they enter higher education.

While the current political climate has focused mostly on the immigrant status of Latinxs, with an inordinate amount of negative attention and blame being placed on the role of immigrants who entered the country “illegally,” the reality is that most Latinxs in the United States were born here. Saenz (2010) reports that 63% of Latinxs are second- or third-generation Latinxs, a number greater than that of first-generation or undocumented immigrants combined. Núñez et al. (2013) expand on the demographics of Latinx students today by citing Census data from 2010 that shows that the median age for Latinxs is 27 years old, as compared to 45 for Whites, further evidence that as a youthful demographic, numbers are bound to increase. Supporting this claim is Saenz’s (2010)
report that the projected growth in population is not due primarily to a rise in immigration, but rather to additional births within the population that is already here.

**Latinx students: access, choice, and the community college.** Latinx students represent a largely heterogeneous group in the United States, but they do share certain attributes that can inform the work of higher education administrators. Bontrager and Hossler (2015) point out that some of the projected future growth from this group will be made up of recent immigrants, mostly from Mexico, who are low-income and who are first-generation college attendees. In addition, a variety of studies have shown that these same students are more likely to stay close to home, to commute, and to attend a low-cost community college (Kirsch, Braun, Yamamoto, & Sum, 2007). Because of these increasing numbers and because of the challenge that fostering academic success will pose to institutions of higher learning, a growing number of researchers are trying to provide a window to understanding exactly who these students are and how to meet their unique needs.

Park and Hossler (2015) cite various studies that show that Latinx students are more likely to be first-generation students, tend to have lower college aspirations and lower high school academic achievement than other students, have the lowest expectations for degree attainment and tend to apply to fewer colleges than other students regardless of their academic success in high school, and are more likely to attend two-year or less selective institutions. These statistics, however, belie the fact that Latinx students value education greatly, but may often be at a loss in navigating the world of higher education in the United States, something more likely to occur because of challenges in
language proficiency than lack of personal interest or a sense of investment in education. Park and Hossler (2015) explain that this often leads Latinx students to seek out college choice assistance from those within their extended familias who may not have all the necessary information, leading many to select institutions near home that are lower in cost and may not be as selective as other options.

Santiago and Cunningham (2005) further explain that financial concerns are a key to understanding college choice, with about one-half of all Latinx students choosing to attend HSIs, which make up about six percent of all institutions of higher learning. Cunningham, Park, and Engle (2014) point out that HSIs are most likely to have open admissions policies, are public institutions, are in communities with large Latinx populations, and have tuition and fees that are lower than other comparable institutions. Additionally, just over half (51%) of Latinx students attend community colleges (Núñez et al., 2013). According to the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU), in 2014, 46% of HSIs were public two-year institutions (community colleges), the largest of any one single type of HSI as compared to private four-year institutions (28%), public four-year institutions (21%), and private two-year institutions (4%). Arbona and Nora (2004) and Fry (2007) suggest that the appeal for such HSI community colleges stems from their lower cost, from the ability for students to stay close to home and home community, and from greater flexibility in course scheduling that allows for taking care of responsibilities and employment needs.

Because the current study focuses on Latinxs at the community college, it is essential to highlight the setting as one that provides both challenges and support for these students. As an institution whose mission is defined by the concept of open access,
the goal of the community college is to serve traditionally underrepresented populations who may otherwise not have a chance to attend college, explain Crisp and Mina (2012). At the same time, open access policies have led to low retention rates and even lower successful transfer rates to four-year institutions, making some question whether access is limited to just getting in the door rather than access to complete a degree or even a credential such as a certificate. Núñez et al. (2013) cite statistics that show that although more than half of Latinx students begin at the community college with the intent to transfer, only 14% of those students had earned a bachelor’s degree or were still enrolled in a 4-year institution six years later. The typical community college student faces challenges that make completion a challenge, as he or she is typically older, faces financial challenges, often enters college with less cultural and social capital than other minoritized students, faces additional family or work responsibilities, or may not have the requisite academic preparation, resulting in having to complete remedial work before beginning credit-bearing coursework. Some critics would take these data as evidence for the notion that the community college’s function is to reproduce social inequality. Clark (1960) challenged the role of the community college as an agent of equity and access by suggesting that what its role is to actually “cool out” student aspirations. In what he deems “the dirty work of the organization,” Clark discusses what he calls the perceived divide between the “formal statements of purpose and everyday reality,” not only questioning the role of the community college as an agent of change, but also deeming its work to be near nefarious, with programs “designed to channel many…students out of transfer programs and into curricula that terminate in the community college.” (Clark, 1980, p. 16). He goes on to say that the cooling out process is rooted in the community
college’s non-selection policy (his term for open door admissions), the maintenance of a standard for transfer to a four-year college, and the problem that some students will not be able to transfer, resulting in the community college’s ultimately not knowing what to do with these students.

In shifting their focus to the institution itself, Crisp and Mina (2012) point out additional challenges that the community college faces, including its inability to raise admission standards (though this study provides a case where the community college does indeed do this), the high degrees of remediation needed by students (for example, developmental education or, in the case of this study, EAP), fewer opportunities for student engagement, the diversity of student goals or reasons for attending, and an absence of institutional resources to focus on improving retention. The researchers also highlight that developing an understanding based on retention theories developed at institutions and with populations that are wholly different from that of the community college, such as Astin’s Student Involvement Theory (1984) and Tinto’s Theory of Student Departure (1993), would be faulty, and the lack of research on retention done on this population leads practitioners to not have answers regarding how to best help these students.

**Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs).** The designation of an institution as a Hispanic-Serving Institution, or HSI, is something that was developed to provide financial support by the federal government to institutions which serve many Latinx students. It is not a title that was developed define an institution that was established to provide services to a specific type of student, but rather one that describes the student demographics of that institution according to its enrollment. As per Title 34 of section
606 of the Code of Federal Regulations, institutions are defined as HSIs if at least 25% of their full-time undergraduate population is Latinx (Núñez et al., 2013). A 2016 listing from the Department of Education identifies 415 institutions that are HSI-funding eligible, but that list counts different campuses within one institution as separate locations. Miami Dade College, for example, is listed eight times, representing its eight campuses.

According to Núñez et al. (2013), the limited research that has been done on students at HSIs has focused on their characteristics, experiences, and outcomes. Some of the trends that these studies have shown include that students in both 2- and 4-year-HSIs have less access to academic, financial, cultural, and social capital than students at non-HSI institutions, as they are more likely to come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, non-English speaking families, recent immigrants (first- and second-generation), first-generation college students, and choose institutions that allow them to stay close to home (Núñez et al., 2013). During their time in college, they are more likely to receive financial aid, attend college part time and work part or full-time, and commute. Because many of these students come to college with lower levels of preparation than non-HSI-students, supporting them is essential. Despite these factors, deemed “pull factors” by Oliva & Nora (2004), Latinxs who attend community college HSIs are more likely than their counterparts at non-HSI community colleges to intend to transfer when they first enter college.

The honors college at the community college. For community colleges in the 21st century, the notion of what equity and access means in changing times has led to developments that have expanded the missions of these institutions. While the key focus
of the community college has been to provide educational opportunity for not only for underprepared students but also for those who may have once thought that college was out of their reach, there has also been an expansion in the notion of access that has led to the steady growth of institutions that offer honors programs or honors colleges. Estimates show that over 40% of two-year institutions now offer such programs, with the National Collegiate Honors Council showing 167 community college honors programs according to 2014 data, representing more than 13% of its membership (Moltz, 2014). These institutions have moved from an understanding of their own missions as solely providing opportunities for students who may otherwise not have access to higher education by expanding their institutional identities to also attract the best and the brightest young minds, many of whom may have limited choices when it comes to postsecondary education, like the participants in this study. Most importantly, they have heeded the call from the National College Honors Council, which explains that an honors program is not about exclusivity, but rather about expanding opportunity to the academically talented. The programs “are based on the belief that superior students benefit from close contact with faculty, small courses, seminars or one-on-one instruction, course work shared with other gifted students, individual research projects, internships, foreign study, and campus or community service” (NCHC, 2010).

If indeed the goal of the community college is to “cool out” student aspirations, as Clark (1980) contended, then the honors college at the community college provides evidence that the institution does seek to democratize education and increase opportunity by expanding access and equity. By its very nature, the honors college at the community college seeks to “warm up” student aspirations, countering the claims that Clark made
decades ago, creating a clear pathway to four-year transfer for these students. In doing so, it allows many to overcome the challenges of a low-income background by giving them opportunities to which they may otherwise not have access. It is hard to counter the argument that these honors programs “have been shown to improve student retention, boost graduation rates, and increase the number of students pursuing baccalaureate degrees” (Risley, 2007). A community college can fulfill its mission more effectively by providing a balance of educational offerings, Risley (2007) claims, by offering both developmental programs for the underprepared and rigorous academic courses for the underserved, thereby addressing “the societal mission of egalitarianism by ensuring that all people have equal access to educational opportunities at all academic levels” (Floyd & Holloway, 2006, p. 43). For many minoritized students, choosing to go to community college before going to a highly selective institution is as much a financial decision as it is an academic one, one that may later facilitate access to a more selective four-year institution.

For high-achieving Latinx students, the honors college at a community college may often be the only realistic college choice. In their analysis of Latinx student retention, Hernandez and Lopez (2004) analyze the leak in the pipeline of Latinx student retention through the lens of personal, environmental, involvement, and socio-cultural factors. Among their recommendations are attention to student self-concept for reinforcement or development of academic confidence, opportunities for parental participation in the college process, assistance in employment by creating campus-based opportunities, and a set of strategies for engagement including faculty-student interaction, mentorship, participation in student organizations, as well as community orientation.
While the benefits for students who participate in honors are mostly academic in nature, such as the small classes and individual attention, we must also consider the financial advantages of attending a community college and the facilitation of transfer to 4-year programs. Miami Dade College, the institution that is the focus of this study, for example, provides full tuition to any student who is accepted into the Honors College and who maintains the required GPA every semester until graduation. Because of the great variety of community building activities that include colloquia, study trips, and experiential learning, students benefit from increased engagement with other students, as well as with faculty members. The benefits for the college itself are also multifaceted. Not only does the community college better meet its mission to provide equity and access at all levels, it also opens doors to a student population that may be geographically bound or financially limited, while at the same time increasing the college’s transfer rates, retention rates, and its ability to recruit strong students. If the community college honors college can offer these advantages to its students, it may also well be their savior.

The English Language Learner (ELL). While cultural and social influences and the notion of the accumulation of capital will be discussed in the next section of this chapter, it is important to consider the role of language, as it is central to the understanding of ELLs at the community college. Saenz (2010) explains that most U.S. Latinxs report speaking at least two languages, English and Spanish, and that there is a focus on preserving the language especially in first- and second-generation immigrant families. Indeed, 95% of Latinx students feel that it is very or somewhat important for future generations to be able to speak Spanish, according to Taylor et al. (2012). Spanish-speaking ELLs are, according to Kanno and Cromley (2013), one of the quickest growing
populations in primary and secondary U.S. education, and by 2025, they are expected to make up 25% of the K-12 population, according to U.S. Department of Education Data from 2006. Already in 2013, Núñez and Sparks reported that 11% of college students in a national sample identified as ELLs and that the great majority were Latinxs. Further research from Kanno and Cromley (2013) has found that less proficient ELLs enter and graduate from college at much lower rates than non-ELLs, with a greater number enrolling in either community colleges or in less selective 4-year institutions.

Undoubtedly, the biggest burden for ELLs is time, as the additional non-credit-bearing coursework in learning a new language not only mirrors the experiences of students who must take developmental or remedial courses, but also acts a drain for financial assistance which may run out before any credential or degree is completed. As shown by Arbelo-Marrero and Milacci (2016) in their qualitative study on nontraditional Latinx students including ELLs, having to learn EAP was a challenging adaptation process that led many students to feel intimidated and that often prolonged the time they had to spend on assignments in comparison to non-ELLs. This type of insecurity can often transfer to the non-academic world, as Rendón (1994) found that minoritized community college students often lacked the confidence to form meaningful relationships with faculty members and fellow students. Academic and social integration are keys to retaining ELL students in the community college, with Estrada, Dupoux, and Wolman (2005) summarizing that there is ample research supporting that “emotional and personal functioning are as important as academic factors in predicting social adjustment to college” (p. 559).
The honors college student. What is an honors college student? The answers to this question can be both quantitative and qualitative, but what is interesting is that there is no one single answer. Different institutions define an honors student in a variety of different ways. At Miami Dade College, to be admitted as an honors student, a student (1) must be a first time in college applicant, (2) must not have earned any college credits outside of dual enrollment opportunities, and (3) must have a minimum of a 3.7 GPA or must be deemed college ready by meeting certain testing criteria (e.g., a combined SAT score of 1270 or a composite ACT score of 26). In addition, for the Dual Language Honors program at the InterAmerican Campus, students must demonstrate Spanish language proficiency by meeting certain SAT II or AP score requirements. Clearly, the college has a high standard for its students, with applicants being “evaluated on the entirety of their background, personal qualities, academic preparation and life experience” in consideration for admission (MDC Honors College Website, 2017).

The research on honors students is sparse, but as Stoller (2004) explains, the term honors student is “generic and relative or relational to other students within a single institution” (p. 75), while at the same time, these students are likely to be deemed superior, high ability or the best and brightest in the literature (Achterberg, 2005). What characterizes honors students is that they are often defined by selection criteria, such as the ones presented above for the institution in this study. As Achterberg (2005) explains, traditional honors students are “able, accelerated, and advanced” (p. 76): able intellectually to do college-level work, accelerated in that they may have moved through the high school curriculum quickly, and advanced in that they often start with advanced academic standing (such as AP or dual enrollment credits) in college. Additional
characteristics supported by the literature show that honors students tend to be more “eager, exploratory, and experienced” (p. 77) than non-honors students: they are highly motivated, self-directed learners, they express high expectations of themselves and their college experiences, and their extensive extra-curricular or co-curricular activities contribute to their experiences (Achterberg, 2005). It is interesting when considering ELLs how the able, accelerated, and advanced aspect of these characteristics can often be subdued due to the focus on the acquisition of proficiency in a new language, whereas the motivation, expectations, and experiences of many ELLs are doubtless assets that help to propel these students forward.

In the conclusion to her study, Achterberg (2005) describes honors students as: heterogeneous, having much in common with non-honors students, and academically superior to non-honor students within the realm of the institution they both attend, while stressing that stereotyping honors students would be misleading. Most importantly, she argues against the notion from Sperber (2000) that “all students deserve the same attention, class size, and pedagogies that honors students receive,” who goes so far as to say that “if all students can’t have such, then none should” (p. 24). Achterberg (2005) argues that Sperber completely misses the point about honors by explaining that honors students “learn better with other motivated, like-minded students, just as remedial or differently-abled students learn better in certain courses designed for their needs” (p. 80). Indeed, identifying students from an ELL background to find their place within the honors college should be a more focused task for community college administrators who seek to expand opportunity for this group of students.
Theoretical Background

The literature review now turns to a variety of theories that have helped to shape our understanding of Latinx students in college, specifically those that move the researcher away from a model of deficiency to one that focuses on student success. This section begins with a short introduction to Critical Race Theory in the context of this work and as it relates to counter-storytelling, before considering the accumulation of capital by first exploring Bourdieu’s Theory of Social Reproduction (1986). It then explores how Yosso (2005) challenged this theory through the lens of CRT and the development of her Community Cultural Wealth model. It then considers how Harper’s (2010) Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework for Research on Students of Color in STEM operationalized and expanded these notions for researchers who seek to embrace a success-based approach to learning about student experiences. Finally, it introduces Rendón’s (1994) Validation Theory as a foundational theory which addresses the needs of minoritized students and provides a sense of the academic identity support that students need to be successful.

Critical Race Theory (CRT). In considering how higher education practitioners have understood the college and university experiences of Latinx students as a group, it is important to remember that most student development theories were created through a lens which, as Critical Race Theory (CRT) explains, “privileges White identities, behaviors, and thought processes, while simultaneously marginalizing people of color” (Patton et al., 2016, p. 26). As Patton et al. (2016) suggest, the scrutiny that must be given to traditional concepts in student development theory requires practitioners to first consider the researcher’s context, identity, and assumptions, next the population that led
to the development of the theory, and finally the sociopolitical and historical context, including notions of power and privilege, that gave shape to that theory. As a result, this section focuses on those theories that allow researchers to challenge the story of failure that has built the pervasive understanding about Latinx student achievement, as CRT embraces not only “challenging and disrupting normative structures that fuel racism and racial oppression,” but also argues for “centering the voices” of minoritized students who can be “recognized as creators and holders of the knowledge they communicate through their counterstories” (Patton et al., 2016, p. 26). By creating counter-storytelling, these theories argue against the single-story phenomenon of understanding, while at the same time moving ELLs into the “center of theory creation and application,” which thereby creates a “space in the research…for validation” of a different perspective (Patton et al., 2016, p. 26).

**Bourdieu’s Theory of Social Reproduction.** A central tenet of CRT, and one which has been embraced by the theories that stem from it, is the notion of “denouncing deficit” in favor of “announcing possibility” (Oseguera & Rodríguez, 2015, p. 130). Before considering a student’s ethnic, racial, social or academic identity while in college, the researcher must first consider how this identity shapes the student’s own thought process to even consider attending a postsecondary institution, as well as how the notion of capital informs this process. Pierre Bourdieu introduced the Theory of Social Reproduction (1986) to explain inequality through a socioeconomic lens, arguing that education is largely to blame for keeping the status quo. As Moi (1991) explains, “education creates, maintains, and reproduces inequality” (p. 1029). Moreover, Moi (1991) writes, the education system serves to “legitimize current dominant power
structures” by creating a veil that those with power have it because of their “qualifications and achievements” (p. 1029).

Three forms of capital – economic, cultural, and social – shape social class culture, explains Bourdieu. These are used to increase one’s wealth, power, and status as different individuals and groups compete for their own differences (Patton et al., 2016, p. 251). Economic capital refers to any resources that are “immediately and directly convertible to money” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 47). Cultural capital refers to “cultural knowledge as a resource of power used by individuals and social groups to improve their positions in society” (Joppke, 1986, p. 57), such as postsecondary choice as a direct result of one’s access to and knowledge of the college-choice process (Patton et al., 2016, p. 251). Social capital refers to the resources that “individuals possess to form and maintain networks or participate and build relationships as members of a given social group,” (Patton et al., 2016, p. 251) with the notion that some networks have greater reach and depth than others. These three forms of capital are inextricably linked, as Edgerton and Roberts (2014) explain:

Economic capital affords the time and resources for investment in the development of children’s cultural capital, which is associated with future educational and occupational success and, in turn, contributes to the accumulation of economic capital which is associated with greater social capital in that one’s social network becomes broader, more influential, and more conducive to opportunity and further enhancement of one’s other capital stocks (p.195).

Bourdieu claimed that the link between knowledge, power, socialization, and education means, therefore, that “the higher educational system is part of a more general theory of cultural transmission” (Swartz, 1977, p. 547). This, in turn, creates inequities in colleges and universities for certain students of the non-dominant background.
Yosso’s Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) model. A challenge to the prevailing notions regarding capital and, specifically, to the notion that minoritized students are lacking in capital, was presented by Tara Yosso (2005) in her seminal work, “Whose culture has capital?” As Núñez et al. (2013) explain, Bourdieu’s theory has been criticized not only for “being overly deterministic” and for “negating individual agency,” but also for its application of “deficit thinking to frame the inability of non-dominant groups to advance in education because they do not follow dominant values” (p. 40).

Social capital theory had been used by some academics to explain that the academic and social outcomes of minoritized groups are lower than those of Whites due to a perceived lack of capital. Most troublesome within this interpretation is the notion that “some communities are culturally wealthy while others are culturally poor” (Yosso, 2005, p. 76). By questioning established concepts regarding commonly held understandings of capital to that point, Yosso effectively challenged certain scholars’ as well as the academy’s own racism.

Implicit within this argument is the question from Yosso as to why certain types of knowledge that are valuable to and valued by minoritized groups have not been acknowledged, leading to a “deficit thinking” that she labels as “one of the most prevalent forms of racism in U.S. schools” (Yosso, 2005, p. 75). Specifically, Yosso (2005) denounces the idea that minoritized students and their families are “at fault” for poor academic performance because of a “lack of normative cultural knowledge and skills” and because of a lack of parental “value…or support [for] their child’s education” (p. 75). As a response to her own question regarding whose culture has capital, Yosso (2005) proposes that minoritized communities have certain forms of heretofore
unacknowledged capital which she defines as Community Cultural Wealth (CCW), “an array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist the macro and micro-forms of oppression” (p. 77). These forms of capital, she explains, are neither static nor are they mutually exclusive, instead they are “dynamic processes that build on one another” (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). The forms of capital Yosso (2005) identifies are:

Table 1

**Forms of Capital as Part of Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forms of Capital</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. aspirational capital</td>
<td>“the ability to maintain hopes and dreams…in the face of real and perceived barriers”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. linguistic capital</td>
<td>“the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. familial capital</td>
<td>“cultural knowledge nurtured among <em>familia</em> (or kin) that carries a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. social capital</td>
<td>Here, Yosso argues that communities of color have long attained education, legal justice, employment, and health care via their networks of people and community resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. navigational capital</td>
<td>“the skills of maneuvering through social institutions not created with Communities of Color in mind”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. resistant capital</td>
<td>“knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality…such as racism, capitalism, and patriarchy”</td>
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These notions help to “shift the research lens away from a deficit view of Communities of Color as places full of cultural poverty or disadvantages, and instead focuses on and learns from these communities’ assets and wealth” (Yosso, 2005, p. 82).

**An expansion of the Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) model.** Rendón, Nora, and Kanagala (2014) added to Yosso’s CCW model by conducting research on six
low-income, first-generation Latinx students at the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), and based on their findings, created a model of the Latinx College Experience, focusing on the experiences of a group of students who more greatly represented Mexican backgrounds than the current study. As part of this model, the researchers expanded Yosso’s CCW framework to include four additional forms of cultural wealth which they call ventajas, or “assets or personal resources the students possessed.” These include (1) ganas/perseverance, (2) ethnic consciousness, (3) spirituality/faith, and (4) pluriversal wealth (Rendón et. al, 2014, pp. 18-19). The definitions of each one of these assets or resources are:

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forms of Ventajas (Assets)</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. ganas/perseverance</td>
<td>determination, self-reliance and inner confidence, including “the life experiences and circumstances of students [that] paint a picture of hardships and adversities that one would think they would not be able to overcome”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. ethnic consciousness</td>
<td>“cultural pride and a sense that personal accomplishment can lead to the betterment of the Latinx collective whole”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. spirituality/faith</td>
<td>“gratitude, compassion, and a sense of purpose in life, as well as a positive view of the world”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. pluriversal wealth</td>
<td>“versatility of being able to make identity and behavioral shifts while operating in multiple, diverse worlds”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The spirit of this study, as one which denounces a deficit model of understanding for ELL students, is like that of Yosso’s work and Rendón et al.’s expansion of her work in that it seeks to find what forms of capital and ventajas contribute to students’ academic success instead of existing in a space where statistics live to tell only the direst of stories.
Harper’s Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework. Frustrated by the focus on the lack of students of color pursuing STEM, specifically Blacks and Latinxs, Harper (2010) created an Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework for Research on Students of Color in STEM that turns the conversation away from “what complicates and undermines achievement…for particular racial groups” to look at how these groups “manage to successfully navigate their ways…through the pipeline” (p. 64). Harper’s (2010) framework suggests going beyond asking traditional research questions which “amplify minority student failure and deficits” to expand our ability to better comprehend minoritized students’ success (p. 64). In doing so, it embraces the concepts presented by Yosso’s (2005) CCW framework as well as a variety of other theoretical frameworks. Harper reminds researchers that by reframing questions from deficit-oriented to anti-deficit, as well as by considering theory from a different perspective, a researcher can change her focus to capture the success of a particular group of students as a means not only to counter the prevailing negativity of the existing research, but also to celebrate the successes of these students via a form of counterstorytelling. Specifically, he advises the researcher when considering Bourdieu’s cultural capital and social capital theories to focus on exploring how students overcome certain disadvantages (e.g., lack of access to sophisticated technologies and labs) and on how they build relationships with STEM-faculty and others in the field to make up for the lack of social and cultural capital they are deemed to have. Embracing Attribution Theory (Weiner, 1985), students are asked to name persons, resources, experiences, and opportunities to which they attribute their achievements over focusing on barriers, and students are seen as experts on their realities to create counternarratives. The present study fully embraces Harper’s framework as a
means to change the focus of the narrative to recontextualize EAP student experiences at the community college. In doing so, this study uses these narratives to create a mid-level theory that explains how the participants were able to find their pathways to success, providing information to other students who are pursuing their own roads to completion and the practitioners who work with them.

**Rendón’s Theory of Validation.** Because college is a period of tremendous personal growth, not only is it important to consider the development of racial and ethnic identity, but also that of one’s own academic identity as it is shaped by an individual’s experiences, background, and context. Laura Rendón’s (1994) Theory of Validation, one of the first “foundational theories” that focuses specifically on the needs of minoritized students, helps researchers better understand how to create opportunities for the success of students whose academic confidence may not have been supported by their pre-college experiences. Rendón’s work focuses on the differences between confidence in academics between traditional and non-traditional students, defined as those from diverse racial/ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and was one of the first to remind practitioners that non-traditional students, in an expanded definition of the term that goes beyond age, have different needs.

