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Entering the Big Zone: Accruing Social Capital in a Developmental Learning Community for Nontraditional Student Success

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Entering the Big Zone: Accruing Social Capital in a Developmental Learning Community for

Nontraditional Student of Color Success

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Education

by

Theresa Marie Lorch

2014

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Entering the Big Zone: Accruing Social Capital in a Developmental Learning Community for

Nontraditional Student Success

by

Theresa Marie Lorch

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

Professor Walter R. Allen, Chair

Over the past decade, three rationales have emerged for improving the rate of postsecondary participation among the Latina/o population in and through the higher education pipeline. The first rationale pertains to the importance of educational access and equity to ensuring the U.S. remains a global competitor on the world stage (Bowen, Kurzweil, & Tobin, 2005). The second relates to the importance of a diverse workforce to ensuring greater social mobility within the U.S. (Rhoads & Torres, 2006; Russell, 2010). The third rationale points to the importance of adequately addressing the dual concerns of educational social justice and equity and the necessity for creating a fair, open, educational pipeline encouraging and cultivating rather than undermining and curtailing the life chances of students (Zhou, 2005).

Taking into consideration these three rationales, this case study focuses on the ways community colleges bolster the success of Latina/o students, and nontraditional students of color in general, through institutional innovation intended to improve student persistence rates and encourage transfer aspirations. This case study examined the experiences of 44 Latina/o community college students who were participants in a "Zero-Year" Developmental Learning Community (DLC). The DLC represents a one-year gateway program specifically designed to help students navigate their precollegiate year of entry into college. I analyzed data from interviews with program participants from across the 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010 DLC cohorts. Based upon my analyses, two themes emerged as important factors in the academic careers of the DLC Latina/o participants:

- The importance of the program structure in a conducive environment for accrual of social capital and academic capital,

- The pivotal role of program culture for accrual of cultural capital transmitted by high performance and values of transfer-readiness for student success.

DLCs are environments created to support students' persistence and transfer aspirations by creating the physical space, social relationships with faculty, staff and peers, academic skill development, and cultural supports necessary to achieve these goals. The DLC's purpose is to equip students with knowledge and understanding of the collegiate culture and its values. Consequently, students gain awareness of how the community college system operates so they can persist and transfer. Specifically, students develop bonding and bridging social capital, which is transmutable to academic and cultural capital. Together, social, academic, and cultural capital assist students' preparation to transfer.

Findings from this research study provide university administrators, policy makers, faculty, and scholars with a better understanding of the role community colleges can play in motivating and supporting the success of Latina/o and nontraditional community college students of color.

The dissertation of Theresa Marie Lorch is approved.

Patricia M. McDonough

Alan P. Fiske

Walter R. Allen, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2014

Dedications

I dedicate this dissertation to all nontraditional students in pursuit of higher education and all lifelong learners. I remain in the trenches with you. To my dad, William John Zemko, who taught me to be resourceful, and my mom, Marilyn Jane Franks Zemko, who always supported and believed in me. To my lifetime mate Jacques Christian who knew he committed to a perpetual learner many years ago. To all my offspring, Robert James, Jeffrey Michael, Karina Marie, and Jacques Phillip for the inspiration you have been and will be to me. Finally, to all my colleagues who have supported me in my educational pursuits, particularly my CORE.

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Acknowledgements

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Although one author's name appears on this dissertation, this is a product involving the input, encouragement, and inspiration of colleagues including Jane Burtis, Tamara Fine, Siduri Haslerig, my HEOC cohort, and RAC members who collaborated with me to its completion. I acknowledge a considerable debt of gratitude to those who helped me in the undertaking of completing my dissertation. Writing this dissertation took possession of my time, energy, and household of family members to whom I am grateful for their forbearance and support.