In their 2011 discussion of validation, Rendón Linares and Muñoz explain that validation has six elements, all of which make up the “enabling, confirming and supportive process initiated by in- and out-of-class agents that fosters academic and interpersonal development” (Rendón, 1994, p. 46). The six elements of validation include: (1) “the responsibility of initiating contact with students is placed on institutional agents” (e.g., faculty, advisers, coaches, lab assistants, counselors); (2) when it is present,
“students feel capable of learning and have self-worth”; (3) it is “a likely prerequisite for student development”; (4) it “can occur in and out of class”; (5) it “should not be viewed as an end, but rather as a developmental process which begins early and can continue over time”; and (6) it is “most critical when administered early in the college experience” (Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011, pp. 17-18). By focusing on building strong interpersonal relationships, validation provides the student support in her desire to achieve and grow not only academically, but also personally while in college.

**Summary.** The goal of this qualitative study is to better understand the journey to success of Latinx students who complete the EAP program and who enter the honors college at the community college. Each of the theories presented in this review contributes uniquely to this study aim. First, social reproduction theory lays the groundwork for understanding how traditional theory has explained a deficit in minoritized groups’ educational attainment by focusing on a lack of capital as a means to understand the reproduction of inequity. Yosso’s Community Cultural Wealth model expands on the foundations presented by critical race theory and challenges these notions by suggesting that formerly unrecognized forms of capital are available to minoritized students as they make their way through the educational system. The anti-deficit model embraces this concept and adds to it a variety of additional constructs in order to inform researchers’ work to focus on how students overcome challenges and create pathways to success. Finally, validation theory reminds academic and student affairs practitioners of the need to support the minoritized, non-traditional student in ways that are meaningful and highly valued by this group of students to help support their journey to success.

Taken together, these theories underscore the importance of better understanding what
factors contribute to students’ academic achievement as practitioners meet the needs of students as individuals with varying backgrounds, needs, and stories. Without this understanding, institutions of higher learning will not be able to meet the unique challenges that these students face on the way to earning a higher education credential.

**Empirical Research**

Because research on the specific population for this study does not currently exist, the literature review turns to recent studies and literature reviews that focus on Latinx students, on success-based models of understanding, and specifically on Trucker’s 2014 study that traces students who began in developmental education and made their way to the honors college. The review ends with an introduction to the present study.

**Research on English Language Learners in college.** One of the most troubling aspects for those who research ELLs is their lack of credential attainment and completion in the community college setting. Almon’s (2012) study tries to find some answers to this quandary by focusing on the retention of ELLs in a community college setting in Pennsylvania. She uses transcript analysis to consider how 161 ELLs were retained; how persistence, program completion, graduation, and GPA vary within different proficiency levels; and what differences exist between ELL versus non-ELLs in GPA, persistence, and degree completion. In her analysis, Almon (2012) found that while completion and persistence rates were low, GPA means were rather high in ESL courses. As she explains, “whether…graduating, transferring, meeting their goals, or dropping out, ELs did so while performing well academically” (Almon, 2012, p. 189), yet this does not explain the 37% completion rate for ESL students at the institution. Echoing previous research done by Belcher (1988) at Miami Dade Community College, she also found that the lower the
level of ESL in which students began, “the poorer they performed in every area” (p. 190), being five times more likely than non-ESL students to not complete the program. Despite the limitations in her study (e.g., not knowing the students’ academic goals for pursuing ESL), Almon (2012) found it “alarming” that despite their academic success in their classes, ELLs did not complete their programs of study (13% vs. 23% for the community college at large). Almon finishes her study with a clear call for studies such as the present one, a qualitative approach to better understanding community college students’ journeys by “following up with interviews on those ELs to explore reasons for their success or attrition and seek ways to prevent dropout of this important subgroup of their population” (p. 198).

Because of the challenges that these students face, Almon sought to find out what characteristics differentiate those students who are successful versus those who are not. A general profile of success identified students who were female, traditionally-aged, full-time, non-resident, and benefitting from financial aid as more likely to succeed. She points out, however, that the non-traditional student, one represented in great numbers in the ELL community college, contends with an additional set of challenges, dealing not only with a lack of financial resources and likely full-time employment, but also with family obligations that make a long-term commitment to college less likely. In a second qualitative study by Almon (2015), she looked at 28 community college participants in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. This study focused on more female than male students, with an average student age of 32 years old, and with well over half considered nontraditional students who represented a variety of backgrounds, with 18 countries represented (8 of which represent Latinx students). In this study, Almon (2015)
identified three main obstacles to persistence: full-time jobs, family obligations, and lack of finances, all of which are common obstacles for community college students. Almon (2015) also found that to overcome these obstacles, students who were successful relied on academic support via tutoring as well as personal motivation, especially in persevering at learning a new language. In addition, she recommends that the institution take on an active role in creating supports for students, such as open discussions about obstacles to enrollment, guest speakers including successful ELLs, sessions with academic counselors, advisors, and financial aid representatives, a relevant and achievable curriculum, and helping students build relationships with faculty and with college mentors.

One study that heeded Almon’s call is Chavez’s 2015 study on Hispanic ESL women at an HSI in the Southwest United States, a qualitative study that sought to better understand non-traditional Hispanic females who were also first-generation college students. In her study, Chavez (2015) identified six main themes that impacted these women’s success, including (1) personal attributes, (2) home culture and language, (3) support, opposition and tradition, (4) discrimination and equity issues, (5) building connections and mentors, and finally, (6) college experiences and instruction. Chavez (2015) shares the present study’s concern that “a lack of published information related to the entrance into the educational arena” of her subset of students indicated a need to identify and analyze the themes that lead to their acclimation to the community college. She goes on to focus her research on what distinguished the transition to college, how the transition to college was made, and what factors were deemed to be encouraging or discouraging (Chavez, 2015, p. 208).
Chavez (2015) explains that the pursuit of and perseverance in attainment of educational goals were both greatly affected by the individual’s self-initiative and resilience. While these adult ESL women do not bear a great similarity to the students in the present study, it is interesting to consider how self-initiative may be a key factor that leads to the success of the students interviewed for this study. Resilience, on the other hand, may take on a different shape considering the difference in average age and familial responsibilities between the two groups. Chavez (2015) also focuses on the great role of family as transmitters of encouragement, ethnic identity, and cultural pride, forms of support which are challenged by parental inability to provide direct support in navigating the college experience. As a result, many of the women in the study created alliances with younger students and spoke about the role of caring and understanding from their professors and tutors, not only to inform their journey, but also as sources of encouragement. In her discussion, Chavez (2015) focuses on the role of resilience and self-initiative as keys to success and designators of the women’s commitment to attaining their educational goals, as well as on the creation of personal networks within a new setting that allowed the adult ESL learners to get the support needed to navigate through the system and eventually become role models themselves.

While not focused specifically on college student experiences as the previous studies discussed in this section, Kanno and Cromley’s 2013 study on ELL access to and attainment in postsecondary education and their 20015 study on ELLs pathways to four-year colleges are two of the very few that tackle the journey to college for this segment of the population, with the latter echoing the present study’s concern that “higher education has largely been silent on ELL’s access to and success in college” (p. 2). Their 2013
study provides important information about the recent immigrant ELL population and postsecondary education, finding that being a first-generation immigrant was a positive predictor for postsecondary educational attainment, but not necessarily for access (p.111). Kanno and Cromley (2013) explain that they interpret their results to mean that “it is the students’ own determination and agency, rather than parental help, that make a difference,” and further identify the key factor to help them “prevail to complete college: the faith in the American dream that they share with their parents” and “the sense that they owe it to their parents to obtain a college degree” (p. 111). In their second study, Kanno and Cromley (2015) focus on pathways to four-year institutions rather than the more popular choice of the community college and also expand their focus beyond just Latinx students. When looking at what they term “Hispanic ELLs,” the authors found that being Hispanic “remains a negative predictor for later milestones,” specifically mentioning that the combination of being an ELL and being Hispanic is what “puts a student at a particularly high risk,” especially in light of deficiency-based understandings of immigrant students as “nonacademic, unwilling to learn English, and lacking in high aspirations” (Gándara & Contreras, 2009, p. 307). They also found that academic capital factors play a lesser role for all ELLs’ (including other backgrounds) college access.

Specifically, Kanno and Cromley (2015) go on to explain that it is lack of college knowledge, including the ability to translate academic success to following the steps to application and admission, as well as challenges from heavy family obligations, the notion that four-year colleges are only for native speakers, and the desire to become financially independent quickly which are the most relevant factors to better understanding ELLs’ college access.
Research on Latinx students and their journeys to college: pathways to success. In order to better understand the motivations of Latinx students on the pathway to college, Phinney, Dennis, and Gutierrez (2005) used a cluster analysis to identify the college orientation profiles of 115 Latinx college freshmen from a low SES at a minority urban commuter university and examined the relationship of these profiles to adjustment and academic outcomes using a survey. In their results, they identified three clusters of students via which they varied in motivation, commitment, and values. The first group, the family group, “combined a strong sense of family interdependence with high motivation for attending college for both family and personal reasons” (Phinney et al., 2005, p. 403). The main motivation for attending college for this group was to help their family, one that was especially strong for recent immigrants, and members of this group also showed a strong identity commitment, revealing themselves to be secure and adjusted. The second group, the committed group, expressed the strongest positive attitudes regarding being in college and the desire to complete college, demonstrating a strong sense of personal determination rather than being driven by a family or group affiliation. Journal entries from this group included one student who explicitly sought to defy the statistics for Latinx students, as well as another who focused on his own drive and power to succeed. The final group, or the default group, lacked a specific purpose for attending college, reporting lower family interdependence, and was the most in need of direction, resulting in greater likelihood to drop out. As the authors explain, for some students, ties to their ethnic culture together with a strong motivation for college seem to provide a basis for adjustment. For others, an individual commitment to college and a sense of who they are appear to be effective without strong family or cultural ties. Still, others seem to persist…largely on the basis of expectations of others and a lack of alternative options (Phinney et al., 2005, p. 405).
Whether students belong to the first group (through commitment to the family) or the second group (through commitment to the self), helping students to overcome falling into the default group should be the focus of any college administrator working with mostly Latinx students.

Returning to the metaphor of the leaking pipeline, Hernandez and Lopez (2004) explain that “in spite of [an] enrollment growth…Latinos trail all other groups in earning undergraduate degrees” (p. 37). To address this problem, their approach was to review personal, environmental, involvement, and socio-cultural factors that influence retention to recommend ways to improve Latinx persistence in higher education. In considering personal factors, the authors refer to the importance of academic self-concept (later confirmed by Crisp et al.’s 2014 study) and recommend that advisors assess the student’s positive self-concept to reinforce it when strong or develop it when weak (Hernandez & Lopez, 2004, p. 40), something closely tied to the notion of self-initiative and resilience that Chavez (2015) identified. To better support the family, the authors suggest engaging them in programs to educate them about the American higher education system, including bilingual recruitment materials and parent orientation programs (Hernandez & Lopez, 2004). Because financial aid continues to be a challenge for Latinx students, the authors recommend “aggressive outreach and education efforts…to educate Latino students and their families about federal and state financial aid programs as well as providing assistance with cumbersome applications” (p. 42). When it comes to the environmental factors that contribute to student success, Hernandez and Lopez (2004) focus on a welcoming campus including one that has a healthy racial climate, welcomes the presence of an ethnic community, and supports living on- and off-campus. HSIs seem
to be at an advantage, as it is important for Latinxs to find a critical mass of students who are like them. In addition, mattering, a sense of belonging, and feeling appreciated as a theory developed by Lynch, Chickering and Schlossberg (1989), all contribute to students’ desire to persist through building their own communities of support, through creating mentoring relationships, or through sharing information with their peers. Important to this group is the pull that they feel from the need to work, leading to a recommendation that higher education institutions not only increase funding opportunities to Latinx students, but also assist them in locating higher paying jobs as well as providing them with opportunities to work on campus (Hernandez & Lopez, 2004, p. 45).

The authors take an uncritical view at involvement factors in comparison to the later approach by Crisp et al. (2014) but recommend that programs facilitate student-faculty interactions outside of class, provide mentorship opportunities, and encourage students to participate in a variety of student organizations, not just ethnically-based ones. Finally, Hernandez and Lopez (2004) highlight the heterogeneity of the Latinx student and cite different needs for students of Mexican versus Central American backgrounds, as an example, calling for a need for practitioners to better understand immigrant minorities and their specific needs, as this study does by adding to the profile of Latinx students of different backgrounds. They further discuss the fluidity of ethnic identity as something “defined and formulated not only by their own cultural environment, but also by both the dominant cultural group with which it is in contact and the nature of the ethnic group/dominant group interaction” (Casas and Pytluk, 1995, p. 155). An understanding of Latinx gender roles, religious roles, and communities can also
contribute to better supporting this group of students, reminding practitioners that while Latinx communities differ greatly across the country, to stop the leak in the pipeline, higher education leaders must better understand this group of students to keep them engaged in higher education and guide them toward completion.

Ten years after Rodriguez and Hernandez’s pipeline report, Crisp et al. (2014) performed a systematic review of the literature to address which factors most contribute to undergraduate academic access for Latinx students. In their review of 190 studies, the authors found that a combination of the following nine different factor areas was shown to be related to one or more success outcomes for students: (1) sociocultural characteristics; (2) academic self-confidence; (3) beliefs, ethnic/racial identity, and coping styles; (4) precollege academic experiences; (5) college experiences; (6) internal motivation and commitment; (7) interactions with supportive individuals; (8) perceptions of the campus climate/environment; and (9) institutional type/characteristics. This set of factors echoes those that Chavez (2015) identified in her study. According to their review, Crisp et al. (2014) identify that being female is a clear advantage for Latinx students, despite having to deal with gender discrimination, while for male students, domestic responsibilities, fellow male peers, and discrimination, specifically from financial aid staff, may lead to greater challenges. Additionally, parental educational attainment was found to be positively associated with both GPA and persistence, as was SES status and family income.

Crisp et al. (2014) further found that measures of academic self-confidence are linked to course pass rates, grades, persistence decisions, and degree completion. Although support was limited, findings suggest that “belief systems, ethnic/racial
identity, stereotype vulnerability, and coping styles may in some way be related to academic success outcomes” as well (p. 256). Delaying enrollment in college following high school was found by the authors to be negatively related to persistence decisions in the community college, while student performance during high school (particularly for males) was “repeatedly found to be positively related” to college grades and persistence for first generation students (p. 257). While the financial support that students receive clearly affects their ability to persist in college, as important is the full-time status for students enrolled in college, as part-time status led to challenges in managing competing work versus academic demands and became a barrier for transfer due to external responsibilities.

Although students who are ELLs are different from those who take remedial or developmental courses by the nature of those courses, with ELLs building proficiency by learning a language for the first time, while remedial or developmental education students make up for a deficiency in learning that they were unable to master during high school or earlier, these two are often grouped together. There is no denying that there is a similarity between the groups, in that both groups have delays in their access to credit-bearing courses that lead to a degree or a certificate. According to Crisp et al. (2014), enrollment in developmental and remedial courses (but not specifically in English as a Second Language courses) was found by one study by Crisp and Nora (2010) to be positively related to degree completion among two-year Latinx students, while research by Alfonso (2006) found that it decreased the odds of two-year completion. Based on the
lack of students who complete ESL programs as evidenced by Belcher (1988) and Almon (2012), one would assume that the statistics for ELLs would more likely mirror those of the latter study.

Crisp et al. (2014) also report that motivation and commitment are keys to success, echoed in this literature review by Chavez’s 2015 study. Studies like Arellano and Padilla (1996) found that “the drive to succeed was the most salient characteristic to academic attainment” for students in highly selective schools (p. 503), and Crisp et al.’s (2014) analysis also found that there is a connection between the decision to remain enrolled in college and various forms of motivation and commitment. In the theoretical background, the role of validation as presented by Rendón (1994) was presented. The findings in Crisp et al.’s (2014) analysis support this theory in that Latinx students’ “interactions with individuals who provide various types and forms of supportive relationships contribute in meaningful ways to…grades and persistence decisions” (p. 11).

While qualitative studies highlight the impact of role models, mentors, parents, peers, and Latinx communities on campus, quantitative evidence has found that mentoring experiences, encouragement, support from friends, and mentoring relationships were all found to be consistently positive for Latinx students. Institutional climate and size also played a role in the analysis, as student interactions and perceptions of the campus environment were related to academic success outcomes, as was a sense of belonging, something which one can posit will be higher at an HSI than at a different type of institution. In addition, the researchers found some evidence, albeit limited, that attending a public institution with a sizable percentage of Latinx students, such as the one
in the present study, may improve the odds that the student will persist or attain a degree. Other studies, however, have found that attending a two-year institution may serve to decrease the odds of degree completion (Melguizo, 2009).

Crisp et al.’s (2014) overall analysis points to the need for more research with Latinx students and reminds us of the limits of widely accepted theory when considering the challenges that this group faces. As they explain, “the lack of more relevant and developed theories specific to Latina/os” as well as an “overreliance of Tinto’s (1993) model of student integration… continue to hamper scholars’ ability to move away from using student integration theory to predict academic outcomes” (Crisp et al., 2014, p. 13). In their conclusion, the authors actively call for “additional qualitative research…that allows Latina/o students to voice their own lived college experiences as specifically related to successful academic outcomes” (p. 264), a call to researchers which the current study actively seeks to answer through a grounded theory approach that allows students to narrate their stories of success through their eyes, their words, and their experiences.

**From deficit to wealth: changing paradigms in the literature.** In their research on student success for Latinx students in the educational pipeline, Rodríguez and Oseguera (2015) introduce their research by denouncing the “historically deficit-driven” literature about Latinxs in education in what they deem the “blaming and ‘othering’ that often occurs” with this subset of students. By doing so, the authors attack the “deficit perspectives that continue to characterize the realities facing Latinas/os at the K-12 and higher education systems,” deficits which stem from a “practice of low expectations or from the ideology of cultural or intellectual inferiority” (p. 130). As Rodríguez and Oseguera (2015) set their frame, casting aside “ahistorical remnant of U.S. culture that
suggests that poor children, children of color, English learners, immigrant students, undocumented students, and others are more likely to fail than to succeed, which informs the policies, practices, and procedures that Latino students end up facing in schools and higher education systems” (p. 130), the authors condemn the narrative of failure that has been pervasive to our understanding of this group of students for decades. The authors go on to argue, much as this work does, that creating a framework that looks at students as wealth-driven (Yosso, 2005) allows us to reframe our understanding of these students to understand “how various forms of wealth can contribute to the transformation of opportunities and outcomes for Latinos/as across the educational pipeline” (p. 131).

This approach to research is echoed by Valdez and Lugg’s (2010) article on CCW and Latinx students, which calls on professionals to see students of color as “holders and creators of knowledge” citing Delgado-Bernal (2002) and which fosters collaboration between teachers, administrators, schools, families, and the community to share knowledge. The current research focuses on student identified stories of success, and as such, takes a similar approach to that of Rodríguez and Oseguera’s and Valdez and Lugg’s work.

In their work, Rodríguez and Oseguera (2015) focus on the power of institutional culture to support success. First, they deem relationships as the “X” factor in supporting students, not only as they navigate from high school to college, but also within the college setting. This is not limited to student interactions with faculty who are approachable, understanding, and encouraging of them, but also includes relationships with mentors who are able to provide support by “challenging the protégé to aspire to certain goals, teaches him or her how to cope with the challenges that lie ahead, helps
him or her to develop the requisite skills, provides moral support, and sometimes transmits or negotiates the transmission of key resources and opportunities” (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2003, p. 235). In addition to the support of these types of relationships, the authors make a clear call for the need for institutional leaders to “tap into the voices and lived experiences of a vital group of stakeholders if they are truly concerned with educational opportunity, quality, and outcomes” (Rodríguez & Oseguera, 2015, p. 137), a direct tie in to the goals of the current study.

The Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) model was applied to research at an HSI in a 2017 study by Kouyoumdjian, Guzmán, Garcia, and Talavera-Bustillos that focused on sources of support and challenge for first- and second-generation Latinx undergraduate students at a four-year institution to better understand how to increase completion rates by focusing on student needs. Kouyoumdjian et al. (2017) explain that to their knowledge, no study has provided empirical evidence of the diverse sources of capital described within the CCW paradigm for multiple generations, something they sought to do in their work. The authors surveyed 114 Latinx students on challenges and sources of support, then used a grounded theory approach to interpret their open-ended responses by analyzing key themes by coding. The researchers found evidence for various forms of CCW, including aspirational, familial, navigational and social capital as sources of support, whereas challenges that were identified included financial stability and academic knowledge. In the area of support, the authors found seven themes and presented them in order of frequency: (1) family – both as sources of academic support, but also as the impetus for persistence, for example in order to “make [their] parents proud”; (2) institutional support – instructors (especially those whose instruction was
engaging and relevant), access to financial aid (including grants and loans), support offices such as the office for students with disabilities, tutoring, priority registration opportunities, and transfer programs; (3) financial stability; (4) self-determination (defined as “motivation,” “dedication,” or the “will to graduate”); (5) romantic partnerships/sustainable or loyal friendships; (6) academic skills; and (7) tangible support – e.g., having the necessary books or a car to get to school (Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017, pp. 68-9).

A previous study by Luna and Martinez (2013) also used the CCW framework to examine the educational experiences of Latinx college students at a four-year institution who were deemed “successful” by having graduated from high school and having enrolled full-time at a four-year institution. The researchers then created focus groups that elicited student perceptions about the factors that contributed to their academic success via a content analysis approach. Like Kouyoumdjian et al.’s (2017) research, Luna and Martinez (2013) found evidence of aspirational, familial, social and navigational forms of wealth in the student responses. Among their key findings were that Latinx parents “largely shape their children’s academic aspirations,” and while many are unable to provide financial support or guide their children through a higher education system that remains unfamiliar to them, their aspiration for their children, their encouragement, and their inspiration are keys to motivation for many students (Luna & Martinez, 2013, p. 12). The findings in Luna and Martinez’s (2013) study “suggest that Latino students bring to school knowledge, skills, abilities, and networks that usually go unrecognized and undervalued in educational settings” (p. 12), providing yet another argument that supports a CCW framework for understanding these students. Moreover,
the authors recommend a reevaluation of the role of parental involvement in higher education, wherein support is often motivational and encouraging, and may look quite different from the parental support provided by parents of other backgrounds.

As Luna and Martinez (2013) explain, for these parents, giving of their time may not be possible, but their “storytelling, advising, and motivating youth to continue with school” may be just as meaningful. They go on to explain that educational achievement is not “an individual attribute” (p. 14), but rather “a collective process of commitments among and between individuals who are embedded in supportive aspirational networks” (Valenzuela, 1999). One additional recommendation is related to the use of home-based knowledge and how it can be incorporated into both teaching and learning settings:

“Bicultural and bilingual skills should be framed as assets and can enhance the teaching and learning setting for all students” (Luna & Martinez, 2013, p. 14). For bilingual students, the authors recommend a reset regarding code switching between English and Spanish, “a positive tool to increase comprehension” (Luna & Martinez, 2013, p. 14). This is especially important to students whose bilingual background is embraced, such as by programs like Miami Dade College’s Dual Language Honors Program at the InterAmerican Campus, the only honors program in the Miami Dade College environment that requires a specific level of proficiency in Spanish.

The role of honors for community college students. One additional area of focus in creating a culture of success for Latinx students is, according to Rodriguez and Oseguera (2015), through greater access to honors colleges. They cite research by Bowen, Chingos, and McPherson (2009) that has shown that students enrolled in honors were most likely to complete college even when controlling for pre-entry characteristics
thanks to the personal, small class attention these students receive through the honors program. Research on community college honors, however, continues to be quite limited. As Treat and Barnard (2015) explain, “[l]ittle is known about the national overall picture with the respect to number of honors colleges in community colleges, their absolute composition and composition relative to the colleges’ overall populations, or the level of investment and revenue sources used to promote honors colleges” (p. 711). Still, Treat and Barnard (2015) argue that honors colleges at community colleges are satisfying their institutions’ missions by recruiting and serving high achieving students as they “consider access and success as keystones to [their] foundation” (p. 710).