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CSCC 2011   Theresa M. Lorch, Goal Development of Latina/o students in a Developmental Learning Community at a Community College, presented at the 53rd Annual Council for Study of Community Colleges Conference

CAFÉ 2011   Theresa M. Lorch, Pathways for Social Justice Education in an Age of Fear: A Call for Dialogue on the Value of Developmental Learning presented at the California Association of Freirean Educators Conference

NLCC 2010   15th Annual National Learning Community Conference
Case Study of Goal Achievement in a Developmental Learning Community at a Community College, Theresa M. Lorch, M.A.

CAFÉ 2010   California Association of Freirean Educators Conference
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CSCC 2010   Council for the Study of Community Colleges
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ASHE 2009   Access and Success for America's Emerging Majority: The Individual,
Organizational, and Institutional Contexts of Latina/os in Higher Education, Pat
McDonough, Ph.D., et al.

ASHE 2009   Goal Achievement in a Developmental Learning Community at a Community
College, Theresa M. Lorch, M.A.

ASHE 2007   *Measured Engaged Learning in College Students: Beyond the Borders of NSSE*,
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CAFÉ 2009   California Association of Freirean Educators Conference
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Chapter 1 – Introduction

"Education is a social process . . . Education is growth . . . Education is not a preparation for life; education is life itself . . . Arriving at one goal is the starting point to another." John Dewey 1916

The community college has long been seen as the most democratic of higher education institutions (Dowd, 2003). Tasked with serving multiple purposes, multiple missions, and multiple constituencies, community colleges mirror the country's highest ideals: open access, educational equity, and the chance for social mobility. Community colleges serve as a vital engine for the U.S. economy through workplace programs, on-site entrepreneurial and technological innovation and incubation, professional development, community based learning, and perhaps most importantly, its transfer function (Boggs, 2012). U.S. community colleges are responsible for teaching 45% of all U.S. undergraduates, including 56% of all Latina/o undergraduates, 49% of all African American undergraduates, as well as 44% and 42% of all Asian-American and Native American undergraduates respectively (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013).

Yet, despite educating a substantial percentage of the nation's undergraduate enrollment population, community colleges have struggled to ensure fruitful outcomes for students. As of 2011, only 29.9% of all community college students ended up transferring to four-year institutions within three-years of entry. This number improved to 50.6% for students transferring within a six-year period of entry (Mullin, 2011). Furthermore, the College Board reports only 21% of all degree seekers graduated within 150% of what is termed "normal time" (Baum, Little, & Payea, 2011). These disturbing patterns are nothing new.

Burton Clark (1960) coined the term, "cooling out" to describe the role of the community college in discouraging students' progress. Research has identified counseling and informational resources as lacking (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000; McDonough, 2005). Community college counselors, for example, were said to have designated paths for students according to personal judgment and assessment tests (Au, 2008). Additional barriers to transfer among Latina/o, low-income, and first generation students include lack of financial aid, incomplete college preparatory coursework and counseling, and discomfort with the campus climate due to racial tension (Dowd, Cheslock, & Melguizo, 2008).

Muddling the persistence and transfer conversation further is an on-going debate over how statistical analyses of student persistence in community colleges fail to take into consideration the wide and varied constituencies making up the community-college enrollments (Levin, 2007; Rhoads & Valadez, 1996). For example, the attendance patterns of students who shop only for the courses they need for their jobs rather than completing entire programs or transferring is often factored in with the traditional full-time, degree-seeking student counts (Hagedorn, Chi, Cepeda, & McLain, 2007). On the other hand, student persistence data, particularly for Latina/o students in community college, is statistically camouflaged by a "revolving door" effect whereby new students replace non-persisting students (Tinto, 2006).

Since Clark's "cooling out" assertion, community colleges have responded by paying greater attention to the role of the institution in encouraging, as well as inadvertently discouraging, students who aspire to pursue a higher education (Crisp & Nora, 2010). The steady growth in overall enrollment among students of color has brought to the fore a need for greater cultural congruency among institutions in both policy and practice. California's community college system serves the largest concentration of Latina/o students in the nation (NCES, 2008).

Of the approximately 4.7 million California community college students enrolled in California's

112 community colleges, Latina/o students make up the largest percentage of the population at

36.17%; see Table 1 for a more detailed breakdown of total California Community College

enrollments for Fall 2012.