Following the pattern set forth by four-year colleges, the honors programs at two-year colleges develop an honors ideology, create honors options, form separate organizational entities, and expand concepts of merit that extend beyond the classroom to community-based service and civic engagement (Treat & Barnard, 2015, p. 696). Moreover, as De Leon (2010) argues for the value of honors, a further benefit of an honors program is the honors identity, one which can, in his eyes, create a new shared identity for those for whom “the push of revolutions and the pull of exiles to the U.S. have left without a coherent or shared national identity” (p. 70), something that is explored in the current study. Engelen-Eigles and Levinsohn Milner (2014) echo this sentiment and argue for the value of an honors program at the community college at an even larger scale, one which “has the potential to subvert a dominant current of thought on the position of community colleges in the contemporary higher education landscape” while “challeng[ing] the resulting stratification by race and class within these institutions and within the larger society” (p. 99).
Floyd and Holloway’s (2006) article titled “Prioritizing Service to the Academically Talented: The Honors College” highlights the program at the center of the current study, that of Miami Dade College, as a means of introducing the concept of the community college honors college, explaining diverging models, and discussing the pros and cons of such programs. Floyd and Holloway (2006) explain that admission can be classified into open access and restricted enrollment, with Miami Dade’s program being the latter, with “both shar[ing] the perspective that these programs are appropriately included in their college’s overall mission and enhance the students’ academic experiences” (p. 45). It is important that in both instances, these programs exist “not…as ancillary to the college, but [as] an integral curricular offering that provides another group of students with a rich learning experience” (p. 45). The Honors College at Miami Dade College was established in 2001 with 75 students, expanding in by 2004 to 365 students, in a selective program that was fully endorsed by the administration, and supported by faculty and staff, according to the authors. All admitted students receive the Honors College Fellow Scholarship Award, one which covers in-state tuition, a book allowance, and a stipend, and is renewable if the student is in good standing and maintains a 3.5 GPA. Should the GPA drop below this level, the student must leave the honors program and the award is revoked for future semesters. In 2006, when Floyd and Holloway wrote the article, 73% of students were Latinx (by 2015, this number had risen to 88%), with most students coming from public schools in the Miami Dade County area. Special opportunities for students include colloquia, study travel events, individual honors courses, and honors contracts for non-honors courses whereby students complete an additional project to earn honors credit. At the end of their article, Floyd and
Holloway (2006) argue that honors programs are appropriate for all community colleges, despite trends that find them located at larger institutions, because of the success of their students in retention and transfer. They argue that debating whether community colleges should offer honors is “a matter of rhetoric”: as developmental courses were added when students needed support to succeed in college-level work, so too should rigorous coursework be added when students want to attend the most selective of universities. The question remains, however, how to maintain open access and egalitarianism in a program that is selective by nature.

The question of addressing completion rates at the community college to duplicate the success that honors students have is one that Trucker (2014) considered in his study of developmental education students who go on to the honors college, the study that most closely mirrors the trajectory of the students in and the intent of the current study. In his work, Trucker (2014) actively pursues an agenda to expand honors to more than the 315 honors students at his institution of 24,000, the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC), especially when considering that 80% of students at the institution begin in developmental education. Trucker’s (2014) work seeks not only to “counterbalance the often-grim longitudinal data on the progress (or lack thereof) of community college developmental students” (much like that of ELLs in the present study) but is also built upon his desire to diversify honors diversity to increase enrollment and graduation rates (p. 70). In his study, Trucker (2014) found that 60% of honors students had begun their studies by taking at least one developmental course, a sub-100 level course in English, reading or math. He then interviewed 29 students (17 White, 10 Black, 1 Asian, 1 Hispanic/Latinx) in focus groups and individual interviews and focused
his questions on how students have avoided withdrawal from the school, using Tinto’s Theory of Departure.

Trucker (2014) found that two factors had the greatest influence in both a decision to apply to the honors college and on academic self-image, and both were interpersonally grounded: the belief in student promise by faculty and informal assistance and advice from peers. He goes on to suggest that because both completion and transfer rates for honors students are so much higher than those of non-honors students, “developing honors students should be a major component of a multi-faceted approach to increased completion” (p. 78). Trucker’s first recommendation of partnering with developmental education is an intriguing one, one he defends by stressing that “earlier access to a diverse, highly motivated subset of students” can only help to improve the program, as can modified entry requirements for this subset of students (pp. 78-9). He argues for the generally ignored wealth (my word) that students bring to the campus, “rich life experiences…that can broaden class discussions and collaborations,” citing specifically those who have returned from a harsh job market as some of his “most determined, most thoughtful, and most thorough students” (p. 79). Trucker (2014) also recommends providing honors college information at all orientations regardless of audience, institutionalizing recommendations via informal departmental discussions of potential candidates, and creating opportunities for honors students to interact with the general population through advisement and tutoring, study groups, or an open-door honors policy. As Trucker (2014) explains, “the best action plan for honors programs at open-admissions institutions is to reposition themselves as agents of change” (p. 79).
While at CCBC this change has to do with diversification that includes greater representation in honors for Non-White students, at Miami Dade College it could mean diversification by expanding access to EAP completers, a group that has not historically been empowered to pursue the Honors College pathway. Trucker (2014) explains, “Like their classmates who often do not persist, transfer, or graduate, [the students who participated in his research] faced obstacles, impediments, and external pressures to their time, yet they found their way to the honors program” and once there “were able to take advantage of program features such as smaller, student-centered classes, a designated study space, scholarships, additional transfer advising, and the company of a similarly driven community of peers” (p. 88). How students were able to do this in their own words and through their own stories is the ultimate goal of the present research with a different subset of students, those who have learned English as an additional language to their own and who reached a level of proficiency that has allowed them to become members in the most selective area of the community college, the Honors College.

**Current Study**

The current study answers the call for more research both at the community college honors college as well as with populations who have successfully completed the EAP program to add to the literature that welcomes students’ voices to better understand their experiences. Echoing Strauss’ Chicago School, human beings in this study are viewed as “active agents in their lives and in their worlds rather than as passive recipients of larger social forces” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 7). To better understand how these active agents view the experiences that shape their success, this study embraces a qualitative
approach through a phenomenological lens to understand these experiences and a
grounded theory lens to build a theory to explain their experiences from the ground up.

The study gathers rich data, those that “reveal participants’ views, feelings,
intentions, and actions as well as the contexts and structures of their lives,” by
constructing one-on-one interviews that allow the researcher to slowly build an image
that becomes clearer as he or she analyzes the results of the interviews through coding
and thematic identification (Charmaz, 2006, p. 14). At the same time, this researcher fully
acknowledges that he is far from a *tabula rasa*, and in no way can he be a “scientific
observer who can dismiss scrutiny of [his] values by claiming scientific neutrality and
authority” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 15).

While this literature review considers the research that has been done in a variety
of related areas to the topic at hand, no one work of research in the literature has dealt
with the specific group of students that is of interest in this study. In addition, many of
the theories fit a deficit approach to understanding these students’ experiences and may
not adequately describe the experiences of those who have succeeded in meeting their
academic goals. Because of this, it may well be that these theories will work with this
group of students, but it could also be that a new set of theories needs to be developed to
explain the trajectories of success that these students have followed. By incorporating
phenomenology and grounded theory, this multi-method qualitative study seeks to build a
model of understanding for a group of students that has heretofore not been studied.
Chapter 3: Methods

A Qualitative Inquiry Approach

The power of qualitative research is its ability to veer away from a unified single story to understanding lived experiences that give permission to the researcher to “embrac[e] the idea of multiple realities” (Creswell, 2013, p. 16). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe qualitative research as “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (p.3). More importantly, they stress the nature of this type of research, one which seeks to study “things in their natural settings, attempting to interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them” (p. 3). The goal is to bring these phenomena to light, “mak[ing] the world visible” (p. 3) and, in doing so, creating a form of transformation. In addition, qualitative research acknowledges that there is a relationship between the researcher and the phenomenon being researched. It allows, or one could even say demands, that the researcher situate the self in his or her work to “lessen the distance between himself or herself and that being researched” (Creswell, 2013, p. 17).

The present study not only creates the opportunity to hear the voices of Honors College students who have completed the EAP program, in this case the voices of success, it also includes the voice of the researcher, allowing him to be heard and understood, and acknowledging both his values and his biases. More importantly, though, the present research’s main goal is to empower the participants, not only through the content of the study but also through its methodology, as this approach allows students to “collaborate with [the researcher] during the data analysis and interpretation phases of research” (Creswell, 2013, p. 19). In other words, it is a building of a “we” that will narrate this phenomenon, one which validates, and which is also validated by the students.
whose stories are being told. Creating this narrative to tell a story that goes beyond the expected, one that goes beyond a “single story” of defeating data, allowing for an understanding of student experiences within their own space and reality make a qualitative approach the natural lens through which to study the journey from the EAP program to the Honors College for Latinx community college students.

**Research Purpose**

The purpose of the current research is to not only acknowledge a variety of stories, but also to expand of our understanding of success-based experiences for this group of students. By giving voice to these students’ experiences and providing a counter-story to that of the statistics that focus on their struggles, this research allows us to expand our understanding of the lived experiences of ELLs as they journey from the most widely accessible program at the community college, the EAP program, to its most selective, the Honors College. Creswell (2013) suggests that qualitative research is warranted when there is “a need to study a group or population, identify variables that cannot be easily measured, or hear silenced voices” (p. 40). Indeed, we know little about students’ success-based transitions from an EAP program into an honors program due to a lack of research in this area. Moreover, this work is in line with Creswell’s (2013) explanation that such research “empower[s] individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study” (p. 40). The findings from this study will then be used to make recommendations about how faculty, administrators, and others in community colleges can better support their EAP students in this specific context and possibly those who share a similar profile.
Target Population and Setting

This study focused on a population in the city of Miami at an institution, Miami Dade College, that is a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) that provides English as a Second Language coursework for both credit, as English for Academic Purposes (EAP), and non-credit, as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). The study focused on the students who take EAP, as these are the students who make up the statistics that are most often reported on by researchers and because these are the students who choose to take an academic rather than a purely vocational path to higher education. In the fall of 2017, the EAP program served 4,294 students at six campuses across the college. According to data from 2014 regarding the college’s population, over half of students who attended the College were first-generation college attendees, and just under three-quarters of students overall held employment (Miami Dade College Institutional Effectiveness, 2015c). Just under half, or 45.2%, were below the poverty level for their household size, and 65.5% were considered low-income (Miami Dade College Institutional Effectiveness, 2015c). Over half (53%) depended on scholarships and grants as a major source of funding for college tuition, and of the 68% of students that arrived at Miami Dade College as academically unprepared students, just below 17% needed EAP classes (Miami Dade College Institutional Effectiveness, 2015c). In the fall of 2015, Miami Dade College reported just 55% of students as being native speakers of English, with 38% of students identifying Spanish as their native language, while Haitian-Creole comes in a distant second at only 4% of students (Miami Dade College Institutional Effectiveness, 2016a).
Unlike the extremely low completion rates of the EAP program mentioned earlier in this work, the Honors College program at Miami Dade College boasts an 87% graduation rate within two years of entering (Class of 2013 data), and a 98% fall-to-fall retention rate for new honors students (Miami Dade College Institutional Effectiveness, 2015b). In 2015, the program served 263 students across four campuses, including one that offers a dual-language honors college option, with 88% of the class represented by Latinx students (Miami Dade College Institutional Effectiveness, 2015b). More than half (51%) of the students spoke English as their native language, and 22% are U.S. residents, along with 14 international students. Surprisingly, 99% of students in the Honors College were under 21 years old (Miami Dade College Institutional Effectiveness, 2015b).

**From Interpretative Phenomenology to Grounded Theory**

According to Creswell (2013), a phenomenological study “describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (p. 57). By focusing on “what all participants have in common as they experience this phenomenon” (p. 57), we try to “grasp the very essence of the thing” (van Manen, 1990, p. 163). The approach taken in the current study began with an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), the aim of which was to “explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world” and which focused on “the meanings particular experiences, events, and states hold for participants” (p. 53), as described by Smith and Osborn (2008). IPA involves a two-step approach, one in which the participants first make sense of their own experiences, and the second in which the researcher makes sense of the participants own sense-making process in order to better understand “what [that experience] is like, from the point of view of the participants,” or,
as the authors refer to the process, “to take their side” (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 53).

IPA affected not only the sampling and the creation of the interview questions, but also the analysis of the participants’ responses, from recording and transcription to the analysis of the data, one which resulted in the creation of categories and themes which describe the journey of these students. In looking at the experiences that define the success of a subset of students, the present research identified a common thread in these narratives that explains how the participants were able to navigate more successfully than others who have similar backgrounds.

After analyzing the data, the researcher progressed to the creation of a mid-level theory that described the participants’ experiences using a grounded theory approach. Charmaz (2006) explains that in 1967, Glaser and Strauss defined these defining components to battle the notion that qualitative methods were simply “impressionistic and unsystematic,” that quantitative research was “more rigorous,” that there was an arbitrary division between theory and research, and, most importantly, to counter the notion that qualitative research could not generate theory. Charmaz (2006) highlights that qualitative approaches to theory “offer an interpretive portrayal of the studied world, not an exact picture of it” (p. 10). As such, it is important to consider that just as our subjects constructed a picture of their lived experiences by telling their stories, so did the researcher construct a reality of how their stories are interpreted in the creation of a grounded theory.

**Methods of Data Collection**

As Smith and Osborn (2008) explain, IPA is a “suitable approach when one is trying to find out how individuals are perceiving the particular situations they are facing,
how they are making sense of their personal and social world,” an approach that is useful
when the researcher “is concerned with complexity, process, or novelty” (p. 55). As a
result, IPA studies “are conducted on small sample sizes” which tend to be “fairly
homogenous” (pp. 55-56). Because this study focused on a very narrow group of students
who are members of the Miami Dade College community, the process of selecting
students ultimately yielded seven participants who were “good key informants” who were
“able to be reflective and thoughtful, to communicate effectively with the researcher”
(Mills & Gay, 2015, p. 14). As Mills and Gay (2015) explain, because the goal of
qualitative research is to “select participants who can best add to the understanding of the
phenomenon under study,” purposive sampling is the key to finding the right students for
this study (p. 14). Smith and Osborn (2008) concur, adding that by using purposive
sampling, the researcher “finds a more closely defined group for whom the research
questions will be significant” (p. 56). It was essential, therefore, that participants in this
study have completed coursework in Miami Dade College’s EAP program and be
enrolled in or have graduated from Miami Dade College’s Honors College.

While it was originally hoped that there would be a greater number of current
students who were Latinx Honors College students who had completed the EAP program,
a first report using data from the Campus Rosters through the College’s Institutional
Research website identified only five such students. Four of the five were contacted via
e-mail and were invited to participate in the study, while the fifth was known personally
to the researcher. Three of the four contacted via email responded right away and showed
an interest in participating. Among them, however, was one who also asked, “What is
EAP?” Further research indicated that this student had completed an accent reduction
course, but had not actually taken any additional EAP courses, and therefore the student was excluded from the sample. The other two participants received a follow-up email inviting them to participate in the study. The potential participant known to the researcher, his former student from the prior year, was invited to participate in person and agreed to become a participant. A sample of the recruitment script for in email and in-person contact and the accompanying consent form are included in Appendix A.

Because of the need for further participants, the researcher contacted Miami Dade College’s Institutional Effectiveness department to obtain a list of graduates between 2014 and 2017 who met the study requirements. In the meantime, the researcher reached out to Honors College directors via email, a process which yielded the same names identified by the Campus Roster analysis. In the process, one director provided the researcher with the name and contact information of a recent graduate, with that student becoming the fourth participant. Once the researcher received the list of graduates, he reached out to the ten additional students via the emails that are available through the College. Because some of the students only had their Miami-Dade College email address listed but were no longer taking classes as the College, they were also contacted by phone. Three additional participants were found via this process, bringing the total to seven participants, three current students and four recent graduates.

Once the participants were identified, they were invited to a sixty-to-ninety-minute interview with the researcher that featured a questioning protocol that was open-ended and limited in its scope to the students’ experiences as EAP students and honors students. For the three Honors College students who were currently enrolled, the researcher worked with the Honors College director and found place on campus to meet
the participant after classes. These interviews were held face-to-face. For the four graduates, two interviews were held via Skype and two others were held via phone. All interviews were conducted between September and November 2017. They were audio recorded on a tablet or laptop as well as on a cell phone to ensure that there were two copies of each interview. Following the interview, these were uploaded to the researcher’s Google Drive storage and deleted from his tablet, laptop, or phone.

During the interview, the student took part in a semi-structured interview, one in which the researcher has “a specific set of questions that elicits the same information from all of the respondents” (Mills & Gay, 2015, p. 550). Before beginning the main part of the interview, the researcher first shared a bit of his own history and his interest in the topic. Participants were invited to ask questions even before getting started, something that led to the establishment of rapport and the ability to get to know the researcher. The researcher first asked participants to answer some demographic questions to better understand each one’s story. The development of the questions included expert feedback to ensure that they would properly elicit answers to answer the research question. The questioning protocol is included in Appendix B.

Because there is an inherent power difference between someone who is a college administrator and someone who is a student, even when these two may have no form of contact, this dynamic was always acknowledged as part of the pre-interview discussion. Had there been the possibility that the administrator would ever play a role in a future decision of the student, then it would have been advisable for the researcher to not consider that student as part of his sample. More specifically, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) stress that “the research interview should not be regarded as a completely open
and free dialogue between egalitarian partners” (p. 33). Because the interviewer owned the questioning and was interested in informing his perspective, the researchers suggest strategies to break down this power dynamic, such as allowing the participant to interpret and report, something that this research achieved through member checks later in the process of analyzing the data, discussed later in this section.

During the interview itself, the researcher focused on listening to the participant and allowing him or her to tell his or her story. As a result, the interviewer refrained from taking notes on the interview, unless notes were necessary to reflect a reaction or to describe body language, something not captured by the audio recording. All interviewees were assured confidentiality regarding the content of their interviews as well as their identity. At the end of the interview, the researcher collected additional identification data, such as student ID to gain access to their academic history for the purpose of describing the demographics of the participants.

**Data Analysis**

Following the data collection, the first recording was transcribed through the method of shadowing. In shadowing, the researcher listened to the audio recording of the interview and repeated what the interviewee responded, creating a transcript of the interview using voice-to-text software via Google Docs. After this first transcript, the following six interviews were transcribed using the web program Trint. To become familiar with the data and to stay as close as possible to the participants’ voice, language, and experiences, the researcher listened to and corrected all errors in the automated transcription, adding any context and meanings not captured by the direct transcription. This included not only capturing the exact words that the participants used, but also
episodes of laughter, pauses, and longer periods of thought. This was the first step that was part of the data management process, as these transcripts then became part of a database for the purpose of analysis. Because these transcripts are “like field notes for interview data,” the interviewer reviewed them once again for accuracy once the transcription was completed (Creswell, 2013, p. 142). As Creswell (2013) suggests, the first step was then to “read the transcripts in their entirety several times [to] [i]mmers[e] yourself in the details, trying to get a sense of an interview as a whole before breaking it into parts” (p. 150).

As Smith and Osborn (2008) explain, in interpretative phenomenological analysis, the researcher is interested “in learning something about the respondent’s psychological world” in one of two ways: either in the form of “beliefs and constructs” that the participant mentions as part of the interview, or in the way that the participant’s story “can itself be said to represent a piece of [their] identity” (p. 66). As a result, data analysis means having an “interpretative relationship” with the interview transcripts and building meaning through close interaction with the texts and the interpretation process. IPA has many forms of analysis, as “qualitative analysis is inevitably a personal process, and the analysis itself is the interpretative work which the investigator does at each of the stages” (p. 67). The first step in the process of analyzing the transcripts was that of reviewing the full transcripts and developing three columns of analysis. Being careful to always maintain the voice of the participant, the researcher first focused on reducing responses to the most salient parts of the interview (e.g., focusing on the main part of the interview), while also adding memos that presented interpretations of what the participant said (e.g., noticing Carolina’s use of “we” and not “I” for her decision-making process).
Then, after considering the research questions that guide this study, the researcher focused on those responses as the ones that needed further interpretation leading to the creation of categories, what Smith and Osborn (2008) refer to as themes. This process of reviewing the transcript led to emergent category titles which were noted to the right of the transcript. As Smith and Osborn (2008) suggest, it is important to create “concise phrases which aim to capture the essential quality of what was found in the text,” with the goal being to “find expressions which are high level enough to allow theoretical connections within and across cases, but which are still grounded in the particularity of the specific thing said” (p. 68). The process they describe was facilitated in that the participants all shared a common journey and common milestones (discussed in the model presented in Chapter 5). Once these categories emerge from the analysis of the transcript, “one looks for connections between them” (p. 70). After writing them down in the sequence in which they appeared in the transcript, the researcher moves to the next stage which involves a more analytical or theoretical ordering, as the researcher “makes sense of the connections which are emerging” (p. 70). As these cluster together and some emerge as what Smith and Osborn (2008) call “superordinate concepts,” this process led to the creation of four such concepts that unified the research. This study followed their advice to “compile directories of the participants’ phrases that support related themes” to keep the voice of the participant at the forefront (p. 70). According to Smith and Osborn (2008), the next stage is to produce a table with themes and superordinate themes. To differentiate between these two, themes are referred to in this work as categories, while superordinate themes are referred to as themes. As they suggest, “a table lists the themes
which go with each superordinate theme” (p. 72), with this work presenting such a table in the Findings (Chapter 4).

After this analysis was completed and categories and themes describing the participants’ lived experiences were finalized, a grounded theory method was used to create a mid-level theory that would give meaning to the experiences of the participants through a theoretical model (Charmaz, 2006). As Charmaz (2006) explains, grounded theory methods “consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories ‘grounded’ in the data themselves” (p. 2).

Data, then, is the foundation of the construction of a theory that is informed by the participants in the research, and what the researcher does in interpreting this data is to build a theoretical analysis of their lived experiences. As part of the process, Charmaz (2006) explains that after data collection and analysis, the researcher interprets the data to build levels of abstraction that lead to the development of a theory than can be later checked and further refined. This method led to the creation of a model presented in Chapter 5 which visually describes the journey from EAP to Honors, creating a level of abstraction by describing it through the lens of knowing or not knowing, and which includes the identified categories and themes as the hallmarks of the journey itself.

Trustworthiness

The quality of qualitative research is determined by trustworthiness (Mills & Gay, 2015). Trustworthiness refers to the ability to “address the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability” of the study and its findings (Mills & Gay, 2015, p. 554). Credibility refers to the researcher’s accounting for the study’s complexity and to the ability to address problems that are difficult to explain. Transferability identifies the
degree to which the findings from a given study setting apply to other like settings. A researcher establishes transferability by providing a clear understanding of the setting via description of it that is comprehensive and rich in context. Dependability considers the stability of the data that are collected (Mills & Gay, 2015), while confirmability reminds the researcher to take the necessary steps to ensure that the findings reflect the experiences and ideas of the informants (Shenton, 2004). Both Guba (1981) and Shenton (2004) provide guidelines to researchers to establish the trustworthiness of a qualitative study.

**Credibility.** To ensure credibility, the researcher benefitted from prolonged participation at the study site, having previously been an adjunct professor at the site and having had contact with both the EAP department and the Honors College. Shenton (2004) deems this “familiarity with the culture of [the] participating organization” to be a key factor to supporting credibility (p. 65). Additionally, as part of our current doctoral program, students were constantly engaged in peer debriefing to test their insights with other professionals who are also engaging in qualitative research, what Shenton (2004) deems “peer scrutiny” (p. 65). Moreover, this work benefitted from the contributions of an external auditor, Dr. Debbiesiu Lee, who read through all the transcripts, analyses, resulting themes and categories, as well as the grounded-theory model. The auditor compared each of these to the raw data each step of the way and provided feedback that was then reincorporated back into the analysis. The benefit of such an audit was the ability to “provide support, play devil’s advocate, challenge the researcher’s assumptions,…and to ask hard questions about methods and interpretations” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308), all of which add to the credibility of the present study.
Another key piece to support the credibility of the research was to include member checks, a process via which the researcher presented the overall report with the participants before it is shared in its final form. This method was described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and was cited as “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (Shenton, 2004, p. 68). All participants were invited to review the model that the researcher developed, as well as to review the themes and categories, their accompanying quotes, and the findings which incorporate the participants’ voices, allowing them a chance to react to the findings and support or challenge them as needed (Creswell, 2013, p. 209). Those who responded to this invitation confirmed that the model accurately reflected their experiences and that the findings put their words to use in an appropriate context.

Rapport and trust are a key piece to be able to further address credibility, and as such, the researcher invested as much in a short telling of his story and his motivation as he did in hearing his participants’ stories. Shenton (2004) further adds to Guba’s suggestions by reminding the researcher that the adoption of well-established research methods is also a key to ensuring credibility. To ensure honesty, Shenton (2004) further suggests opportunities to refuse to participate in the study, a frank approach from the outset of the interview session, and the establishment of rapport with the interviewee. Participants were reminded that they could withdraw from the research at any time, without any explanation needed. All this information was included in the consent form and was discussed with each participant.

**Transferability.** To ensure transferability, Guba (1981) reminds us that the goal of this research is not generalization to a larger group of people, but rather the need for us
to develop a rich, context-specific description of our location and our subjects, what Shenton (2004) calls the “sending context” (p. 70). To support this, the present study provides a rich description of the setting that explains not only the context of the location, but also of the participants, allowing them to provide detailed descriptions of themselves and their experiences in the context of their educational setting while ensuring their anonymity. In addition, it also provides, as Shenton (2004) suggests, the number of organizations and where they are based, any restrictions in the type of people who contributed data, the number of participants involved in fieldwork, the data collection methods employed, the number and length of the data sessions, and the time over which the data was collected. Indeed, in bringing this sending context to light, we are limited to the lived experiences of a small number of particular environments and individuals. While generalizing, therefore, may not be possible and is not the goal of this type of study, the prospect of transferability “should not be immediately rejected,” but must be approached with caution (Shenton, 2004, p. 69). However, because the researcher knows only the sending context, “he cannot make transferability inferences” (p. 69). As Shenton (2004) reminds us, “ultimately the results…must be understood within the context of the particular characteristics of the organisation…and, perhaps, the geographical area in which the fieldwork was carried out” (p. 70). Indeed, the present work limits its scope to Miami Dade College and its students.

**Dependability.** To address the stability of the data, or its dependability, the researcher established what Shenton (2004) describes as a “prototype model” (p. 71), one via which a future researcher can repeat the work. To do so, the present study includes sections on the research design and its implementation, the operational details of data
gathering, and a reflective appraisal of the project, evaluating the effectiveness of the inquiry (Shenton, 2004). Additionally, memo-writing was used to reflect upon the dependability of the findings.

**Confirmability.** Finally, for confirmability, the researcher has practiced reflexivity in the present document through the explanation of his research stance, one in which “underlying assumptions or biases” are revealed. Here, “beliefs underpinning decisions made and methods adopted should be acknowledged within the research report” via a “reflective commentary” (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). As Creswell and Miller (2000) add, researchers must “acknowledge and describe their entering beliefs and biases early in the research process (done here in the Researcher’s Stance section of this chapter) to allow readers to understand their position, and then to bracket or suspend those researcher biases as the study proceeds” (p. 127).

**Researcher’s Stance**

My relationship with the words ‘challenge’ and ‘success’ has been at the center of the last two years of my life as a student of and an administrator in higher education. In my work to grow in my understanding of my field, I have been surrounded by academic literature that talks about “me” as a member of a larger ethnic group and which has often focused on the challenges that Latinx, or my group, face in attaining their educational goals. In my day to day work, the word ‘challenge’ surrounds me daily as I lead a department made up of mostly immigrant students who have come to this country to overcome challenges and build a life for themselves by first paving a road to opportunity through their growth in proficiency in a new language. I struggle to reconcile my own experiences with this reality, as I have become greatly aware of my own privilege in
having been able to have overcome my own challenges in my own education, one that has now led me to be in a position of administrative leadership at my institution. At the same time, I realize that there is power in words, and that the power of those words has now become a challenge for me as well.

I am reminded of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s 2009 TED Talk, “The Danger of a Single Story,” in which she says that when we “create a single story, show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again”, eventually it “is what they become.” Inevitably, she goes on to remind us that along with the creation of the single story, we cannot forget that “how [stories] are told, who tells them, when they're told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power” (Adichie, 2009). As a researcher, I was heartened by work such as that of Rodriguez and Oseguera (2015), whose focus on denouncing deficit and announcing possibility spoke of the shift in stance that I had been struggling to find. The authors denounce “othering”, deficit perspectives, a stance that Latinx students are more likely to fail than to succeed, and a “failing” narrative of public institutions in favor of taking on the role of researchers who drive forward “wealth-driven perspectives when devising a new framework and pathway for Latinx student success across the educational pipeline” (Rodriguez & Oseguera, 2015, p. 131). As a result, I have been drawn to a body of research that chooses to look at our experiences not through the lens of challenge, but rather through the lens of success.

Like the participants in this study, I am an English Language Learner who immigrated to this country. Unlike the participants in this study, coming to the United States as a nine-year-old meant experiencing education through a wholly different lens than for those who came in their later years. I was deemed bilingual by the end of
elementary school and had the privilege of attending private middle and high schools, as well as a highly-selective private liberal arts college for my undergraduate degree. I never had the pressure of having to provide for my family by having to work outside of school, and I also had the benefit of having highly educated parents, with my father having studied at Northwestern University before completing his degree in Nicaragua and my mother having partially attended high school in California. I did not, like much of the research shows, adhere to the expectations of staying close to home at an institution that was more affordable because of my own privileges that were provided to me by my family, especially by my mother.

I spent the first half of my career as a public high school teacher of foreign languages, including ESL. I have had firsthand experience of students who have just arrived in this country as teenagers being expected to learn the same curriculum as their counterparts who have grown up speaking English, some of whom struggle with the material just like they do. For my most brilliant students as well as for my most challenging students, it was not a failure in knowledge that caused them to struggle, but rather the lack of the opportunity to access that knowledge through English. During that time, I saw inequities, I observed the ridiculous amount of time spent on trying to prepare students for standardized tests that they couldn’t understand because of language, not content, and I also saw resilience, as these students navigated their days to find ways to make school and the education system comprehensible not only to themselves, but also to their parents, siblings, and extended families.

Today, as a higher education administrator who works directly as the chairperson of the Department of World Languages and as a professor of World Languages at the
largest Hispanic-Serving Institution in the state of Florida, Miami Dade College, I have contact with adult ELLs daily. My campus, the InterAmerican Campus, is one of the medium-sized campuses of the college, with almost 13,000 students taking credit classes, and an additional 4,700 taking non-credit classes. It is located on the border of Coral Gables and Little Havana, meaning that most of our students (58%) are born as native Spanish-speakers and well over a third are resident aliens or refugees/asylum seekers (Miami Dade College Institutional Effectiveness, 2016a). On the InterAmerican Campus, 85% of students are Hispanic, and 46% of our students take EAP classes while they are with us, the highest percent of any Miami Dade College campus (Miami Dade College Institutional Effectiveness, 2016a). Only 35% of our students can enroll full-time because 81% of them are working while they are pursuing their studies, with one third holding full-time jobs (Miami Dade College Institutional Effectiveness, 2016a).

While my work during the advisement process allows me to have contact with students prior to the beginning of every semester, the great bulk of my contact with these students as an administrator is when there is an academic issue or an issue with a professor. I am surrounded daily by the statistics that show how difficult it is for students to complete the EAP program, and I am constantly working with faculty, staff, and other administrators to create opportunities that support student success in this area. I am always impressed by students’ resilience and their drive when I get to know them. As a result, I was drawn to the notions that capital is something that differs depending on background and culture. I do not view my EAP students as deficient, certainly not because of a lack of proficiency in a second language. I also completely understand that EAP students are not developmental students. While both programs mean that students’
entry into a credit or degree-bearing program is delayed, EAP students are focusing on building proficiency, while developmental students are focusing on filling in gaps of knowledge due to a perceived, externally-measured and -defined deficiency. I view the ability of EAP students to successfully navigate in more than one language and in one more than one culture as a huge asset. Moreover, I fully embrace the notion that as minoritized students, we build our own avenues of support by expanding our own sense of family and by reaching into our communities of personal connections to survive in a new world.

My goal in pursuing this research is to provide better services to my students who are language learners. A lack of proficiency in a second language is by no means a deficiency, but instead holds the potential for possibility, especially if we consider the deficiency in our own English-only speaking population, with the 2016 American Academy of Arts and Sciences (AAAS) Report on the State of Languages in the U.S. reporting that only 20% of the population speaks a language other than English. At my institution, we are constantly expanding that 20% of the population by creating a much-needed resource for our country, fully bilingual speakers who have completed an academic credential in their second language such as a certificate or an A.S., A.A., or B.S. degree. As such, I view my role as an administrator and as a support for these students as crucial to their, and our, success. By focusing on what has allowed these students to grow both personally and academically, it is hoped that the present research allows us to continue the conversation of the expansion of access to educational possibility for EAP students by expanding our understanding of their lived experiences both as learners of a new language and as Honors College students.
**Expected Transformative Changes**

Student success is very often closely related to methods of support and how successfully a student can construct a series of supports for himself or herself to succeed in a challenging environment. The mini-study assignment that inspired this study showed that by the time students got to Miami Dade’s Honors College, the attention to student success presented by the entry requirements and the effort needed to stay in the program were motivating factors, while at the same time, student academic self-concept was strengthened by mechanisms within the program. At the same time, getting to the Honors College and the college experience was something students navigated through with little guidance. Because the EAP program at Miami Dade College does not have such constructs in place, it was interesting to find out what the motivating factors were for completing this program. It was expected that many of these would be related to students’ own motivation, but that they may also be related to relationships with supportive faculty with whom they were able to create a bond, like the mini-study suggested. With minimal cultural capital and with parents who were educated but not educated in the American higher education system, students in the mini-study found themselves having to rely on friends or on trusted faculty connections to provide information about the process, as they managed the college selection process along with adapting to a new country, learning a new language, and understanding a new school system. Another area of clear need was information and education about the American college system for parents in Spanish, since the parents of the participants in this mini-study did not speak English. Allowing them to learn about the process along with their children ensures that the family is there to support the student, since
[t]he family and the home environment can be utilized as an effective retention tool by familiarizing Latino parents with the college setting and providing them with an opportunity to meet and develop rapport with college educators and support staff. To gain family support, university personnel should engage parents in programs that assist them to become comfortable and knowledgeable in U.S. higher education (Hernandez & Lopez, 2004, p. 41).

Additionally, since the participants mentioned the struggle of transitioning to college during the first semester, it was useful to consider the role that the required leadership Honors course plays during this time. Finally, there is no doubt that students like the ones in this study need validation, as defined by Rendón (2004), who states that this “intentional, proactive affirmation of students by agents of the college” is a key to their success (p. 12).
Chapter 4: Findings

The current study provides insight into the journey of Latinx community college students who begin their first experience in American higher education in the EAP program and who eventually earn admission into the Honors College at Miami Dade College, a Hispanic-serving institution located in southeast Florida. To better understand the lived experiences of these students leading toward the construction of a theory that is grounded in the participants’ lived experiences, the study focuses on the following research questions:

(1) How do Latinx EAP students describe what led to their success on their journey from completing the EAP program to the Honors College at the community college?

(2) How do they describe the challenges they faced on this journey and how they overcame them?

(3) How do these learners describe the EAP experience as compared to that of the Honors College?

In considering these questions, this study fills a gap in understanding this population’s experiences in higher education, one that has seldom been considered by other researchers. As such, it tells the story of students whose experiences are defined by their success and their ability to overcome accompanying challenges, finding success in navigating their way to higher education, in completing the EAP program, in gaining admission into the Honors College, and in some cases successfully transferring out of the Honors College. By not focusing on these students’ perceived deficiencies, such as a lack of proficiency in a second language or minimal access to information about American
higher education processes and procedures, this study’s focus builds toward a theory that will ultimately support more students who learn English as a second language, as well as those who aspire to become members of the Honors College at the community college.

The seven participants in the study represent the rich variety of backgrounds of Latinx students who attend Miami Dade College, with national origins representing countries in both the Spanish-speaking Caribbean and South America. This study originally began by focusing on current students who are enrolled in the Honors College and who had completed the EAP program, but the number of students who met both requirements at the time the study was conducted was surprisingly low, with only three participants meeting this description. As a result, the participant pool was expanded to include recent graduates between 2014 and 2017 who met the same criteria, which allowed for the inclusion of four additional voices. The ability to expand the pool of participants led to a much richer understanding of the experiences of these students as it provided the opportunity to strike a balance between students who are currently in their first or second year of the Honors College and who are therefore living the experience, as well as students who had the ability to look back upon the experience with a greater sense of distance and reflection, as represented by the voices of the graduates.

Participants

To better understand the findings, it is essential to get to know the seven students who participated in the study. Despite sharing an educational journey, their many differences (such as age, previous educational experiences, national background, and family support) make each participant as unique as their voices. Three of the participants are originally from South America, and four of them came to the United States from the
Spanish-speaking Caribbean, with the greatest representation being from Cuba, mirroring the demographics of the city and the College. Six of the seven participants completed the EAP program in just one semester, with the seventh taking one additional semester. Only one, Diego, attended high school in the United States prior to enrolling at Miami Dade College. Two of the seven participants also considered themselves non-traditional students at the time they were members of the Honors College.

Table 3

**Participant Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
<th>Time Spent in EAP</th>
<th>Honors College Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>2 semesters</td>
<td>1st year, 1st semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emilia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>1 semester</td>
<td>1st year, 1st semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnny</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>1 semester</td>
<td>2nd year, 1st semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carolina</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>1 semester</td>
<td>graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diego</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>1 semester</td>
<td>graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>José</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>1 semester</td>
<td>graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keria</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>1 semester</td>
<td>graduate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Resulting Themes**

The interviews in the study yielded four main themes that capture the most salient experiences that were shared by the seven participants, including (1) Making Sense of the Past, (2) Forging New Educational Pathways, (3) Building Relationships of Support, and (4) Overcoming Challenges. The themes represent a variety of experiences in many different contexts for the participants, and these are illustrated below via an analysis of each theme and supporting quotations that put the voices of Carlos, Emilia, Johnny, Carolina, Diego, José, and Keria at the forefront. Each theme is first introduced and is then followed by the categories within the theme, as well as a participant quote that strives to capture a description of the category in one participant’s words.
Theme 1: Making Sense of the Past

For any recent immigrant to the United States, embarking on a new academic path, such as making the decision to enroll in an institution of higher education, represents a new beginning, most often one which the student navigates on his or her own. In the interviews for this study, the theme of Making Sense of the Past was a key piece to shaping each participant’s future as they charted a new path to higher education in a new country. Within this theme, there were three key categories that appeared after coding the interviews. As part of Making Sense of the Past, the participants had to first grapple with having to leave their countries of origin (Understanding Leaving One’s Country), then evaluate how leaving their countries changed their relationships with others in their families or even themselves (Changing Relationships), and finally assess their previous educational experiences and thereby its adequacy (or inadequacy) as they entered a new system of higher education (Evaluating Educational Experiences).

Understanding Leaving One’s Country - “It’s a lot of pressure for someone who’s leaving a country.” As the participants reflected on their journey to higher education in the United States and on the steps they took to seek out educational opportunity, one of the first areas of reflection was upon the experience of leaving their country behind. While some participants left along with their families (Johnny, José, Carlos, and Diego), one left at the same as her family but without them (Carolina), and two left on their own (Emilia and Keria). In looking at this process, it is clear that there is a division between those who left as a choice and those who left because they had no other choice.
For Emilia, Carlos, and José, who left the Dominican Republic, Colombia, and Ecuador, respectively, the decision to come to the United States was based greatly on opportunity, and a great amount of that represents educational opportunity. Emilia, for example, highlights that her decision was one that was presented to her by her dad, largely tied to seeking out opportunity after finishing high school, and defined by the knowledge that there was always the possibility she could return home:

When I graduated high school, I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life. My dad...told me, "Would you like to come to Miami and study?" So, I came in October 2015 and I asked the questions and I apply to Miami Dade and all that, but I didn't take any tests and I didn't take the SAT or anything, and I didn't know where I was going to be. I didn't know what to do with my life...I woke up and I thought like I don't want to miss an opportunity like this just because of my friends and because of my life. And I want to feel challenged because staying there was just the regular...My mom told me that at least finish this first semester to see what happens and if you really, really don't like it, just come back.

For José, the experience of leaving Ecuador is couched within the concept of living the American dream:

When I was 18, my mom...came here like a few years prior to my arrival. It's one of the classical stories that she was trying to come here for...better opportunities and eventually bring her children, with me and my younger brother. I was transitioning, and I kind of knew that I came here to the U.S. to go to school, to make a difference.

He went on to explain that it was not his original intent to stay in the United States:

There was a part of me that kind of looked back. And then I think that was really prior to EAP, like, I thought that I am going to get my degree here in the States, and then I’m going to go back to Ecuador, to my country. But, like, that changed.

It is indeed fitting that these students eventually chose to pursue their education at a college whose motto is “Opportunity changes everything,” as for them leaving their countries of origin was all about expanding their future chances.
For the participants from Cuba (Johnny, Keria, and Diego) and Venezuela (Carolina), leaving one’s country represents an exodus, one that is defined by political systems which they or their families felt were keeping them from having access to opportunity. The desperation that Carolina felt when the political situation in Venezuela deteriorated led her to first leave her college in Caracas and return home to her city, and eventually to find a way out: “We had to start kind of a plan of what we were going to do…Just anything to get my visa and come here to the U.S.” Throughout her interview, Carolina does not refer to her departure from her country in terms of herself, but rather in terms of a “we”, possibly signifying the role of the family unit within this process. This inability to easily return to her country led to Carolina’s ultimate motivation and focus:

If I don't [find] success here, what I'm going to do go back to Venezuela? It's a lot of pressure for someone who's leaving a country. It's really hard to go back. I had to get in to the Honors College.

Keria, too, reflects on her leaving her country, but with a sense of frustration coupled with sheer will:

So first of all, I came to the United States in 2009. I was in Cuba and then I was finishing my Bachelor's in Cuba. Then I couldn't graduate. I had my thesis and everything ready, but I couldn't graduate because in Cuba, if you graduate, you have to spend two years like paying [back] your career. So, then I finished all my credits and everything through all those five years, and then I came to the United States. I came through a third country, so I have to travel a lot. I came via Paraguay. I was on my own with only one hundred and eighty dollars in my pocket. It's really difficult for me to be there by myself. But I could make it.

Johnny, also from Cuba, explains that coming to the United States was “driven by my parents, but overlooking mine and my sister's future.” As the participants were asked to tell the stories of how they came to be EAP students, they reflected upon the experiences that brought them there. These experiences are defined first by their own understanding of why they left behind their countries of origin, and, more importantly, represent the first
impetus for comprehending the participants’ drive, motivation, and ultimate success in
the American educational system.

Evaluating Educational Experiences - “I was never going to need it.”/“Maybe
it wasn’t the right major for me.” Faced with a new educational experience, the
participants were forced to also make sense of their educational past. First and foremost,
this meant coming to terms with their varying levels of proficiency in English. In
addition, for those who had had already started attending university before coming to the
United States, starting anew offered an opportunity to reconsider whether their original
educational choices were the best fit for them.

All students who enter the EAP program at Miami Dade College who did not
graduate from a public Florida high school or charter school are required to take an
English proficiency placement test. Until 2016, Miami-Dade College used the
COMPASS exam to assess student proficiency in reading, writing, and listening, and then
place students into the appropriate level of English. All the participants had some
exposure to English in their countries of origin, with Carolina and Emilia, for example,
having attended what would be considered bilingual schools in their country, but they
quickly came to realize that the level of English that they had received in their prior
schooling was not at the level necessary to pursue an academic credential in the United
States. Carlos best explained the experience: “[I took English in] middle school, high
school, I think elementary some classes too, but to be honest, it was always like verb to
be. I just didn't use it. To me, I was never going to need it and look at me now.” Keria
echoed his sentiment: “Well actually I spoke a little bit of English, the English that we
speak in Cuba. It's like, ‘Tom is a boy, Mary is a girl’,” while José described his
experiences with English as “limited English instruction, mainly grammar. But it wouldn't be like writing. There was no…speech. I wouldn't consider myself bilingual with that instruction.” Even for an outlier like Diego, who spent three years taking English as a Second Language in an American high school, additional coursework in EAP was needed: “I didn't do well on the English exam, and I saw that I wasn't ready. I decided that I needed to study English for a little bit, so I wanted to do something like really intensive…I knew I wasn’t ready.” While having to take EAP coursework was not something that the participants welcomed, it is interesting to consider that at the time they entered the College, the only person who had any knowledge of the Honors College was Carolina. Had the participants begun taking classes immediately, it is highly unlikely that they would have been offered an opportunity to enter into the Honors College, as Diego acknowledged: “I had good grades when I came out of high school. I could have applied to the Honors College. I just didn't have the level of...English to actually pass the interview and feel like ready for the program.” Therefore, EAP may well have been a blessing in disguise.

The notion of educational opportunity is also one that played a role in the choices that Carolina, Keria, and Carlos ultimately made regarding their academic pathways. While coming to the United States represented loss not only in the sense of leaving behind their countries, it also meant leaving behind any postsecondary education that was already underway. For all three, entering the American higher education system represented an opportunity to reconsider their academic goals, and all three ultimately chose to pursue a different pathway. After Carolina met all the prerequisites for geophysical engineering, she seized the opportunity to find a new pathway, eventually
deciding to study Business Administration: “At some point, I also realized that it was not maybe the major for me. My sister graduated from that major. It has a lot of physics and math. I love math, but I didn't get along with physics.” Keria also quickly realized that being an economist was something she wanted to leave behind: “When I first started, I realized that I wanted to change my path.” Carlos, too, at a very early point in his academic career in this country, acknowledges that new educational opportunities have had an effect on him when asked about his pathway: “[That]’s kinda hard for me now. I wanted civil engineering. Now, I want to move to something with business.” The ability to pursue a new educational path can be considered a motivator as the participants move forward, especially in the context of the American higher education system as compared to those of Cuba, Venezuela, and Colombia, where students often gain access to a seat in a specific program for a specific major at a certain university and where the type of academic exploration that is encouraged in an American setting may not be possible.

Changing Relationships - “They don't understand any of that.” As they considered the past, the participants also reflected upon their relationships with their families and even with themselves. The younger participants experienced a change in their relationships with their parents as they set out on their own for the first time, or as they found their parents to be unable to provide the support that they had provided in the past. For Carolina, for example, coming to the United States while her parents went to Saudi Arabia for her father’s job meant that, “We have to figure it out, what we’re going to do. [My dad] didn’t want me there with him, it’s too difficult over there.” Eventually, this meant that Carolina was on her own, and this meant finding other family members to rely on, in this case, her cousin:
My cousin [was my main influence]. He gave me a lot of advices. He guide us a lot. He arranged a little place in Little Havana. We rented a house with one of his friends. I got my own room. He was very helpful in those first months.

Although she had already lived on her own in Caracas, Carolina had to develop a new support system in her cousin, relying on him for information and for emotional support.

For Carlos, who had spent his whole life with his mother, a new relationship with his father, someone with whom he had not grown up, meant having to reset his expectations:

This was really hard for me...It changed totally my world because somehow, I expect [my dad] to be like my mother. My mom always kept on top of everything. And that support that I expected from my dad to replace my mother’s hasn't been able to be there for me.

Whereas Carlos was lucky enough to have a parent who had gone through the EAP program himself, Diego had to rely on his grandmother as she became his guide through the educational system:

My grandmother used to be a teacher. She always led me through when I was beginning college. Like my parents didn't know how the system works here, and they never actually advise me on anything. So, it was basically just me just finding out like how things work, talking to people, things like that. [For my parents], I was just going to school. They wanted me to go to school, it didn't matter what program, what major, what career. Even up to this day, they don't understand any of that.

For all the participants, relying on their parents as they had in the past was no longer an option, because their parents too were new immigrants to this country or were living outside of the United States. While Johnny’s father was able to steer him to Miami Dade “because it’s famous,” the amount of guidance that parents could provide was limited, and as José echoed, “My mom, she didn't know about the American education system.”

As a result, navigating higher education became something that led to reliance on the self, as Keria explained: “So then you go to advisors. Some of them tell you something, some
of them say other things. And then it's kind of hard, you have to figure it out by your own. Sometimes you have to go do a little bit of research.” For Emilia, this notion of self-reliance was all about building confidence. In the absence of her parents being with her, I thought…this is really worth it? This is like, I don't know. I was like, I want to be back with my friends and all that, but I am the kind of person that when I feel challenged, I don't want to give up just because it’s like I didn't try.

Having to rely on themselves was something that got the participants started on their way to higher education in the United States. Despite the bumps in the road that participants like Keria and José experienced as they began their journeys, the participants eventually were propelled forward by their motivation and their drive as they found the answers they needed to begin their studies at the community college.

**Theme 2: Forging New Educational Pathways**

While entering a new academic system creates opportunity, the participants also managed to forge their own pathways as they began to experience education in the United States, the second theme that was identified in the interviews. Within this theme, there were four categories that were identified. Due to the nature of attending an English language program in a mostly-Spanish speaking city, participants found themselves forced to create their own immersion to improve their proficiency in their new language (Creating Immersion). In addition, once it was established that each needed to complete additional coursework in English, all of them found ways to create the quickest path to EAP completion either through existing programs or through self-advocacy (Finding the Quickest Path to EAP Completion). A third commonality was that once admission to the Honors College was established as their goal, the participants found a reason to succeed in the EAP program, something that motivated their performance in the classroom.
Finally, all the participants identified ways that these new educational pathways helped them to grow as individuals, especially in the case of the Honors College (Honors as Personal Growth). As a result of taking ownership of their educational journey, the participants grew both academically and socially in unparalleled ways.

Creating Immersion - “It’s kind of hard to practice English here.” According to July 2016 census data, Miami is a city with a population that is 67.7% Latinx (U.S. Census Bureau Quick Facts, 2016), and Miami Dade College proudly declares that it enrolls more minority students than any other college or university in the United States, including a 74% Latinx student population as of Fall of 2017, with the amount of Latinx students in the EAP program totaling 86% (Cubarrubia, 2017). Because of this, immersing oneself in an English-speaking environment as a language learner often proves to be a daunting task. Outside of the EAP classroom, the participants struggled to find ways to use the language since there were so many bilingual Spanish-English speakers who prefer using Spanish, as well as monolingual Spanish speakers. As Keria explained, “It's kind of hard to practice English here in Miami. You ask in English and they answer in Spanish.” Even in an academic setting, such as the one that Diego experienced as a high school student, students struggle to put English to use in daily life: “I didn't get to learn a lot in my high school class ‘cuz mostly…everyone there speaks Spanish. I never had the chance to speak English while I was in high school.”

As the participants were asked about the EAP program and how they learned English in preparation for admission to the Honors College, one of the commonalities was the notion of creating one’s own immersion. As José explained, while in the
classroom, “you are obligated to speak and to communicate with each other in English,”
but “as soon as you leave that door, the classroom door, then you start speaking Spanish.”

José, who had a clear goal of improving his English, quickly realized:

That's not going to help you, so I was mindful about that. Like I didn't become friends with them. I wasn't engaging in Spanish in the classroom, it would be like mixed, half Spanish, half English. When I was at work, if I even knew that you…spoke Spanish, I would still try to speak to you in English.

Similarly, Keria surrounded herself with English on her own terms:

I was trying to get as much as I can from me in every aspect, like writing, speaking, reading. My sister at home, when I was asking in English…she said, “Shut up!” because I know I was not perfect, but I wanted to speak English. I wanted to improve my English as much as I can every day…I just wanted to speak English better every day. Everything was about becoming a better English speaker. It was about…learning every day something new.

Carlos and Carolina tried a different approach, changing the language of their hobbies and passions to English to surround themselves with the sounds of the language. When first asked how he learned English, Carlos said simply, “Netflix.” When pressed, he explained that once he knew he would be coming to the United States, he created his own immersion in Colombia:

And an advice that [my dad] gave me was like try to do everything in English as long as you can. But I was like, “Oh, I can change all my music to, you know, English…Movies too.” So, I started watching Netflix, everything in English, which was a problem in my home because my mother doesn't speak English, so it was like, “I wanna watch a movie with you,” but…, you know, I want to practice this. So that's what helped me like my vocabulary and everything.

Like Carlos, Carolina had also tried to surround herself with English: “I loved the English music. I wanted to know the meaning of the lyrics. I was always finding and translating everything. Thirty to forty percent [of my learning English] was on my own.”

By taking matters into their own hands, many of the participants were able to take ownership of their learning in their country of origin when they knew they would be
coming to the United States or once they had arrived in the U.S. As they quickly embraced the need for a different kind of English than the one they had previously learned, they built their own support for their learning by whatever means was available to them either via media or via creating connections that would help them with getting on track academically. By creating ownership, they were able to set forth in their new academic setting despite what may have been perceived by others as a deficiency.

Finding the Quickest Path to EAP Completion – “I didn’t wanna waste time.” Once the participants understood they would have to take additional English coursework (discussed under the theme of Overcoming Challenges), taking ownership of their academic learning to find the quickest path to completion was an important next step. Except for Carlos (who began with placement in level 3 for two skills, writing and grammar), the participants entered the EAP program with a relatively high proficiency in English, one that required at most two levels of coursework which they completed in either one or two semesters of coursework. Not all the participants were able to find institutional solutions for rapid completion, leading some of them to create their own pathways to move forward.

The various Miami Dade College campuses offer students different options within the EAP program, and most, but not all, offered some type of acceleration during the time that these participants were enrolled. Both the InterAmerican Campus and the Wolfson Campus offer the ACE (Accelerated Content-Based English) program, one which requires students to have a 3.5 GPA in previous EAP coursework (unless they are new students), complete an application, and participate in an interview with a professor before being accepted into a program that combines two semesters of EAP (levels 5 and 6) into
one. The program also requires that students concurrently enroll in a 3-credit introductory psychology course, CLP 1006, the Psychology of Personal Effectiveness, which provides much of the content for the EAP classes. Keria and Johnny, both of whom took their EAP classes at the InterAmerican Campus, took advantage of this option. When asked why he chose it, Johnny explained, “Because the ACE was the fastest, two levels in one semester. Because I didn't want to waste time. Time is running out. I have an age,” with Keria also citing a similar her age and the speed of the program as the reasons why she chose ACE. For students at campuses like Kendall and North, where the ACE program was not offered, an accelerated option was available. In that option, students could complete two semesters in one by taking their four classes and two labs in two back-to-back eight-week mini-terms rather than in one sixteen-week semester. Diego, for example, who did his EAP coursework at the Kendall Campus, completed an astonishing 26 EAP credits in one semester to exit the program, explaining that “in that semester alone that I took level 5 and 6, I learned more than what I learned in 3 years in high school.” Carlos, on the other hand, took one semester of regular coursework and moved on to this accelerated program in his second.

Carlos, who had the lowest initial placement of any participant, explains that he quickly took ownership of his learning because “I was impatient. I wanted to do everything fast, cut corners. I told [my professor], I want to jump. And she was like, ‘Okay. The only way you can jump is taking the PERT.’” Students who are in the EAP program can prove they are college-ready (i.e., may exit the EAP program) by earning the minimum necessary scores that any student completing high school would have to earn in the Reading and Writing sections of the PERT (Postsecondary Education
Readiness Test), Florida’s customized common placement test. If they do not earn the minimum scores, they need to continue their coursework in EAP until they have completed all six levels. As soon as Carlos found out about this option, he was ready to take on the challenge:

I could jump all the grammar of EAP classes, and I was like “OK, cool. Then I don't have to take any more EAP classes.” And once again I was impatient. Yeah, it was like I don't have to take any of these. And like it was…it doesn't work like that. They made me take the last test of level 4, I passed it. They made me take a level five [test], I didn't pass, so you got the PERT, but I didn't have this one.

As a result, Carlos decided to take the quickest program available to him, the accelerated program, taking 20 credits during his second semester at the college.

Other participants were successful in passing the PERT or other forms of testing that allowed them to exit the EAP program quickly. Emilia, for example, shares that, “I came, took the test, and I passed it. So that's why they told me like, ‘Okay, so you don't have to take more EAP classes,’” and as easy as that, she was out of the program after completing one semester of level 5 coursework. For Carolina, who entered the program knowing the Honors College was her goal, and for José, who established it as his goal shortly after starting EAP, testing was also the way to complete the program quickly. Carolina talks about her time in EAP as “waiting for the Honors College” and was eager to “be done”, citing the cost of the program to her parents, as she was admitted on an international student visa and therefore paid out-of-state tuition. For José, who also cited finances as a concern, completing the program was motivated by the Honors College admissions process, which only takes place in the fall semester:

They told me that I think the deadline was February, the deadline to apply. So…after December, I would only have one class which is Writing 6. So that was the dilemma. What I ended up doing is that…I talked to a couple of professors. I was telling them, ‘Hey, I want to apply to the program…Is there a way that I can
test out of level 6?’ And eventually, they gave me like… they saw my grades in the other classes because I had to talk to two professors and they agreed to… let me test. So, they gave me an essay, like I don't know how long they gave me to do that. And eventually, they told me like I got a B on it. With the good grades in the other classes, it was enough for them to let me skip level 6.

All the participants found ways to accelerate their path through the program once they had a clear goal in mind, that of the Honors College. Whether it was through their own advocacy for themselves as students by engaging with professors or with the testing department, or by enrolling in the accelerated programs that some campuses offer, all of them hit fast-forward on their journey to complete the program. As José explains, “I knew [EAP] was a stepping stone. I needed to be done with that. At the same time, I wanted to learn the most I can. I wanted to be bilingual.” As soon as they completed EAP, the participants were ready to apply for the Honors College, despite finding out about it at different times while in the EAP program. However, their ability to steer their own path through the program is something that they all shared.

**Honors as a Goal - “The reward at the end.”** One of the greatest motivators for the participants was finding out about the Honors College and making admission their goal. By doing so, many gave meaning to their EAP coursework, setting themselves apart from their classmates. Carolina was the only participant who began the program with the Honors College as her ultimate end goal, describing her EAP experience as “getting a lot of information and making sure that I will have everything. The results…would be used for the Honors College. To me, it’s like the reward at the end.” Not only would this allow her to continue her studies, ultimately setting out in a new direction, it would also allow her to allay her concerns regarding taxing her parents’ finances. For Carlos, learning about the Honors College gave meaning to his EAP experience:
I started talking to my English professors, and I told them, “Look I really want to get into the Honors College.” And they were like, “That's a really cool goal.” And they started helping me and that that first semester of useless... I learned a lot. So, it wasn't useless. I was like the EAP program is essentially helping me.

In addition, the Honors College represented the opportunity to attend a selective institution after transfer, something he had dreamed of in Colombia but which he never considered a reality:

In that moment like my possibilities went right from zero-point one percent to like twenty percent. I have to put my effort to go there, but now I have the chances to go to one of those. And I somehow managed to get in there!

This sentiment was echoed by Johnny, Keria, and José, who explained it as follows: “I'm grateful to the Honors College because it actually opened my mind to like hey you can go to an elite school. Hey, you can if you don't have money you can get a scholarship.” For Diego, the Honors College goal was the ultimate GPA motivator: “I was really trying hard because I wanted to achieve [a] 3.8,” the minimum necessary average to be accepted into the program.

In reflecting upon their time in the EAP program, the participants mentioned clear academic goals as the difference between themselves and others in the program, while generally praising their fellow classmates for their drive to begin with, especially for those who are older and have families. Carolina summed it up by saying:

I've met many different people: people my parents' age who just arrived from Cuba and just want to learn some English, people my age who just arrived from Cuba or another country. You can find people in their 40s, people that just left high school, that just arrived to that country and have no idea of English. The only thing that they have in common is that at least they're doing something to learn. At least they are...putting a little effort to try to learn the language. I met some people that would take it serious. Other people didn't look very motivated. They were just, like, I don't know what was their goal. My Colombian friend was not sure what she wanted. She didn't have something like a plan. She was more relaxed. You can find anything.
In the end, even more than their academic pathway, finding out that the Honors College was a realistic, reachable goal was something that ultimately motivated the participants to excel in their English classes even more than their own personal motivation, not only because of the opportunity it represented, but also because of the advantages it provided.

**Honors as Personal Growth - “They have an effect on you.”** While the participants can be divided into two distinct groups, those who are currently in the Honors College and those who were reflecting as graduates on their experiences while in the Honors College, there is no doubt that the academic pathway they have chosen has changed them as academics and as human beings. For Carlos, Emilia, and Johnny, the current students, in addition to their academics, the focus was squarely on personal growth that focuses on issues of the self, such as personal strengths, maturity, growing up, and confidence. Carlos appreciated that “they are teaching us in what we’re good at, our strengths,” seemingly overcoming a period where the focus was on the participants’ perceived deficiency in proficiency in a second language. Both Emilia and Johnny specifically mention their willingness to engage with others, with Johnny understanding it as:

And like I'm growing up, ok? Maybe that I'm growing... I wouldn't talk to as many people [that] I talk to now. And, also, now I'm a chemistry tutor, so I speak to a lot of people who I don't even know who they are. So, there has been a change there.

Emilia, on the other hand, reflected on it more deeply:

I feel like a completely different person since I started...I start conversations. I talk to a lot of people. I was very, very shy at the beginning...I didn't like to talk a lot. I never went to the [Honors College] lounge or something. Now I walk around campus, I know a lot of people and I talk to them. Now I feel like I am more engaged, like I volunteer, I do more activities. I put more effort into my work because all people, everybody here is excellent, they are all really good students,
so the fact that sometimes they are doing something, why I'm not doing something like that?

For those who looked back on the process with more time and a bit more distance, the effect of having been a part of the Honors experience had even deeper resonance.

Keria described it as a life-changing experience:

The Honors College…changed my life, my way to see everything in my life. And I think if I hadn't known about the honors program, I wouldn't be the same person right now. The honors program first of all gives students a lot of opportunities, not only financial, they cover all your expenses, they make you be a better person, they make you a successful person. It gives you a lot of opportunities…you learn how to dress, eat, write, socialize, network.

Carolina also looked back on the effect of the honors experience as something that was life-changing for her, and she offered some perspective to better understand the students currently in the program:

It's the people you're interacting with, the challenges you're facing together, all the things I had to be involved in, and how you see the need to reach out to people when you're in the Honors College. Because you have to. It's like you don't realize it at the moment all you're learning because you're so busy like your mind everything is so busy actually doing it. How I interact now with people - it's different: not only professionally, but also in your daily life, like every day you pay more attention, you can see more things, you pay more attention to people and what's going on around you.

As the participants explain, the Honors College carefully selects the students who will reap its benefits. After application and interview, and in the case of the Dual Language Honors College Program at the InterAmerican Campus the additional requirement of demonstration of proficiency in Spanish including an additional essay, honors students are provided full tuition for the two years during which they complete their Associate in Arts (A.A.) at the College as long as they are in good academic standing. In addition, they are also part of a learning community that benefits from colloquia, meetings with dignitaries from the social, political, and economic world, and even the opportunity to
travel in the United States as well as abroad to participate in seminars and conferences.

Asked what sets apart honors students from other students, Carlos argued that honors students are not geniuses and are not necessarily any smarter than other students:

I guess that's part of how the students are. There are three types of students: the bad students that don't care about anything; the average, they just are good at it and do what they have to do; and the ones to go actually higher. To be a success, you always have to try to be in that select group, to be higher than everyone else. That doesn't mean you're better than everyone else. That just means that (A) you know you're good at something and I put some effort - not all - because I know that's enough. And I go and I am at the top…or (B) you know you are not good at something, so you are going to put that effort on that. That's pretty much what I did in EAP.

Success in the academic world is something that the participants attribute to hard work and their clear sense of motivation. It is only through effort, not necessarily only through talent, that access can be gained to the Honors College.

**Theme 3: Building Relationships of Support**

The third theme that the interviews highlighted is the shift from reliance upon the family unit to a focus on building new relationships. Analysis of this theme identified four categories that were the keys to building these relationships: Finding Information to Chart a Course, Finding Reassurance, Finding Community, and finally Cultivating a Desire to Mentor. The participants quickly found that they could no longer rely on their parents as they had in the past, either because their parents were no longer living together with them or because they simply did not have the information that could have helped their children (Finding Information to Chart a Course). Instead, the participants were forced to find ways to build relationships of support in and around their new academic
setting (Finding Reassurance and Finding Community). In addition, the participants showed a desire to help others build their own relationships of support (Cultivating a Desire to Mentor).

Finding Information to Chart a Course - “I didn’t know anything.” The first step to starting a new educational journey required the participants to gather information about higher education in a new country. Inevitably, this led the participants to go through experiences with misinformation, to benefit from chance happenings, and to eventually find their way to begin their journeys. Even for Diego, who was the only participant who graduated from an American high school, finding information on the transition to college was a challenge: “So, in high school, I never got exposed to like how college life was going to be like.” As a result, he found himself struggling to get started like every other participant.

Keria and José, for example, were steered by a cousin and a college advisor, respectively, toward completing a GED. While it is puzzling that they would be led toward completing a high-school equivalency when they had both graduated from high school and could prove completion, with Keria even completing the coursework for a college degree, it is likely that the reason for this recommendation was that a GED in English makes a student exempt from EAP coursework. José quickly gave up on the idea, however: “I was told with a GED, I would be able to skip the EAP classes and go straight to college. This was so little I knew. I ended up getting bored. I didn't go, it was super far. I got frustrated.” Keria, on the other hand, spent one semester completing a GED at a time before exemption was guaranteed. She eventually had to take the CPT, the College Placement Test, a predecessor to the PERT, and was still placed in EAP:
I was not a traditional student. Then I have to do things faster. So, then you go to advisors…They tell you something. Some of them tell you something. Some of them, you know, say other things. And then it's kind of hard. You have to figure it out by your own. Sometimes you have to go do a little bit of research. So, somebody told me that I can complete my GED and then I can continue at Miami-Dade College…There are some people that they give you advice that is not correct. So then at that point I realized that… that semester was in vain because I really didn't have to have my GED.

Despite the misstep, Keria quickly was able to get on track once she entered the EAP program and found a professor who would become her source of correct information and support.

While Carolina was lucky enough to have her cousin to guide her through EAP and into the Honors College, for the rest of the participants the concept of an honors program was not something they understood. Finding out about it, as a result, was something that happened by intervention from a college agent. For some of the participants, the idea of pursuing admittance to the Honors College happened because a professor saw something in them that was promising or that they deemed to be Honors College quality, especially those EAP professors who sometimes teach Honors courses themselves or who have close ties to the program. This was the case for Carlos, for example, who shared that it was a lab instructor who mentioned that he had the right potential: “He was like, ‘You’re the kind of student that goes into the Honors College.’ I didn't know anything about the Honors College. And I was just like, ‘What's the honors program?’” After being told erroneously by a student who worked in the office that “you can’t be accepted here” because he was taking EAP classes, Carlos persevered and got information directly from the Honors College Director. (The student who told Carlos this information was likely referring to the Honors College requirement that states that, “Only first time in college applicants are eligible. This means that at the time of application, the
applicant has not earned any college credit except for dual enrollment.”) Eventually, he knew it was the right choice for him, even rallying his professors for support. Emilia also shared that she didn’t even understand the concept behind the Honors College:

I didn't know anything about the Honors College. I came to Miami Dade, and I didn't have any idea what an honors program was. I didn't even ask. [Professor] F. told me about the program, and when I looked up in the internet about the Honors College, I remember that I looked and I thought, like, I will never get in there. This is this is just for genius, and I even thought of like not applying because I thought, like, I will not get in.

It was also a professor who saw Keria’s promise and who said to her, “’So…would you like to go to the honors program?’ I didn't even know about the honors program.”

In addition to professors who saw the potential in the participants, at times it was college advisors, be it academic or financial aid advisors, who recommended the Honors College. Not knowing anything about the students’ academic potential as recent entries, however, some of the participants were referred there simply because of the financial benefits the Honors College provides. This was the case for Diego, who explained that:

It came out of the conversation with the advisor. I didn't know anything about the Honors College. [She] told me about the program because it was like right across where I was seeing her. [The director] kind of told us what I needed to do to be able to join the Honors College and all of the benefits that it had.

For José, it was more clearly tied to his financial need. Because José’s mom was married at the time, he did not qualify for financial aid, as his stepfather was not a willing contributor to his education:

So, until today I still have loans that I need to pay for that semester. So, I went like two or three times to the financial aid office and one time, out of nowhere, the lady… mentioned “Well, there's this Honors College that if you get in, they'll pay for your classes.”

He went on to explain that for him, finding out was a stroke of luck:
A lady told me if you need financial aid, if you're really desperate…The people in financial aid, they don't know who you are. Just one or two questions and then they just get you out. If it wasn't for that financial aid lady, I wouldn't have found out about that.

José actively wondered if he had not been so eager to find financial support whether he would have ever heard of the program, especially since he was the only participant who took his EAP classes at the Hialeah campus, which has no Honors program of its own.

Like José, Johnny was also interested in the financial benefits of the program, but he benefitted directly from outreach from the Honors College, the only such case mentioned by anyone who participated in the interviews. Even more interesting is that the person who influenced his decision is no one other than Carolina:

I didn't know about the honors. So, I came to find out about it one day because M. [the Honors College director] and one student that also was an ACE student came to a class. So, they came into the class and gave a presentation about the honors and right after that, after the class finished, I went to their office and started asking questions.

In the absence of this type of outreach, José best captured what most of the participants said about finding out about the Honors College: “I think it was just luck that I found out about the honors program, there's no other way to put it.” Had it not been for the support of their professors, or for them reaching out to academic and financial aid advisors, it is likely that many of the participants would have not heard about the Honors College and therefore would not have applied. Once their decision was made, however, this set forth a clear goal for them to reach for, something that motivated their coursework in EAP and further supported their desire to succeed academically.

Finding Reassurance - “They really care about me.” Closely tied to the theme of finding information, the participants also built relationships that would support what was, for many of them, “a dream,” admission to the Honors College. This type of
validation from members of the college community who were well versed in understanding what it takes to gain admission was a key to the feeling of success for the participants. The most direct source of support for the students was that of their EAP professors, and in many cases, they were the ones who first identified Honors as a possibility (for Carlos, a lab instructor; for Emilia and Keria, their EAP professors). Most found that their professors fully supported their decisions. Carlos explained what he felt:

“They really care...Yep, that's what they do every day in different words. They go, ‘Oh, you can do this!’ But I feel [it] all the time. ‘I want you to be a success.’” This was even more convincing for him when it was said by a professor “who had been in the program” and taught classes for the Honors College, something that helped counter what he perceived to be a lack of support from his father:

And they [my professors] started pushing me. So,…EAP gave me the first, the first punch. And then, they kept me working hard. They kept me like, at the end, when they realized I really want to push myself to learn English, they helped me to improve.

The importance of the role of the EAP professors is echoed by other participants, like Diego: “I think what helped me most were my [EAP] professors,” Johnny: “Each time you need something, you would ask them, and they would help,” and Keria, who explained with greater detail:

And then [my professor] saw my learning...ability. I don't know what she saw. She saw that I was determined. But, you know, she talked to me and said, “Hey I think you can do more, what do you think?” She was like the mom that I didn't have here. She was the professional guider. And I always appreciate that.

For students to whom the Honors College was recommended by someone outside of academics, such as José (a financial aid advisor) and Diego (an advisor) or Johnny (another student), finding reassurance within the world of academics was also essential.
Once someone from the College identified this as a possibility, they sought out their professors not only to get validation that this decision was a realistic one, but also for additional support in completing the EAP program.

For the participants who graduated from the Honors College, finding a validator during their time in Honors was also important, as José attributed much of his success to his Honors professors,

Dr. L. is like your personal cheerleader, he'll believe more in you than you will believe in yourself. Until today, like more than a professor, I consider him as a friend, and Professor T. helped me out a lot... The directors would also be helpful, [they were also] your academic advisor.

This is echoed by current students who also give a great deal of gratitude to the Honors College directors for providing them with the correct information about the admissions process, for believing in them as potential candidates, and also for serving as something more. For Johnny, it was his Honors College director who contributed most to his success “because any time I have a problem, I can just go where she is, and she will talk to me, like, to encourage me.” Becoming part of a selective process for students who have been in the country for a short time and are seeking acceptance into a program that makes them compete with students who have grown up speaking the language and who have attained academic excellence is no easy task. As a result, finding someone who believes in you (in addition to yourself) was identified as an important step in the journey toward success.

Finding Community - “I discovered a different type of community.” The participants all discussed notions of fit with two different types of community, the EAP community and the Honors College community. Fit varied mostly depending on academic goals and age and slightly less due to perceived maturity and background. Because everyone in EAP had the common goal of learning English, for many of the
participants, it was easy to find a sense of community. Johnny explained that being an EAP student “was normal. Most of the people that come here to the United States have...to learn English,” a sentiment that was echoed by José, who said, “Being in EAP wasn't unusual or not normal for me. It kinda felt usual, like in Ecuador. We're in a classroom, we're in an English class, it didn't feel different. I wasn’t the exception.” Diego also added that the nature of his coursework also added to his sense of belonging: “I would say like mostly everyone just like we were just like a small group, we were all there from like Monday to Friday like for those hours. And so, we were like a really close group, like we do like activities like outside the classroom,” with Emilia sharing a similar feeling: “I really liked the environment, I started liking the class. Maybe I’m not ready to take [non-EAP] college classes here.” As an older, non-traditional student, Carolina, who felt very much at home in the world of the EAP student, highlighted differences in age and, as a result shared that she “made a lot of friends,” but at the same time, “We were very different. You don't have the same goals. When it's language courses, it's more visible to see …the differences.” Despite the common desire to learn English, there were differences that became more pronounced when it came down to analyzing their own academic goals versus those of their classmates, which eventually created a disconnect for some of the participants.

While not all the participants felt that the Honors College provided a community that made them feel like they belonged, some felt strongly that this was their academic home. Carolina, for example, “discovered a different type of community…You enter into this program where everyone…[is] so motivated and…it's like wow.” Carlos, who had
found that because of his age he did not fit in with his fellow EAP Students, drew a similar comparison:

[Being in the Honors College] feels way better. You know, I know this sounds like a little lonely and stuff,...but right now,...I get into this suite the honors suite and I say hi to everyone, say hi to most of them by their names. And I talk to everyone... Everyone else just came from high school. So, they like a lot of expectations and they all have to do this and sometimes I'm like, “Yo, chill out...that happened to me when I was a freshman back in Colombia, same thing.” Now I feel a bit more like a sophomore in some way. I've helped like two three friends with chemistry. I'm not even taking in chemistry, but they know I know chemistry, so they are like, “Can you help me with this?”...And personal stuff some friends are like going through.

In finding that he possessed experience that differentiated him from others who may have things that he himself lacked, Carlos was able to understand himself as someone who had something to offer, despite any perceived deficiencies.

**Cultivating a Desire to Mentor** - **“I don’t think it’s a good idea for anybody to miss that opportunity.”** While Carlos is just beginning to understand his own ability to support and validate the experiences of other students in his first semester in the Honors College, three of the graduates who participated in the interviews shared a desire to give back to the program. Along with Carolina, who helped to recruit others into the program, José and Keria also expressed their desire to share the Honors College experience with EAP students and the community at large. While Carolina visited classrooms with her Honors College director, José spent much of the end of his interview expressing his desire to return to the InterAmerican Campus during a break to talk to students about the program and about career opportunities beyond the College:

Yeah, I think that if we can give something back to the Honors College, it would be maybe pass out some flyers or have an info session. Or tell the professors to tell the students, right? ‘Coz none of the students mentioned...that. I think that once I got into the IAC [InterAmerican Campus], I was the only one who came from an EAP background.
José pointed out one of the challenges in the present study, the lack of Latinx students who have chosen to apply to Honors College after completing EAP. Keria also expressed that, as someone who works at the College,

> I've been advising a lot of students about the honors program. I would say 90 percent of the students, they're transferring from high school to college, they don't even know about the honors program. I don't think it's a good idea for anybody…to miss that opportunity. I think one of the most important things is to advise students…that there is an option.

Only Diego, also a graduate, did not bring up the desire to mentor other students, but this may well be due to his lack of connection to the Honors College community, as is explained under the final theme, Overcoming Challenges.

**Theme 4: Overcoming Challenges**

The one thing that binds the participants together is their ability to overcome challenges, the final theme that the interviews revealed, including academic challenges, social challenges, and transitional challenges. These challenges were related to life in a new country and in a new educational system, but inevitably led to a greater reliance on the self, one that could be best understood as growing maturity as well as acculturation to the system of American higher education. Within this theme, there were six categories that were identified. The first category considers Migration as a Challenge, as participants had to overcome the transitional challenges of life in a new country, in a new language, within a new educational context. The second through fourth categories, EAP as an Obstacle, Academic Writing and Speaking as Challenges, and Overcoming Doubt, all are tied to the academic experiences of the students. These challenges are closely tied to participants’ identity as second language learners who were now studying in English, something that was not necessarily part of their academic plans before they came to the
United States. The next category, Time Management as a Challenge, is specifically tied to participants’ experiences as Honors College students, and is a combination of academic and social challenges. The final category, Not Finding Community, reconsiders a category discussed in Theme 3, Building Relationships of Support, to include the experiences of all participants across two different programs, the EAP Program and the Honors College, as they considered their fit within each program and each community.

**Migration as a Challenge - “Everything started to be so complicated.”**

Leaving behind one’s country (the known) and coming to the United States (the unknown) was a common challenge for many of the participants, especially for those like Emilia, Keria, and Carolina, who came here on their own. Even for José, however, who came with his family, the process of getting used to life in a new country was no easy task:

> Once I got here the transition was very difficult because I had like no friends. I didn't speak the language and I was 18. I would ask a lot of questions. It was difficult for me to adapt to the culture. It was a little bit of culture shock… the majority were Cuban. They spoke Spanish so…that kind of balanced things out.

Not only did the participants have to start anew, some of them had to now take charge of their own lives, adding adjustment challenges to those related to education. While Carolina had already experienced college away from her hometown, she was lucky that she had family support to help with the transition:

> I was already used to it, like, to manage my expenses…by myself in Caracas. So, for that in Miami when I arrived,… I had to find out how it would be,… starting with my cousin and obviously trying to you know understand everything, the system, how do you do everything in the US… And then I'm talking about like that responsibility of doing well in school.

For Emilia, who had never been on her own before, this challenge was happening in a new country and in a different language:
When I was in high school in the Dominican Republic, I knew everything. Not everything, but I knew the city, I knew the people…I didn't know what I was doing. In high school, I was a good student, I graduated with honors and all that, and coming here and everything started to be like so complicated, like even going to the gas station and putting gas in my car was like a task for me. I remember like: the apartment was a mess, because I didn't know, Oh, this is how you clean your clothes, Oh, this is how you clean this, Oh, this is how you cook. And yeah, I remember I cry a lot at the beginning because I miss my friends and I miss my mom and my dad and all of that.

In this process, as Emilia explains, she went from a world of knowing everything around her to one of not knowing how to do the most basic of tasks. Not only was she experiencing life in a new country, she was also doing it alone.

EAP as an Obstacle - “I'm not moving.” Faced with entering a new academic system, the first experience for the participants was that of having their level of proficiency in English assessed, then having to face the news that they would not be able to begin taking classes toward their major until they completed further coursework in English. For all of them, this was unwelcome news, even if they knew deep inside that it was necessary. Diego viewed EAP as a “delay,” but acknowledged that he needed it, while Carlos referred to it as a “step back”:

It's true, I'm taking four classes, but those four classes are just English. I'm not…spending [time] in other classes, like I'm not thinking anything else. So, at first, I thought it was a step back…I can understand why people don't complete the EAP program ‘cuz the way I felt it was like, I mean, this is useless. And I was talking to my friends in Colombia and they were like, “Oh I'm studying second semester, third semester.” They're doing all their stuff. It was like, “I'm not moving!!!”

Emilia had a reaction that echoed Carlos’ experience:

I remember that day was like really mad: “Mom, I can't believe I still have to take English classes after all these years studying.” I was kind of sad. Because when I talk to my friends in the Dominican Republic, they were like, “I'm taking this math. I'm taking this thing,” so I was like, “Oh my God, I can't believe that I am a year behind all of them taking English.”
Placement in the EAP program, one that was originally deemed “useless” by Carlos, was viewed by the participants as a roadblock and a detour on their academic journey. Despite knowing that it was necessary, none of them actively embraced the experience until they began taking classes. It was not until they began to create relationships with professors, focused on learning academic English, and established their immediate academic goal as acceptance in the Honors College that they began to understand that this was a necessary step in their academic growth.

**Academic Writing and Speaking as Challenges - “It’s different speaking the language than writing the language.”** Once in the EAP program and eventually in the Honors College, the greatest challenge for the participants was writing, specifically written academic English. Carolina explains her perspective along the lines of Carlos’s “useless” claim by saying, “I thought [EAP] would be not much work, like more relaxed, just language classes. You have so many things to do here and then essays...I felt like a sponge.” Quickly, the participants started realizing that there was great value in their EAP coursework. Emilia explained the need as:

So, you know that essays here have like a very specific format, and I wasn't familiar with that format. I spent more time practicing because I think it's different speaking the language than writing the language, so that was a very challenging class for me.

José had a similar experience: “First, writing is a challenge, and doing it in another language is more difficult. Writing was still an issue [in the Honors College],” with Carolina adding that for her:

It was one of the hardest parts. I feel like not many people take it serious. You can speak English but not everyone can write English, can write a good essay or something that makes sense. It represented a bit more difficulty for me. I had work a little extra on it.
Speaking posed a challenge as well, with Keria mentioning that her accent “that will stay with her forever” has affected her confidence, while José remembered his “broken English” when he first arrived in the United States. Academically, both Johnny and Diego mentioned the effect of speaking a second language as a non-native speaker as a challenge they had to overcome. Johnny shared that speaking was always something that he had to overcome in class, “I had a…professor in Cuba but I never practiced English. So that was my main problem: speaking,” and something that he felt put him at a disadvantage when he applied to Honors College, “The most difficult part was the interview. I got really, really, really nervous. I was so nervous that I got out of the room and I forgot everything.” For Diego, his lack of confidence in speaking was even more extreme: “I would not do a presentation even if that gave me an F. I did avoid almost all of my presentations during college. It was until this semester [his final semester at FIU] that I started doing presentations and overcame that fear.” Overcoming these immediate challenges takes time, and it was done either, as Diego did, by relying on oneself, or by asking for help, something that the participants said was a key to their academic success. As Emilia explained, asking for help may not come easily to academic achievers, but it is a necessary step for academic success in the Honors College:

V. [the Honors College director] always says that Honors College students don't like to ask questions just because they don't want to look like, you know, they don't know something. So, something that I learned in the process and - I think was the most important thing that makes me successful - is asking for help. Even though you will not look like the smartest person in the room,… if you think that you are the smartest person in the room, then you are in the wrong place, because no one can contribute to yourself. So, yeah,… I remember there were other students that they said like, “Oh, I will not take my papers to the Writing Center. I will not ask other people to read my papers,” because they said like, “I know what I'm doing and I know I'm smart” and whatever. So that person that told me that made me that feel bad, so like I have to ask for help all the time. He is not here anymore (laughter).
The participants credited their professors greatly for their willingness and ability to help them succeed, both in the EAP program and in the Honors College. Even though asking for help represented a paradigm shift for many of them, as Carolina explained, it was new for her to send e-mails to the professor and go to office hours because “that is just how the system works.”

**Overcoming Doubt - “I thought I was going to fail.”** Not every professor, unfortunately, was supportive of the participants on their academic journey. While most professors were praised for their willingness to support the participants academically and emotionally, it is worth mentioning that three participants had negative experiences with professors that they had to overcome.

Keria and José faced a different sort of challenge from the same professor, one who believed that Honors students should be better than regular college students, and who was vocal in making students feel that they did not belong in the program if they did not meet her standards. Professor D. was a long-time professor of English who taught the honors section of the introductory composition course, ENC 1101. Not all classes that honors students take are designated as honors only, but this is one of the classes that is. Keria describes Professor D. as someone who “contributed in a negative way” to her success by making her doubt herself, her academic ability, and indeed whether she even belonged in the honors program:

> It was in a negative way that I overcame [it], and it was a lesson for me. That professor made me struggle so much, but so much that I was thinking I’d quit. Once I got to my house, and I told my [now] husband, “Hey, I’m going to quit!” She was she was not only tough with that class itself like, you know, in front of the class. She would say, …because normally, the first class she'd give us something to write and then she'd grade [it] and then the next class she comes and
she said, “Hey, you don't even deserve to be in the Honors College...How will you graduate from Miami-Dade College if you don't even know how to write?”

On one occasion, the questions became more personal:

I went...to her office once. And she told me... I'm not going to tell you what she told me. She told me a lot of things. She told me at the point that I started crying. I started crying. She made me cry. I thought I was going to fail. I can tell you that I ended up that class with a B, but I started I think with a Z, like zeta! It was a really bad experience for me. But because of that professor, right now, I know how to write. Right now, I understand that every little detail, everything that I know about writing is because of her.

Eventually, the experience with this professor was proof to Keria that she was determined enough and resilient enough to make it through the Honors College. And this redemption did not go unnoticed by Professor D.:

[S]he knew that I struggled at the beginning, but I worked so hard. And then, the end of the story was that at the end of the semester, all professors, they meet up and they have, like you know, like a lunch or something like that. And then all professors, they speak about something during the semester. I wasn't there because it's all professors, but Monica [the Honors College Director] just told me the story. But Monica said, “Keria,... at this meeting, this Professor,....she stands up in the middle of the meeting and she said, “I wanted to talk about a student that she was most,” she said, “the most determined student I have ever had in my life.”

The student she was talking about was, of course, Keria. A similar experience with Professor D. was shared by José, who described her as someone “who raised the standard, who raised the bar.” In setting her expectations highly, she was not picking on students who had an EAP background. Instead, explained José:

She was like it doesn't matter if you come from an ESOL background, like that is no excuse. She would be tough, she would make me doubt myself, she might make me feel bad. But at the same time, she would make it work...It's like I got little bit of an insight from what it's like in a big university, like, for instance, discussion classes that are like being in Professor D.’s class.

In the end, José rationalized Professor D.’s approach as her means to prepare students for the highly selective college and university path that the majority of Honors College
students choose to follow. It is interesting that although both of the participants describe the process as unpleasant in no uncertain terms, they both gave credit to Professor D.’s doubt in their ability to awaken their fortitude as learners, especially as those of a second language. By being held to a standard equal to their honors counterparts, many of whom had spent their whole lives in the American high school system, they were able to find even greater validation by finding the strength to move past this experience.

Carolina, on the other hand, had an experience before applying that challenged her thinking. Although she was the most determined of the participants to want to enter the Honors College, when she asked her EAP professor for a letter of recommendation, she was taken aback by his response:

And I asked him, and he is like, ‘Oh no, Honors College, … those kids are like robots. Because you know grades, grades, grades, I need to get an A! When you talk to them, it's like everything it's like, you know, if you don't have an A...They all want things their own way.’ And I'm like OK.

Carolina did not let this affect her negatively, and upon further reflection, she came to understand his response as a warning regarding the challenges she would face as an Honors student:

It's just that that they [the Honors College leaders] demand so much time. And then once you’re starting, they tell you immediately, you know, if you're not involved, you have to do this, do that, you have to get in this. So, I guess that's why the professors say that they're [the Honors College students] robots just because they… have a lot that you have to do.

Her analysis of his response is plausible when one considers that time management was an issue that many of the participants identified as a challenge.

**Time Management as a Challenge - “I thought I could do everything. And now I realize…”** The demands placed on students in the Honors College are considerable, but these demands also provide the students with a wealth of opportunities.
Carlos explained it best when he said, “Once again, when I told you everything that the Honors College gives us, that’s awesome. But it also takes a lot of from us.” Students are not only expected to succeed in their academics, taking a minimum of fifteen credits per semester, but they are also expected to be part of monthly Colloquia, to take part in on-campus activities, to become members of clubs, and even to hold leadership positions in those clubs or in student government. As Johnny put it, “I didn't have as much stress [in EAP] as I have now. Now, I don't have a life.” Because the Honors College pays for tuition and therefore allows those who qualify for financial aid to keep their money to be put to use for other purposes, Honors students are not forced to continue working. Yet some, like José who did not qualify for assistance, had to continue working:

When I was in college, I had to work. When I was in Miami-Dade, I worked 28 hours a week. Like, I would go to school, like I remember my days at InterAmerican campus would be …from sometimes I had class at 7, sometimes I had class at 8 or 8:30,…so it would be from whatever time that is until like around 1:30 or so or two. And so, my shifts were from three to eight, so like mornings school, so then go to that, traffic from InterAmerican to Miami Lakes, where I worked. It was not easy. Sometimes it was just like too much.

Despite this, José was a leader on his campus, president of the Phi Theta Kappa Honors Club, maintained a 4.0 GPA, and eventually was awarded a Jack Kent Cooke Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship, marking the first time he was able to attend college without having to work.

For students who don’t face the pressures that José did, the Honors College builds in time management skills as part of its required IDH (interdisciplinary honors) seminar, a course that is required of all honors students during each semester of enrollment. Emilia specifically mentions an exercise where she had to keep a diary of her use of time, revealing to her that she was not using her time properly: “So now, I have to, like, I write
everything down and I know later what I have to do. I make my priorities, and I make like a monthly list, a weekly, daily, something, so that helps me a lot.” In doing so, she was able better find a way to manage the demands placed on her by the Honors College, while reminding us, as Carlos does, “So I thought I could do everything. And now I realize, ‘Yo, no you can't.’ You can't. Even if you want to, if you put your whole self in that sometimes, you just have to go through one thing or the other... And you know I put my priorities...school comes first.”

**Not Finding Community - “I never felt like I fit in, really.”** While some participants were able to find community either in the EAP program or in the Honors College, with some even finding it in both, others were not as lucky. Finding community in EAP was closely tied to age, as Carlos, the youngest participant, said:

> You can say that: EAP program, old people; Honors College, young people. The youngest person [in EAP] was 22,…she had her life, boyfriend, job, everything. Most of the students are older people. They were like go to class and leave to whatever: your life, children, work.

This likely explains why he was so eager to establish his sense of community in the Honors College. Indeed, Carlos has a point. The average age of an EAP student is 26 years old, as compared to the average age of an Honors College student, which shows that, according to data from 2015, 97.8% of Honors College students are between 18-20 years old, with 1.1% younger than 17 and 1.1% between 21-25 years old (Miami Dade College’s Institutional Effectiveness, 2015b). For Keria, who entered the Honors College at 26, this meant a reason for rushing: “I was not a traditional student. I have to do things faster.”
Finding community in the Honors College was challenging for some members of the study, but more so for those who did not attend the Dual Language Honors College Program. For Diego, there was a clear distinction between him and others:

I couldn't [fit in] that much with the Honors College ‘coz everyone there had like a different level. They'd been through high school for several years or they were born here, they speak perfect English, and there was I, who had just learned everything in one semester. Even though the Honors College group, it was around like 50 people also that try to achieve the same thing [a sense of community like EAP], I never felt like I fit in really. Everyone knew more English than I did.

Emilia used similar wording to describe how she felt before applying to the Honors College and thinking about her chances:

I was really nervous because I was competing to get in with the students that, in my mind, have like certain advantages with me: They studied here, they knew the country, the system, they took the SAT. I thought they have more things to offer than what I have.

Despite this, both were able to succeed in the Honors College.

For the three students who attended the Dual Language Honors College program at the InterAmerican Campus, the experience was slightly different. To gain admission, students must demonstrate a high Spanish-language proficiency in addition to English (proven by SAT 2 or AP scores) and they must also write an additional essay in Spanish. These students also go on to complete a minimum of two courses in Spanish while in the Honors Program, courses such as Biology or Humanities, that are offered completely in the language. For Carolina, José, and Johnny, this was a natural fit for their backgrounds since it acknowledged and valued their academic experiences in their countries of origin and because their ability in Spanish also gave them, as José terms it, “a competitive edge” to enter the program. While Carolina found community with those who shared a similar sense of academic motivation, José found his belonging to the program challenged by
Honors students from other campuses. While participating in the Salzburg Global Citizen Seminar, he had an experience that made him question his sense of belonging:

And, actually, I kinda, uhm, there were some gossiping like from all the other Honors College campuses, that they will stereotype, I feel that they will think that…that they all came from Cuba like in a raft yesterday. They have broken English and stuff like that. So, I can have that perception, but then because of that time like we hung around with students from the other campuses…it wasn't like too much, but the thing is that I did hear a comment, like, because the thing is that one of my close friends at IAC, he actually doesn't speak Spanish very well. So, then somebody made the comment that they thought that he…came from Kendall campus or Wolfson because he spoke English very well. At the same time, like, we had the highest, at least in my time, the highest...first year retention and we've got Jack Kent Cooke students three years in a row, you know, so they can say whatever they want.

While José did not have difficulty finding community on his campus, Johnny had a different view of his fellow students, one of unearned entitlement:

I feel like they think they are like superior to other people and to regular students. Like they don't talk to regular students. Most of them don't talk to them and the way they act. Even inside the lounge like they are better than you. I just don't talk to them. And I told them once I don't want to be your friend. I don't even care what you think about me.

Honors students are indeed different from regular students. They are afforded benefits and opportunities that others are not, but Johnny, whose EAP background has given him a different perspective, struggled to reconcile this identity, later adding: “[About 50%] have changed [their thinking about differences between Honors and non-Honors students]. I don't know. Maybe they've realized that even in the regular students among them, there are people that are even more intelligent than honor students.” Despite not finding community or being challenged in their sense of community by others with different perceptions, there is no doubt that the Honors College purposefully views itself as building a learning community through its various activities, and that many of the
participants found a sense of belonging in this community despite their backgrounds which made them different from its other members.

**Summary**

Table 4

*Themes, Categories, and Participant Quotes*

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<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Participant Quote</th>
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<td>Understanding Leaving One’s Country</td>
<td>It’s a lot of pressure for someone who’s leaving a country.</td>
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<td>Changing Relationships</td>
<td>They don’t understand any of that.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Theme 2: Forging New Educational Pathways</td>
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<td>Finding the Quickest Path to EAP Completion</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Honors as a Goal</td>
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<td>Honors as Personal Growth</td>
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<td>Theme 3: Building Relationships of Support</td>
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<td>Finding Community</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Not Finding Community</td>
<td>I never felt like I fit in, really.</td>
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The four themes and the seventeen categories within each theme are represented in Table 4. The reasons for much of the success (Research Question 1) that the
participants experienced or created themselves are to be found under Theme 2, Forging New Educational Pathways, and Theme 3, Building Relationships of Support. Theme 4, Overcoming Challenges, directly corresponds to Research Question 2, while Theme 1, Making Sense of the Past, also includes some aspects related to questions about how participants surmounted challenges. The differences in the experience of being an EAP student versus being an Honors College student (Research Question 3) are found throughout the interviews but point to the need for greater interpretation. Both a discussion of the answers to the research questions based on the participants’ responses as well as the presentation of a grounded theory model that helps to explain the trajectory that the participants follow from the EAP program to the Honors College are presented in the section that follows.

According to Miami Dade College data, 4 years after the Fall 2008 began taking classes, 32.6% of first time in college students had graduated, whereas for the cohort of students who began in EAP during that semester, only 12% had reached graduation (Cubarrubia, 2017). After 8 years, the number of graduates who are non-EAP students rises to 44.5%, whereas EAP students still do not reach one quarter of the population, with just 23.4% having graduated (Cubarrubia, 2017). Completing the EAP program and gaining admission to the Honors College is no easy task. As shown by the participants’ responses, the journey requires a great deal of personal effort, of finding one’s orientation, of relying on others and relying on oneself, and of constantly overcoming roadblocks that are placed along the journey to meet one’s academic and personal goals. While the participants share common educational milestones along the journey, their willingness to openly share how they experienced the journey, the challenges they faced,
and the successes that they celebrated along the way allows us to better understand how they were able to defy the statistics that describe EAP students.
Chapter 5: Discussion

The findings of this qualitative study emanate from an interpretative phenomenological analysis blended with a grounded theory approach to understand the experiences of seven Latinx community college participants’ journeys from the EAP program to the Honors College. Students were invited to share their experiences on this journey from its inception and to their Honors College experience. The research questions that guided the study put the participants’ voices at the forefront and invited them to explain in their own words, thoughts, and feelings, their pathway to success along the trajectory, as well as their ability to overcome challenges. The study was guided by the three primary research questions:

(1) How do Latinx EAP students describe what led to their success on their journey from completing the EAP program to the Honors College at the community college?

(2) How do they describe the challenges they faced on this journey and how they overcame them?

(3) How do these learners describe the EAP experience as compared to that of the Honors College?

Inevitably, these questions were expanded upon by the responses of the participants to include insight into the first steps of their journey into the EAP program, as this was a crucial part of understanding each participant’s background. The goal of the study was to create an opportunity to hear these students’ voices, many of which have been seldom heard in previously published literature. In doing so, this study tells the story
of success for Latinx students as they travel from the most open access program at Miami Dade Community College, the EAP program, to the institution’s most selective program, the Honors College. According to data from Miami Dade College based on students of the 2008 cohort, only 23% of EAP students graduated with a degree or a certificate from the College after eight years, with that number shrinking to just 5% after three years (Cubarrubia, 2017). The participants in the current study belong to this exclusive group of students or are on track to become part of this select group upon graduation. One aim of this study is to better understand how these students were able to pave their road to success and how these findings can be used to improve services not only for high potential, high-achieving EAP students who are still in the process of completing the program, but also for other students who have learned English as a second language and who seek to pursue secondary education beyond that of the EAP program.

This chapter begins with an introduction to a grounded theory model that captures the categories that were identified within the four themes first presented in Chapter Four: (1) Making Sense of the Past, (2) Forging New Educational Pathways, (3) Building Relationships of Support, and (4) Overcoming Challenges. The model is explained and its relationship to the research questions is explored. Next, model fit is assessed within the context of both theoretical and the empirical literature to better understand to what extent the results are consistent with or divergent from existing theory and research on Latinx students. The section that follows acknowledges the limitations that may affect the study, before considering implications, including those for practice in the EAP program and Honors College of Miami Dade College, as well as those for institutional stakeholders.
and policymakers. Finally, recommendations for additional research on EAP students and their academic journeys that extend the scope of this study are presented.

**Latinx Community College Students’ Journeys from EAP to the Honors College**

According to Thornberg and Charmaz (2012), a theory “states the relationships between abstract concepts and may aim for either explanation or understanding.” Charmaz (2014) further explains that “theories try to answer questions…[and] offer accounts for what happens, how it ensues, and may aim to account for why it happened. Theorizing consists of the actions involved in constructing these accounts” (p. 228). In approaching the construction of a grounded theory, the researcher concurs with Charmaz’s (2014) contention that theorizing is a “social action that researchers construct in concert with others in particular places and times” (p. 234) As she explains, while we “interact with data and create theories about them, we do not exist in a social vacuum” (p. 234). Based on this understanding, it is important to consider Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) definition of theory as “a set of well-developed concepts related through statements of relationship, which together constitute an integrated framework that can be used to explain or predict phenomena” (p. 15). This study embraces the constructivist approach to grounded theory, one which “places priority on the studied phenomenon and relationships with participants and other sources of data” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 239). As such, this study considers how participants construct meanings and actions in specific situations. As Charmaz (2014) suggests, the current study “not only theorizes the interpretive work that the research participants do, but also acknowledges that the resulting theory is an interpretation” (p. 239). Moreover, it fully takes into account that
the theory “depends on the researcher’s view; it does not and cannot stand outside of it” (p. 239).

An introduction to the model begins with the metaphor of the journey, one which for the purposes of the creation of this model is presented in a linear fashion. The model takes the stories that are presented in the findings that precede this discussion and situates the experiences of the participants along a journey-like continuum, one that is captured by the visual metaphor of a winding road. This winding road is made up of two lanes, one that is symbolized by knowing, outlined in green, and one that is symbolized by not knowing, outlined in red. While the model acknowledges that students may be moving between lanes constantly as they progress along the journey, it focuses on the common experiences that participants shared in telling their stories as they progressed on their educational journeys.

The journey contains six main educational milestones common to the participants. These are marked in the model in purple and include: (1) Desire to Continue Education in the U.S; (2) EAP Placement; (3) Application to Honors; (4) Honors Acceptance; (5) EAP Completion, either through completion of the required sequence of course or through completion of additional exit testing; and, for four of the seven participants (6) Honors Completion, completion of the Associate of Arts (A.A.) degree at Miami Dade College, allowing for transfer to a four-year institution. The model looks as follows:
Figure 1. A Grounded Theory Model for the Journey from EAP to the Honors College
Along the pathway, the participants’ shared experiences (categories) are placed in blocks in one of the two lanes of knowing (in green) and not knowing (in red), or in between the two lanes (in blue). The determination as to where these different experiences were placed was based upon an analysis of the participants’ stories as shared in the findings that precede this section. While the order of the experiences can vary somewhat from participant to participant, the model accounts for the most commonly shared experience as a means of portraying the journey that the participants traveled through. Each category presented in the model is followed by a label (e.g., T1 = Theme 1) indicating which theme each category belongs to (see Table 4: Themes, Categories, and Participant Quotes).

**From desire to continued education in the U.S. to EAP placement.** The model begins with the decision to pursue an academic path in higher education in the U.S. It is highlighted by the knowledge that the desire to continue along this path is more important than any of the challenges that will be faced at the beginning of the journey. Between the first two milestones, the majority of the categories are represented in the model in red, placing these experiences in the lane of not knowing. For any student who is an immigrant, leaving behind one’s country, whether it is with family or on his or her own, marks an experience that is defined by going from knowing to not knowing. The period before leaving one’s country is defined by established family relationships, an understanding of the educational pathway as defined by the country’s educational system (e.g., Carolina’s and Carlos’ time at university studying engineering in Venezuela and Colombia, respectively, or Keria’s almost completed study of economics in Cuba), a
clear way of managing daily life, and the ability to rely on family, friends, and others for information, as needed.

For the participants, the period of “I didn’t know anything” began almost immediately after setting foot in the U.S.. They suddenly found themselves at a loss for information on how to navigate not just daily life in a new country, but also a new educational system, with many not knowing where to start or where to go. As they struggled with their future, the participants were also grappling with making sense of the past. First, they were trying to make sense of leaving their country of origin (e.g., Carolina’s desire to get a visa by any means, José’s initial thought that he would return to Ecuador, or Keria’s leaving her country on her own). At times, starting anew meant having no friends or local support system (e.g., José and Emilia). Moreover, this period led to changing relationships, as their formerly knowing parents now struggled to understand life in a new country (e.g., Johnny and Diego) or were no longer physically with the participant as a means of support (e.g., Emilia, Carlos, and Carolina). In addition, for these high-achieving students, their academic self-concept changed abruptly from one of a successful achiever (knowing) to one who is labeled deficient (not knowing) because of their inability to meet a set standard of proficiency in English. The first steps into higher education, therefore, involve coming to terms with this label and accepting that additional coursework in English is necessary before being able to start on their desired academic pathway.

The driving force behind the participants’ decision-making process, and the one that eventually led them to the College, was the desire and belief that in order to get ahead, education, at first in building English proficiency and later in an academic
pathway, was crucial to their future success. The one aspect that the participants had
direct control over was that of creating their own immersion by finding ways to surround
themselves with English. At times, students had to overcome wrong information (e.g.,
Keria and José), to chart their academic pathway in the U.S. At the same time, the
participants were grappling with leaving behind their country of origin, learning to rely
on themselves in the absence of their parents, and overcoming the basic everyday
challenges of life in a new country where the language and the culture are different from
that of their countries of origin (e.g., Emilia).

**From EAP placement to application to Honors and Honors acceptance.** Once
the students were placed in the EAP program, there was a shift in the journey to a place
between knowing and not knowing. The most important determining factor during this
part of the journey was finding an academic goal and focusing on the goal, that of
admission to the Honors College. Except for Carolina, all the participants found out about
the Honors program once they had enrolled in the EAP program. The students’
subsequent decision to pursue admission into the Honors College strengthened their
motivation to learn English, which propelled them toward this goal of entry.

After having to overcome a lack of information about the Honors College, the
participants set forth on their journey to Honors. On the way, they continued to create
their own immersion (e.g., Keria’s attempts to surround herself with English at all times,
José’s attempts to use only English at work), while at the same time they looked to find
their place in their new educational community. Both creating immersion and finding
community are placed here in a space between knowing and not knowing. This reflects
the push and the pull between the use of the language in daily life (Spanish-focused) and
in the classroom (English-focused), as well as the inability for every participant to find community within the EAP program. Finding community proved difficult for some participants because of differences in age (easier to find for non-traditional students who were surrounded by other adults) and because of differing academic goals (more likely for participants in an accelerated academic program versus those who thought their fellow EAP students were “just learning English”). One area that is placed in the area of knowing is that of finding reassurance, as the participants found support from their professors, who not only voiced their belief in their ability to earn admission to the Honors College, but also actively helped with the application process by providing additional test preparation, writing recommendations, and offering advice. This second part of the journey ends with being accepted into the Honors College, as well as with the completion of the EAP program.

**From EAP completion to Honors completion and beyond.** The final part of the journey is one that is marked by a greater sense of knowing as compared to the previous two stages. The participants had grown substantially in their knowledge after having had at least one semester to learn about the American system of higher education, and in some cases, up to a year. One benefit of acceptance into the Honors College was a growing sense of financial stability, with academic costs covered by the program, and consequently, a clearer sense of meaning for the participants’ academic pathway. However, despite this, academic writing and speaking continued to be a challenge. Nonetheless, there also came the sense that the participants were able to overcome their doubts and become successful members of the Honors College. While some participants found a strong sense of community in the Honors College, others struggled to find their
place. As was the case in the EAP program, finding community was yet again tied closely to academics. It was easier for participants with a strong sense of academic confidence to find their place in the Honors College (e.g., Carolina and Emilia) than for those who still doubted their abilities, especially linguistically (e.g., Johnny and Diego). Age, on the other hand, seemed not to be as salient, with the youngest participant, Carlos, relishing his role as the mature freshman, whereas, Keria and Carolina, found community despite their non-traditional student status. In addition, time management was also something that participants were not previously forced to contend with. Using the tools provided by the Honors College, however, they were able to grow in their ability to handle the challenges they faced regarding their ability to invest time to both academic and non-academic pursuits. Both beginning students and graduates acknowledged that the Honors College provided them with tremendous opportunities for personal growth, allowing them to focus on their strengths as students as well as giving them opportunities to become leaders and engaged members of their communities. Finally, the model captures the desire of most of the graduates interviewed who wanted to mentor other students, especially those of an EAP background who show the potential to one day become Honors College students.

**Finding the Answers to the Research Questions through the Model**

The model presented here addresses the research questions in several ways. The first research question examined how participants found success through their journey into the EAP program to the Honors College. The findings indicate that there are two key predictors of participants’ success. These include: (1) a growing sense of self-reliance and self-determination (found in the categories of Desire to Continue Education,
Changing Relationships, and Honors as Personal Growth) and (2) goal-setting as a means of creating meaning for study (found in the categories of Finding Information, Finding the Quickest Path to EAP Completion, and Honors as a Goal). The second research question focuses on how students overcome the challenges they face along the journey. The participants indicated that their means of overcoming challenges included (1) self-reliance in order to overcome perceived deficiency (found in the categories of Creating Immersion, Overcoming Doubt, Getting Information), (2) a willingness to be vulnerable and ask for help when needed (found in the categories of Finding Information and Academic Writing and Speaking), and (3) receiving validation from faculty and Honors College directors (Finding Reassurance). Included in this final category would be overcoming invalidation (found in the category of Overcoming Doubt) in the case of two participants. For many of the participants in this study, questions surrounding success and challenge became intertwined as they considered success itself to be the ability to overcome a challenge. As shown in the model, the participants operated from a stance of overcoming challenge because they began their journey squarely in the area of not knowing, something which affected their understanding of what success means as they created their own small victories along the way. The third research question focuses on the nature of the EAP experience as compared to that of the Honors College. The model answers this question through the creation of its two lanes of knowing and not knowing, highlighting how through time and through their experiences in their journey, the participants travel from mostly not knowing to mostly knowing. The EAP experience is marked by the transition to a new country, as well as a new program which seeks to address the participants’ “not knowing” English. The Honors College experience, on the
other hand, is marked not only by the celebration of the participant as one who belongs (both in the Honors College and, therefore, in the realm of American higher education), but also as one who knows and who can therefore potentially share information with others. Visually, the model shows a great shift from categories that are in red to those that are in blue and green, as the participants’ experiences helped them grow in their sense of knowing.

**Assessing Model Fit with the Theoretical and Empirical Literature**

In this section, the findings from the present study through the model are compared to the theories and works of research that were reviewed in Chapter 2. This section focuses on three primary areas. First, it considers to what degree the current study finds evidence of the different forms of capital identified by Yosso (2005) in her Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) Framework and in Rendón et al.’s (2014) expansion of the framework. This section then reviews the importance of Rendón’s (1994) theory of validation. Finally, this segment looks to previously published research to understand Latinx college students’ pathways to success to consider to what degree that literature also describes EAP students who have gained acceptance in the Honors College.

**Exploring and expanding Community Cultural Wealth (CCW).** The findings of this study create a better understanding for a framework of success that Latinx community college EAP students follow on their journey to the Honors College. Most importantly, the study strongly confirms a variety of forms of capital that Yosso (2005) describes in her CCW Framework and in Rendón et al.’s (2014) expansion of the framework. Yosso’s (2005) challenge to Bourdieu’s theory as presented in her theory of CCW, as discussed in Chapter 2, allows for reflection on the capital that students of
color, such as the participants in this study, bring to the process of navigating through the American higher education system. Indeed, this study found ample evidence that the participants were able to employ the “array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts” (Yosso, 2005, p. 77) they possess to successfully complete the EAP program and enter (and complete) the Honors College. The evidence presented in this study most strongly supports the notion that what led to the participants’ success was their aspirational and navigational capital, followed by their social and familial capital, whereas study results showed limited evidence for the role of resistant and linguistic capital.

The form of capital for which this study finds the most evidence is that of navigational capital, or the “skills of maneuvering through social institutions” (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). Most specifically, study results found evidence of this form of capital through the participants’ ability to “sustain high levels of achievement, despite the presence of stressful events and conditions that place them at risk of doing poorly at school and, ultimately, dropping out of school” (Alva, 1991, p. 19). Challenges such as receiving incorrect information, having to work, not qualifying for financial aid, traveling long distances, and a general sense of not knowing how the education system works did not dissuade the participants from completing their studies. Instead, participants sought out university agents for additional assistance regarding programs and financial aid, asked for academic help when they were struggling, and found ways to complete programs as quickly as possible, either by getting program information or creating their own shortcuts to EAP completion, all the while finding their own inner sense of resilience. If any one word captures how the students were able to navigate through the EAP program to the Honors College, it is that of resilience, defined by Stanton-Salazar...
and Spina (2000) as “a set of inner resources, social competencies and cultural strategies that permit individuals not only to survive, recover, or even thrive after stressful events, but also to draw from the experience to enhance subsequent functioning” (p. 229). Based on the evidence that is reported in this study, it is not that opportunity reached out to the participants, but rather that they built their own pathways to opportunity by asking questions, taking chances, making mistakes, asking for help, then adjusting as necessary in order to reach their educational goals.

A second form of capital, aspirational capital, is described as “the ability to hold on to hope in the face of structured inequality and often without the means to make such dreams a reality” (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). The participants demonstrated their tenacity in “allow[ing] themselves…to dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances, often without the objective means to attain those goals” (Yosso, 2005, p. 78) through their tremendous willingness to work toward goals, despite the inability to draw the level of direct support from family to which students raised in this country would have access. All the participants showed ample evidence of holding on to their aspirational capital, as evidenced by Carlos’ mom’s insistence that he will succeed in an American educational context, as well as Johnny’s response to the question of what he was proudest of: “That I haven’t surrendered. I kept fighting for what I want. Since I was in Cuba, it has now been 18 years because I decided to become a paleontologist when I was three. And now, I’m 21.” This form of capital was strengthened by the participants’ intellectual ability and was one which, in the context of a new country, could have been abandoned for the need to work to provide sustenance for themselves and their families. Despite this, once the participants established admission to the Honors College as a goal, they worked that
much harder to reap the benefits that such a program would offer, taking charge of their own learning to meet their aspirational goals by, for example, creating their own immersion and overcoming a lack of available information.

The notions of social and familial capital that Yosso highlights in the CCW framework are also found in the current study. While the participants did not come to the American postsecondary system with ample social capital, there is evidence that they build this form of capital by quickly creating “networks of people and community resources” by creating community with their peers or by finding validation from agents of the College, especially professors and Honors College directors, “reassuring the student emotionally that she/he is not alone in the process of pursuing higher education” (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). In addition, there is no doubt that this rapid creation of networks was facilitated by being surrounded by others of similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The findings from this study also align with what Yosso highlights about graduates’ desire to mentor and give back to students who were like them. As Yosso explains, she found that members of Communities of Color “gave the information and resources they gained through these institutions back to their social networks” (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). With regards to familial capital, the study supports the notion that in the absence of parents, the traditional holders of knowledge, members of Communities of Color broaden their notion of family to include extended family. This was evidenced by Carolina’s cousin, Diego’s grandmother, and even to an extent by Keria’s ersatz mother (in the absence of any family presence), all of whom “model lessons of caring, coping and providing which inform our emotional, moral, educational, and occupational consciousness” (Reese, 1992, as quoted in Yosso, 2005).
Resistant capital has its roots in securing equal rights and collective freedom, and is closely related to notions of social justice, as Yosso (2005) terms it, “engag[ing] in behaviors and maintain[ing] attitudes that challenge the status quo” (p. 81). There is evidence that the Honors College experience creates a sense of resistant capital as shown by the notion of community that Carolina describes, awaking a certain level of consciousness in its members that allows them to better understand their role in society, albeit within a geographical context where the participants are the majority, not the minority. Despite this, the participants experience what it is like to be minoritized when they go through the EAP program, as some shared their frustration that information about the Honors College was not provided to them like it was provided to non-EAP high school students. This frustration led Carolina, for example, to eventually take matters into her own hands and become an advocate herself. In addition, José shared how perceptions of language use can create a hierarchy of belonging within the Honors College itself, with the belief that those who speak English with an accent are “refs” (a commonly used pejorative term in Miami for “refugees”) and are therefore lesser than those who sound like native speakers. Immediately, José showed his sense of resistant capital by battling against that idea, defending the Dual Language Honors campus as the one with the highest first-year retention rate and the one with the most Jack Kent Cooke Scholarship recipients.

The final form of capital, linguistic capital, plays a lesser role, if any, in the present study. Because the focus is strongly on participants’ development of language proficiency in English, the role of the first language, Spanish, is one that was viewed neither as a hindrance nor as a particular strength. While four of the participants, Keria,
Carolina, José, and Johnny, all attended the Dual Language Honors College, a program that puts great value in “intellectual and social skills attained through communication skills in more than one language” (Orellana, Reynolds, Dorner, & Meza, 2003, p. 15), only José spoke of his ability as a bilingual speaker of English and Spanish as something “that might give me a competitive edge.” There is no doubt, however, that the Dual Language Honors program, by its very nature, operates under the notion that bilingualism is something to be valued, and in this belief, has created a program that honors both the home language and the adopted language of the participants in this study.

The themes discovered and presented in this study were similar to that which was conveyed by Rendón et al. (2014) in their qualitative work in expanding the CCW framework. Within this study, examples of such likenesses were evident in categories such as Dealing with Choque/Cultural Collision, Experiencing Liminality (an in-between space), Negotiating Dislocation and Relocation, Financial Burdens and Concerns, and Less than Adequate Advising. These themes have easily identifiable parallels in the categories presented in Chapter 4. Unlike the study of Rendón et al. (2014), however, apart from José’s experience, the participants in the current study did not mention experiencing microaggressions as a challenge. As presented in Table 2, Rendón et al. (2014) suggests the addition of four ventajas (assets) as an expansion to Yosso’s model: ganas/perseverance, ethnic consciousness, spirituality/faith, and pluriversal wealth. The current study provides ample support for ganas/perseverance, but no evidence of the other three ventajas. Most importantly, the notion of ganas/perseverance is one asset that appeared in interview after interview. This study finds support for the notion that
resilience, or perseverance as Rendón et al. (2014) term it, is indeed an additional form of wealth that contributes to the success of these Latinx community college students.

The present study also echoes the results of Kouyoumdjian et al.’s (2017) study, which identified the importance of family, institutional support, financial stability, self-determination, and academic skills as related to aspirational, familial, navigational, and social wealth as being crucial to student success. Less evidence was found in this study for the importance of romantic partnerships/sustainable and loyal friendships or tangible support, the latter most likely because of the financial stability that students in the Honors College enjoy. As the authors explain, this does “not imply that [these forms of CCW] were not present, but rather that this conceptualization…did not elicit discussion of these forms of capital that also support academic persistence” (Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017, p. 72). Luna and Martinez (2013) further stress the importance of language and framing bilingual skills as an asset. It is interesting to note that while more than half of the participants attended the Dual Language Honors College, their proficiency in two languages was not something that was mentioned as an important contributor to success, likely due to the number of bilingual English/Spanish speakers in the Miami area, something which causes linguistic capital to be less salient among this group of students.

The importance of validation. The present study strongly confirms the value and importance of validation, as presented by Rendón (1994) and updated by Rendón Linares and Muñoz (2011). It is clear from this study that this type of “intentional proactive affirmation of students” from their professors, from Honors College directors, from some family members, and from other supporters made a clear difference in their progress, especially toward seeking and gaining admission into the Honors College. One of the
validating experiences that Rendón Linares and Muñoz (2011) mention specifically is that of faculty telling students “You can do this, and I am going to help you,” words that echo what many of the participants heard from their EAP professors during the application period. In their discussion, the authors also highlight the negative power of invalidation from certain individuals, such as “faculty who students believe are inapproachable, inaccessible and often dehumanizing toward students” (Rendón Linares and Muñoz, 2011, p. 20). Interestingly, in this study, José and Keria, both of whom experienced invalidation with Professor D., turned the experience around by their desire to prove those who doubted them wrong. Validation is extremely important for EAP students on their journey to the Honors College, and likely needed by all EAP students, regardless of their ultimate academic goal. Assisting students to “trust their innate capacity to learn and to acquire confidence in being a college student” (Rendón, 1994, p. 40) is a key part of promoting student success for this segment of the college student population.

Creating paths to student success. In their research, Phinney et al. (2005) found that students belonged to one of three groups that best expressed their motivation, commitment, and values as related to higher education. The present study found strong support for the committed group, described as the group with “the strongest positive attitudes regarding being in college and the desire to complete college, demonstrating a strong sense of personal determination,” over that of the family group, which “combined a strong sense of family interdependence with high motivation for attending college for both family and personal reasons” (Phinney et al., 2005, p. 404). In addition, many of the success outcomes that Crisp et al. (2014) identify in their meta-analysis are confirmed by
the student interviews, including most strongly academic self-confidence, internal motivation and commitment, and interactions with supportive individuals. While Crisp et al. (2014) found that delaying enrollment can be negatively related to persistence, in the case of students who are recent immigrants and who need to improve their language proficiency before continuing with their education, this may not be the case, as shown by both Johnny and José’s experiences. On the other hand, there is ample evidence that “the drive to succeed was the most salient characteristic to academic attainment” (Crisp et al., 2014, p. 259) for students in highly selective schools, such as the ones that the Honors College graduates may eventually attend. Finally, the results of this study also support Trucker’s (2014) two main findings for students who went from a developmental program to the Honors College at his institution. There is strong support for his first finding that “belief in student promise by faculty” is a key to success, with more limited support for his second finding that “informal assistance and advice from peers” plays a key role in student success (Trucker, 2014, p. 87). Trucker’s recommendations for his institution are included here as well, especially the sharing of information to ensure all students make decisions that allow them to consider every possible academic option.

Previous research has additionally focused on the importance of gender as a contributor to ELL student success. Almon (2012, 2015), Chavez (2015), and Crisp et al. (2014) provide evidence from quantitative and qualitative studies that suggests that females have a clearer path to success at the postsecondary level than do their male counterparts. The findings of the current study do not echo those of these previous findings. This may well be related to the fact that the four male participants in the study had recently graduated from high school when they entered the EAP program, thus facing
fewer external pressures, something identified in the previous studies as a hindrance to college success. In addition, unlike the evidence provided in Crisp et al.’s (2014) study, the male participants in this study found support and additional program information from financial aid officers, as well as support from both male and female peers with whom they built a sense of community. Furthermore, there was no evidence that the female participants felt that gender facilitated their journey. Instead, age was identified as the more salient factor, as it contributed not only to a sense of belonging, but also to the participants’ sense of identity as a traditional or non-traditional student, something that was important considering that 99% of students in the Honors College were below the age of 21.

Limitations and Constraints of the Study

According to Price and Murnan (2004), the limitations of a study are those characteristics of design or methodology that influence the interpretation of the findings, including constraints on generalizability, applications to practice, and/or utility of findings related to design or method. The present study is limited in its scope by focusing on Latinx students who attended one single two-year institution in Southeast Florida for both the EAP program and the Honors College. While the study sought to interview 6-15 participants, the surprisingly low number of current students who matched the study requirements proved to be a challenge to the researcher. As a result, but still within the parameters of the methodology, the pool of participants was expanded to include students who graduated between 2014 and 2017, four of whom chose to participate in the study. While this limited the number of student stories that could be told, the participants who chose to be part of the study certainly developed their own voices, were generous in
sharing their stories, and represented more than just one segment of national origin or background.

Because this study was limited to the perspectives of participants at one institution in South Florida, there is a need for further research on EAP students/English Language Learners across different geographical areas, of varying national origins, and different institutions as well. Indeed, the Miami area is one which is different from the rest of the United States, as a large number of the population identifies as Latinx and wherein being Latinx means being part of the majority, not the minority. As a result, the results of the research may only reflect the realities of students who are from this area. Additionally, the results of this study may not be generalizable to all EAP completers who pursue a selective program once they have completed their language coursework.

Another possible limitation was the fact that this study defined success as the ability to complete the EAP program and gain admission into the Honors College. This narrow definition of success is not the only way in which EAP students can succeed. Success for EAP students may encompass a wide variety of definitions, including continuing to an A.A./A.S. program, completing a professional certificate, or simply gaining the necessary competence in English to be able to continue growing professionally at the student’s place of employment.

Finally, every possible effort was made to minimize the impact of researcher bias, whether conscious or unconscious, on study results. As mentioned in the researcher’s stance section of the study, the present researcher was aware that he holds a position of power at the institution where the participants are/were enrolled. The researcher knows many of the people mentioned by the participants personally, and while participants may
have shown some hesitation in, for example, naming certain people, every effort was made to protect their desire for anonymity as requested. Surprisingly, there were times when participants asked that their participation in the study be shared with someone who helped them through their academic journey, suggesting that they felt comfortable enough with the researcher to trust him to share this information and, therefore, to share that they were participating in the project.

**Implications for Practice**

Tinto (2012) advocates that four conditions need to be met to improve student retention and academic success. His framework for institutional action includes four areas of focus: setting high expectations for students, providing adequate support, having continuous assessment and feedback, and promoting involvement (Tinto, 2012). The results of this study provide the EAP program and Honors College of Miami Dade College with various opportunities to pave the way to student success, especially for high-achieving students like those who participated in this study. Using the four areas in Tinto’s (2012) suggested framework for institutional action, this section first provides recommendations based on the results of this study, providing not only context for the current practices but also suggestions as to how to expand access for these students, something that is part of the mission and vision of Miami Dade College. This section then considers the implications of this study at a larger scale, considering what results of this study could mean for institutional stakeholders and policymakers at a time when legislation is largely hostile to the efforts of the community college in Florida.

**Implications for the EAP Program.** There are six main recommendations for the EAP Program at Miami Dade College based on the participants’ responses in this study.
These are: (1) Giving meaning to academics via goal setting; (2) Providing effective advisement for EAP students and expanding opportunities for completion; (3) Sharing information on academic opportunities; (4) Identifying and supporting high-achieving EAP students; (5) Democratizing acceleration and content-based instruction; and (6) Sharing the importance of validation with faculty and other institutional agents. Each one of these recommendations is framed within one of the four categories of Tinto’s (2012) framework for institutional action, abbreviated here as Expectations, Support, Assessment and Feedback, or Involvement.

**Expectations: Giving meaning to academics via goal setting.** As shown by the participants’ responses, goals matter. For most, it was not until they decided the Honors College would be their academic goal that their EAP coursework began to matter. Because every EAP student is considered to be on an A.A. or A.S. track by the College, all students must declare a pathway (similar to a major) when they begin their studies. A review of the data shows that the most common pathway for EAP students is the Pre-Bachelor of Arts, in other words, undecided, followed by Business Administration and Nursing (Cubarrubia, 2017). Students are declaring their pathway upon application for admission, with little information about what this will mean in the future. Throughout the EAP program, little to no mention made of what these pathways require and what options these pathways afford students. It would be helpful to help students orient themselves better by, for example, establishing a curriculum fair for EAP students that invites all the College’s programs to showcase their offerings for their respective pathways. Not only would this provide students more information to better plan of their education, it would also allow them to learn about programs they may not have previously considered. In
addition, it would allow them to select meaningful classes for concurrent enrollment should they choose to pursue the EAP Plus track, a recently developed program track that allows for concurrent enrollment along with EAP courses at levels 3-6. Moreover, career assessments and how the results of these assessments are supported by Miami Dade College’s offerings and pathways should be considered for inclusion in the curriculum as part of giving more meaning and context to EAP coursework.

**Support: Providing effective advisement for EAP students and expanding opportunities for completion.** Although some campuses have decided to combine all advisement into one area within Advisement and Career Services, the needs of EAP students may not be met due to the overwhelming caseloads many of these advisors have. Currently, students go through a variety of steps taking them from application, to placement testing, to financial aid, to new student orientation and, finally, to registration. While these provide points of contact with a variety of institutional agents, lack of communication among these agents can lead to the initial enrollment process becoming more confusing than it needs to be, and it can, at times, lead students to grow frustrated, give up the process, or even seek admission elsewhere. As a result, providing effective EAP advisement that guides students through the process in fewer steps that allows for personal interaction (e.g., financial aid visits to orientation) would ensure that students get the correct information that they need. In doing so, EAP students could be better advised regarding the recommendations made here, including goal setting, information on academic opportunities, and acceleration options, while advisors themselves may also be empowered to get to know EAP students better, eventually making them able to identify high-achieving EAP students.
As noted in the introduction, after eight years of community college attendance, only 23.4% of students who began in EAP have completed an A.A. or A.S. degree. By providing more focused advisement for EAP students, advisors can place students on a path to an achievable completion point other than degree attainment. One example of this would be to help EAP students better understand the role of short term college credit certificates (CCCs), especially since some certificates require as few as four classes. Paired with the students’ EAP coursework (e.g., EAP Plus or ACE models), this would begin to have EAP students count as completers in the performance-based model for the state of Florida before completing an A.A. or an A.S., while also creating a short-term pathway to success for EAP students, expanding possibilities beyond the two-year degree model.

**Support: Sharing information on academic opportunities.** One of the greatest sources of challenge for EAP students was lack of information on academic programs, financial aid, institutional policies and practices, and even academic support. While the College has made efforts in recent years to make an EAP orientation mandatory, much of the information that is shared in that session remains transitional, such as how to succeed in a postsecondary institution, explaining terms such as credits, tuition, academic requirements, degree requirements, and the different types of tracks within EAP programs (e.g., traditional, EAP Plus, ACE). At one campus, the department of financial aid now meets with students one-on-one to guide them in the process, which represents a step forward. However, no orientation currently mentions the Honors College, while opportunities for further study at the College receive minimal attention. Because existing orientations are already three hours long and include registration, a campus tour, and an
overwhelming amount of information for students new to the program, there may be a need for a mid-point orientation to academic programs during level 4 of the EAP program, the course that has the highest enrollment college-wide and after which there seems to be greatest attrition. Paired with the curriculum fair, an orientation to life after the EAP program may result in greater student retention as a path to completion is more clearly spelled out.

**Support: Identifying and supporting high-achieving EAP students.** While much attention is paid to students who struggle, the high-achieving EAP student largely remains unidentified and ignored. For these students, finding success normally means working alone, at some point or another receiving a recommendation from a professor to pursue an accelerated track, if it is offered. Identifying these students and offering them accelerated pathways to completion, such as the ones that José, Carolina, and Emilia created for themselves through testing, as well as focused career and academic advisement, may help to increase completion rates. Students who are high-achieving may be, for example, offered PERT preparation after completing level 4 or 5 to see if they are college-ready. In addition, these students could also be paired with Honors College mentors who may help them academically and/or socially, despite any difference in age or background, helping to expand support to successful students in the EAP program, not just those who struggle. Like the experience that Keria heard about, where Honors faculty got together to discuss her Honors cohort, EAP faculty could also be invited to identify promising students once a semester, especially those who may benefit from acceleration, exemption, or opportunities to test out.
Assessment and Feedback: Democratizing acceleration and content-based instruction. Feedback allows programs to redesign coursework and curriculum to better meet the needs of students. While the College currently has two main programs that students may choose from, the traditional EAP track with four courses and two labs, or the EAP Plus track, with two integrated skills courses with built-in labs and a concurrent enrollment course, accelerated coursework is now offered only at two campuses via the ACE program. For the participants in this study, acceleration was a key to success and to degree attainment mostly because participants who did not have access to ACE found their own ways to speed up their progress. The ACE program, which acts like an Honors track for the EAP program in that it requires an application and is selective, has been highly successful, but is currently not offered beyond these two campuses. More importantly, the ACE program offers a programmatic opportunity for acceleration, combining levels 3 and 4 (a course that the participants in this study did not take, available only at the InterAmerican Campus) and levels 5 and 6 (taken only by Johnny and Keria). The accelerated program that Diego completed, for example, is no longer being offered, while Carlos’ program, which offered the new EAP Plus course in an eight-week format, has also been discontinued. Demand for ACE may not be as high as it is for the other programs, but it is important that students be presented information about an accelerated track and that it also be offered at more than just two campuses, especially since for some students it is the option that best matches their academic needs.

As important as the speed the ACE program offers is the type of instruction in the program, one which focuses on teaching English for Academic Purposes through content-based instruction related to college curriculum (e.g., coursework in computer science and
psychology that is required of almost every single A.A./A.S. pathway). Tinto (2012) presents the example of Kingsborough Community College’s program, which focuses on the creation of learning communities that link coursework in ESL with general education courses, a program which, in its description, closely mirrors that of the ACE Program. Nordmeyer and Barduhn (2010, p.4) further stress the importance of such innovations in ESL program redesign by highlighting the following benefits of content-based instruction:

1. It builds on the interests and linguistic needs of learners;
2. It increases motivation by using content relevant to learners;
3. It incorporates the eventual uses that learners will make of the target language; and
4. It teaches meaningful language embedded within relevant discourse.

Moreover, Nordmeyer and Barduhn (2010) add that content-based instruction in EAP is essential because “it meets the adult ESL students’ need to enter the target professional and academic community and lets them make first steps toward the achievement of this goal” (p. 4). In the absence of other programs at the College that are built around this premise, this is yet another reason that supports the expansion of the ACE program across the College.

**Involvement: Sharing the importance of validation with faculty and other institutional agents.** There is ample support in this study for the positive role that faculty play on the journey to the Honors College. However, were it not for participants’ explicit requests that their gratitude be shared with individual faculty members who made a difference for them, many may not be aware of the key role that they played in the success of this study’s participants. As Rendón explains, the key condition for validation is that “it is critical that validating agents reach out to students to offer assistance,
encouragement, and support, as opposed to expecting students to ask questions first” (Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011, p. 17). While some faculty may balk and claim that validation sounds like coddling, “pampering students, making them weaker,” the authors explain that it is exactly the opposite, “making students stronger in terms of assisting them to believe in their ability to learn, acquire self-worth, and increase their motivation to succeed” (Rendón Linares and Muñoz, 2011, p. 18). There is evidence of the need for validation in students who are low-income, first generation students, but the participants in this study, which include students who fit this description and others who don’t, all benefitted from this type of support. As a result, validation theory should be shared explicitly with faculty and other institutional agents so that they can better understand their agency and their ability to positively affect student success, something that can also be supported by creating opportunities for students and faculty to interact outside the classroom, not just within it.

Because students like Carolina explicitly mentioned the differences in expectations regarding student-faculty interactions in the U.S. versus those in her home country of Venezuela, it is essential to include the importance of student-faculty relationships through the lens of validation as part of the orientation process. Explaining that office hours are times set apart for student-faculty academic interaction or that out of class communication via email is encouraged is an absolute necessity for someone who is used to thinking that visiting a professor in their office is “bothering them,” as Carolina did. At the same time, faculty should also be encouraged to promote a welcoming environment to students and to be clear on how they prefer to be contacted.
The role of faculty-student relationships has long been identified as a key contributor to student satisfaction in college and is an aspect that can facilitate faculty validation of students. According to research by Astin (1977),

[s]tudent-faculty interaction has a stronger relationship to student satisfaction with the college experience than any other variable [and] any student characteristic or institutional characteristic. Students who interact frequently with faculty are more satisfied with all aspects of their institutional experience, including student friendships, variety of courses, intellectual environment, and even administration of the institution (p. 223).

While many students do take advantage of office hours for one-on-one meetings with their professors, informal interactions remain limited and could be influenced by a sense of a need for formality, as Carolina highlighted in her reflection above. However, because interaction outside the classroom has long been shown to correlate positively with academic achievement (Pascarella, 1980), it is important to provide opportunities for students to meet with faculty in informal settings that go beyond the four walls of the classroom. More importantly, because this type of interaction also is positively correlated with retention (Pascarella, 1980; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1978; Tinto, 1993), the College would be well served by providing these opportunities early in the EAP program for students to learn about the importance of building relationships with caring faculty members who may eventually be able to provide support through mentoring that will support them on their journey to EAP completion.

**Implications for the Honors College.** There are three further recommendations for the Honors College at Miami Dade College based on the participants’ responses in this study. These are: (1) Reviewing the requirements for Honors College admission; (2) Expanding opportunities for non-traditional students; and (3) Engaging Honors College
students and alumni in working with EAP students. These recommendations are also
framed within Tinto’s (2012) framework for institutional action.

**Expectations: Reviewing the requirements for Honors College admission.** As
the EAP program continues to encourage students to take concurrent enrollment courses
along with their language courses (such as the EAP Plus program or the more recent
initiative that seeks to increase certificate completion as part of EAP coursework),
students who take these courses are, by definition, disqualified from applying to the
Honors College. The admission requirements clearly state that students may not have
taken any college level classes outside of dual enrollment coursework when they apply to
the Honors College. Exceptions were made for every single student who participated in
this study, as “college credit” would mean not only the concurrent enrollment course that
Keria and Johnny completed through ACE, but also all the EAP coursework that every
participant completed. It would be helpful if there were an exclusion for students who
take a different route other than traditional high school completion, or at least a word of
assurance that EAP coursework will not be held against applicants if they select to apply
to the Honors College.

**Support: Expanding opportunities for non-traditional Honors College students.**
Both Keria and Carolina entered the program as non-traditional college students but were
able to be accepted into the Honors College, despite having completed college-level
coursework in Cuba and Venezuela, respectively. Looking at the most current statistics
for the Honors College from 2015, only 1.1% of students (3 students) were between the
ages of 21-25, yet in that same year, 62.6% of all students at Miami Dade College were
older than 21 (Miami Dade College Institutional Effectiveness, 2015b, 2015c). If all
students are considered to be on pathways to an A.A. or an AS, then focusing on only 37.4% of students is excluding a wide segment of potential Honors College students from the program. Non-traditional students are growing nation-wide, with 51% of them enrolling at two-year institutions and most such students pursuing an associate degree, according to the Postsecondary National Policy Institute Factsheet (2017). Thinking of how to better serve the College’s non-traditional population could lead to the creation of an additional Honors College program that focuses on the needs of these students, a move which could expand the reach of the current program to ensure that opportunity is available for a wider segment of the student body.

Involvement: Engaging Honors College students and alumni in working with EAP students. At the InterAmerican campus of Miami Dade College, Dual Language Honors College students have already assembled a group to help recent immigrants transition to postsecondary education in the United States. The group, called Advocates for Immigrant Students (AIS), works to provide support for EAP students via tutoring, information on transfer opportunities, preparing for interviews, and writing essays, among others. As the majority of graduates showed in their interviews, there is a desire on the part of former EAP students to reach out to current EAP students, and with three current students who participated in this study at three different campuses, this represents an opportunity for students to reach out to potential candidates just as Carolina once did with Johnny. Honors College students are constantly looking for ways to give back to their community and to be involved in ways that are meaningful. Providing additional assistance, and even validation, to these students would be a great way to connect the two segments of the Miami Dade College population. The Honors College would be wise to
invite EAP Honors alumni to return to campus and speak to current EAP students, just as José wanted to. Creating opportunities like this in a face-to-face format or even via social media could present ways for successful alumni to connect with and motivate current EAP students, as well as to market the program. Additionally, alumni from the Dual Language Honors program can promote the importance of being a high-achieving bilingual, something that is often taken for granted in the Miami area. Not only does this program honor the strength that bilingual students bring to the College, it also provides them opportunities to have their linguistic talent propel them beyond what monolingual Honors students can achieve.

**Implications for institutional stakeholders and policymakers.** There is no doubt that high-achieving EAP students like the ones who participated in this study stand to benefit from the educational opportunities that are afforded to them by the community college. However, current concepts regarding how institutions can best serve these students are constantly under threat due to legislation that would impose next-to-impossible expectations on these students and on community college students as a whole. The 2018 introduction of Florida Senate Bill 540 once again focuses on tying community college funding to the notion of on-time graduation, penalizing colleges like Miami Dade College, where only 34% of students graduate within three years (Cubarrubia, 2017). Imposing these requirements may make sense to legislators, but it does little to acknowledge the reality that many community college students can only attend part-time, thereby delaying completion, whereas other students like the ones in this study must first complete the EAP program before beginning coursework toward their pathway. If EAP students were to result in a loss of performance-based funding for colleges, it stands to
reason that these programs could one day go the way of developmental education in Florida, reducing the educational opportunities for those who need the most support. As a result, community college advocates would be wise to include the voices of successful EAP students as part of their communications with legislators so that they can better understand the importance of programs such as the EAP program for recently arrived immigrants. This can also include purposefully including EAP completers who have entered the Honors College, such as the participants in this study, to travel to Tallahassee with the students who represent the College and meet with legislators to share their stories.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

As has been previously noted, there is ample room for additional research on EAP students and their journeys through American higher education. Because there has been limited quantitative and qualitative research on this segment of students, the topics that can be pursued are numerous, but as they relate to the findings in the current study, the recommendations that follow would likely help to better practitioners’ understanding of ELLs at the community college.

First, this study considered only the Latinx population at Miami Dade College because of the nature of the institution as an HSI. However, as an institution that serves a wide variety of students, including a large number of Haitian-American students, it would be useful to analyze this additional segment of the EAP population as well in order to get a better understanding of ELLs that represent various ethnic backgrounds, comparing their responses to Latinx students in the process. The numbers of this population may also be small, but opportunities should be presented to all students regardless of ethnic
background to share their stories. Part of this research can further shed light on what aspects of the model presented in this study apply to any type of immigrant student (regardless of ethnic background) and which apply to Latinx students who are living in a city where they are part of the majority.

Second, a better understanding of EAP completion is still necessary to understand this population. No one study has looked at comparing EAP program completers and non-completers to better understand what motivates completion versus what leads to departure from the program. At Miami Dade College, historical data from 2017 show that enrollment is highest at levels 3 and 4, with a downturn at level 5 and even lower numbers at level 6, with retention hovering between 60-61% in 2013-14, 2014-15 and 2015-16, with retention rising to 66% in 2016-17 (Cubarrubia, 2017). Having seen a large downturn in enrollment, with a five-year drop of 36.3%, understanding why EAP students are leaving the college and its relation to academics, the upward turn in the economy, program length, academic offerings, or competition from other institutions, would be a key piece of understanding that would help us better understand the trajectory that these students follow (Cubarrubia, 2017). Is the College making a mistake in assuming that these students have the intent to earn a degree or a certificate, when completion may, for some, mean attaining a level of proficiency in English that they deem to be enough to meet their own personal goals? Are EAP students who attend an American high school more or less successful than those who do not? Is there a difference in attainment and motivation between traditional and non-traditional EAP students? These questions would help us better understand and support EAP students.
Third, as tied to this study specifically, the role of validation for EAP students deserves a closer look. Based on the experiences of the participants in this study, validation is a key to success that is offered to a select few students. While the research on validation has been used to better understand the college experience for low-income first-generation students, to foster student success, and to improve pedagogical practice, (Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011), its effect on immigrants who are second language learners has yet to be explored. This qualitative study suggests that there is room for additional work in this area to better understand how validation affects EAP completion, and also to better understand the agency of validating sources across the college, not limited to faculty. As such, this topic deserves further exploration.

Finally, there is the recommendation for further research on community college honors programs, and specifically for a better understanding of the program at Miami Dade College. While there are many articles that praise its benefits, little research has been done on honors at the community college level. Miami Dade College offers the Dual Language Honors College program, one which focuses on Spanish and English, in addition to the traditional Honors College format. For four of the students who participated in this study, this program was the logical choice, one that valued their ability to speak Spanish in an academic setting and which fostered their progress in their second language. Other students of similar background, however, attended programs at their home campuses. What relationship is there between a dual language program and acculturation and belonging as compared to a regular honors program for recently arrived immigrants? How does Latinx identity develop and what orientation does it take depending on the program the student selects? Do these students feel at an advantage or
at a disadvantage being surrounded by speakers of two languages where one may be preferred over the other? Do they also have to create their own immersion? These would be additional and equally important questions that may lead us to better understand the nature of these honors programs and where second language learners may feel more at home.

**Final Reflections: Participant Perspectives on Their Journeys**

Throughout the process of co-constructing the narrative of these students’ academic journeys from EAP to the Honors College, there were many instances of laughter, of chances to reflect that provided both opportunity and challenge, and of the ability to look back at one’s past and be proud of one’s accomplishments in overcoming what would for others represent insurmountable obstacles. Every participant, at the end of their interview, was asked if there was anything that they had not thought about before that was prompted by their participation in the study. While some simply said, “No” or “Not really,” others realized that the chance to reflect on their experiences was not something they had had the chance to do. As Carolina explained,

> I don't think often how the changes, like I never have thought, like, about how have I changed?...You never ask that to yourself unless you have to write an essay or sit down for an interview...But it's not something that I usually think about, right?...It's weird because I can't believe that I went through all that. It doesn't feel like it was me...It's like, wow, I really went through all that. Like it was me. I did it. Wow. And I think about it and it's like, wow, it was so much to do and look where I am at right now!

It is not just Carolina, but also Carlos, Diego, Emilia, Keria, Johnny, and José who have the right to exclaim, “Look where I am at right now!” As Carlos, Emilia, and Johnny continue to successfully navigate their way through the Honors College, Carolina is now working toward her bachelor’s degree in business in Europe, while Diego recently
traveled to the Oregon to interview with Microsoft after completing his bachelor’s degree here in Miami. José is about to complete his master’s degree, while Keria, sidelined by her husband’s illness, was inspired to go back to school after participating in this study. These participants, their voices, their successes, and their experiences allow us to better understand the journey to defying the statistics. Their resilience, their fight, their drive to succeed, their motivation, and their ability to overcome the harshest of voices all contribute to the experience of not becoming another number that supports the deficiency that many have assigned to second language learners. Instead, they give us hope that more such students will find a clear path to their academic success through their fortitude, through earning the support of others, and through their own determination to meet their goals.
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Appendix A: Recruitment E-mail

Recruitment E-mail and Script

Dear ________,

My name is Juan Carlos Morales, and I am reaching out to you as a potential participant in my study as part of my doctoral program at the University of Miami, where I am working with Dr. Debbiesiu Lee, my advisor.

You were selected for this study because you completed the ESL/EAP program and are currently part of the Honors College program at Miami Dade College. Your participation in the study is completely optional, and you do not have to participate if you don’t want to. If you choose not to participate, there will be no consequences for you or your status here as a student. Note that your grades will not be affected by your decision to participate in, decline to participate in, or withdraw from the study, and they will not be affected by the information gathered during the study. Furthermore, all your answers to the questions in the study will be completely confidential between you and me and my advisor. Your identity will be protected by using an alias. Only me and my advisor will have access to your answers, and these will not be shared with others during the course of the study.

Your commitment to the study will include completing a demographic survey, participating in a 60-90-minute interview, and in one possible follow-up interview to review the accuracy of the transcript of your answers as well as any other points that may need clarification. Any question can be skipped if it makes your uncomfortable. For the purposes of the interview, I will be tape recording our conversation with an iPhone or iPad.

I look forward to getting to know you and getting to interview you as part of this study. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to me at my email, jxm1386@miami.edu, or via phone at (305) 926-8851.

Kind regards,
Appendix B: Recruitment Script

Recruitment Script (face-to-face/phone)

Good afternoon. My name is Juan Carlos Morales. I am a doctoral student at the University of Miami and I am working on a research study with Dr. Debbiesiu Lee, my advisor. You received an email/phone call from me about my study on English as a second language students who completed the program and are now in the honors college at Miami Dade College.

I’m here to follow up on the email/phone call and to see if you are interested in hearing more about our study. Is it OK for me to continue?
   If individual says “No, not interested” = stop, say thank you. Do not continue.
   If he/she says yes, then continue.

You were selected for this study because you completed the ESL/EAP program and are currently part of the Honors College program at Miami Dade College. Your participation in the study is completely optional, and you do not have to participate if you don’t want to. If you choose not to participate, there will be no consequences for you or your status here as a student. Furthermore, all your answers to the questions in the study will be completely confidential between you and me and my advisor. Your identity will be protected by using an alias. Only me and my advisor will have access to your answers, and these will not be shared with others during the course of the study.

So, are you interested in hearing some details about the research study?

If not interested, thank the individual for his/ her time.
If interested, then move to the consent form.
Appendix C: Consent Form

Consent Form

Miami Dade College
Consent to Participate in a Research Study

A Qualitative Study on ELL Honors Community College Students

This consent form describes the research study in which you have been invited to participate. Please read the information that follows carefully. After considering this information, you will be asked to indicate whether you agree to participate in the study.

PURPOSE OF STUDY: You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to better understand the process of your transition from being an English Language Learner (ESL student, EAP student) to an honors college student at the community college.

PROCEDURES: We will have a conversation in which you will be asked several questions about your experiences as an English Language Learner and as an honors college student. The conversation will be audio recorded with your consent. The conversation will take approximately one hour to one hour and a half. If you do not want to answer a specific question, just let the researcher know and you do not have to answer. You may end the conversation for whatever reason at whatever time. In addition, I may ask you back to review the transcript of your interview and ask some follow up questions. You may, of course, refuse if you choose to.

RISKS AND/OR DISCOMFORTS: We do not anticipate that you will experience any personal risk or discomfort from taking part in this study. You may skip any question you do not wish to answer. Participation in this study will not affect your standing at the college.

BENEFITS: No benefit can be promised to you from your participation in this study. The study is expected to benefit science and society by helping us better understand the experiences of English Language Learners as they complete their English programs and progress to the honors college.

ALTERNATIVES: You are not required to participate in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your information will be confidential. All data collected will be stored on password protected and secured servers. After you have participated, all identifying information will be deleted and replaced by a pseudonym. The investigator and all members of the research team will consider your records confidential to the extent permitted by law. Your records may be reviewed for audit purposes by authorized University or other agents who will be bound by the same provisions of confidentiality.
Finally, the results of this study may be published. However, your identity will remain confidential in all published works. No identifying information will be included in the publication.

**RIGHT TODECLINE OR WITHDRAW:** Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to refuse to participate in the study or withdraw your consent at any time during the study. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. Your grades will not be affected by your decision to participate in, decline to participate in, or withdraw from the study, and they will not be affected by the information gathered during the study.

**CONTACT INFORMATION:** Juan Carlos Morales (305-926-8851 or jxm1386@miami.edu) will be happy to answer any questions you may have concerning the purpose, procedures, and outcome of this project. You can also contact the primary investigator, Dr. Debbiesiu Lee (305-284-6160 or debbiesiu@miami.edu). If you have questions about your rights as a research participant you may contact Human Subjects Research Office at the University of Miami, at (305) 243-3195 or eprost@med.miami.edu.

**PARTICIPANT AGREEMENT:**
By signing my name below, I acknowledge that I have read the information in this consent form and agree to participate in this study. I also confirm that I am 18 years or older at the time of signing.

____________________________________
Name of Participant

____________________________________
Signature of Participant

____________________________________
Date

____________________________________
Name of Person Obtaining Consent

____________________________________
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

____________________________________
Date
Appendix D: Demographic Questions and Questioning Protocol

**Pre-Interview Demographic Questions**

JCM: The following questions will allow me to have a better understanding of your background to inform this study. This information you provide will be kept strictly confidential.

1. What is your name?
2. What is your age?
3. What is your ethnicity?
4. What is the primary language you speak at home?
5. At which campus do you take most your classes?
6. What is your honors college campus?
7. What is your current semester at Miami Dade College (not counting your EAP classes)?
8. What is your major or pathway?
9. In what year did you complete EAP?
10. How many semesters did you spend in the EAP program?
11. Did you take ESL/ESOL before the EAP program?
   11b. If so, where and for how long?
12. Do you have any questions for me before we start?
Questioning Protocol

JCM: Now we’re going to get started with the main part of the interview.

Questions about the English Language Learner (English for Academic Purposes) Experience

1. Tell me about how you came to be an EAP student.

2. What was it like to be an EAP student? What were you thinking then? Who, if anyone, influenced your actions?

3. What was going on in your life at the time you were an EAP student? How would you describe the person you were then?

4. How would you describe how you viewed being an EAP student?

5. What contributed to your success in completing the EAP program? Was there anything you had to overcome when you were an EAP student?

Questions about the Honors College Experience

6. What, if anything, did you know about the Honors College before you decided to apply?

7. What can you tell me about your thoughts and feelings when you decided to apply for the Honors College? Who, if anyone, influenced your actions?

8. What type of process was it for you: easy? difficult? What made it this way?

9. What do you think has led to your success as an honors college student?

10. Have there been any challenges in being an honors college student? If so, how have you overcome these challenges?

11. How have you changed as a person since you became an honors college student?

Questions about the Overall Experience

12. Tell me about what you have discovered through the process of going from the EAP program to the Honors College.

13. What do you most value about yourself now? What do others value in you?
14. After having been through this experience, what advice would you give to an EAP student who is just starting out?

Concluding Questions

15. Is there something that you may not have thought about before that occurred to you during this interview?

16. Is there something else you think I should know to understand how EAP students who complete the program become successful honors college students?

17. Is there anything you’d like to ask me?

Post-Interview Demographic Questions

JCM: Thank you for this interview. I have just a few follow-up questions before we wrap up.

1. What is your telephone number?

2. What is your email?

3. What is your MDID?

4. What is your gender identification?

5. When is the best time for me to reach you if I need to contact you?

6. How should I best contact you?

7. Now that the interview is over, do you have any additional questions for me?
This dissertation embraces the term Latinx as both a noun and an adjective over Latino, Latina, or Latinx as a means of demonstrating gender-neutral inclusion of all members of the Latinx community. The term is not used, however, when citing researchers who used different terminology in their work.

In this dissertation, honors college refers to the generic term for the program at any institution of higher education, whereas Honors College refers to Miami Dade College’s honors program.