Table 1. California Community College Enrollment – By Ethnicity.

	Fall 2012	Fall 2012
	Student Count	Student Count (%)
State of California Total	1,557,865	100.00%
African-American	109,840	7.05%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	7,026	0.45%
Asian	177,298	11.38%
Filipino	46,606	2.99%
Hispanic	605,162	38.85%
Pacific Islander	7,742	0.50%
Two or More Races	50,592	3.25%
Unknown/Non-Respondent	79,852	5.13%
White Non-Hispanic	473,747	30.41%

(Boggs, 2012)

Although the number of Latina/o students surpasses the percentage of white students in

higher education, Latina/o educational attainment still appears to have increased

disproportionately to the growth of Latina/o population growth (Carnevale & Fry, 2000). Despite

the fact 1.3 million Latina/o students enroll in higher education, only 40% attend four-year

institutions while the rest turn to community colleges (NCES, 2008). Most Latina/o students, and

other students of color disadvantaged by low socioeconomic status, arrive from high school

minimally prepared for higher education (Rendón & Hope, 1996). Moreover, Latina/o higher

education students exceed the dropout rates of all other comparable groups. Well over half the

Latina/o students seeking higher education begin at the community college in California where

increasing representation of the Latina/o population is appreciated in administrative and faculty positions (NCES, 2008) .

In spite of the potential for greater cultural congruity through reaching a critical mass of Latina/o community college students (Hagedorn et al., 2007), institutions and individuals need greater understanding of the strengths of Latina/o cultures, such as *familismo* (family ties) and *compradrazcgo* (companionship), both of which embrace cooperation, interdependence, and mutual assistance in relationships (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995). By meeting Latina/o students where they are with respect to their strengths from cultural practices, community colleges can help the large population of Latina/o students transition to college and persist.

Community colleges innovate new academic programs and practices to retain many types of students underrepresented in four-year institutions. A brief examination of some innovations, such as concurrent enrollment while in high school, the community college baccalaureate degree granting program (CCB), and learning communities consider the feasibility of Latina/o students specifically benefiting from the innovations. Concurrent enrollment commonly appeals to high-achieving students who attend high schools in the vicinity of the community college (Boswell, 2001). Concurrent options, however, are largely available in predominantly white high schools, with very few of these options available within predominately Latina/o serving high schools – the schools potentially benefiting most from the availability of these options (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). Likewise, CCBs exist out of range of most Latina/o communities, although current legislation may change the CCB availability as community colleges justify the status through vocations requiring bachelor degrees (Russell, 2010).

Learning communities represent another innovative approach to learning (Malnarich, 2005). Research has documented the value of the learning community model to improved

educational outcomes as well as increased rates of student persistence and student engagement. My understanding of the potential benefits of learning communities led me to investigate additional student development theories, particularly those helping to explain the transition high school students make at a community college as they seek to move on to a four-year college. While investigating two particular theories contributing to my understanding of the role of nontraditional students in community college, Transition Theory and Validation Theory, I discovered Social Capital Theory was foundational to each.

Today, the community college supports Latina/o students as nontraditional students of color through developmental coursework, affordability, and transferability. The heightened need for students to take courses needed for transfer at additional community colleges complicates students' progress (Adelman, 2005; McCormick, 2003). Meeting course requirements, affording the costs, and being transfer-prepared add up to major problems to be addressed by community colleges on behalf of the student.

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

The number of Latina/o students in higher education remains proportionately high in community colleges versus four-year colleges and universities, and the drop-out rate for Latina/o students exceeds the drop-out rates of comparable groups. In the U.S., the 2010 drop-out rates for 16-24 year olds was 15.1%, for Latina/o students, 12.4% for Native American students, 8.0% for African American students, 5.1% for Caucasian students, and 7.4% for all other ethnic groups (NCES, 2012). Several factors contribute to improving the drop-out rate, particularly academic and social involvement (Astin, 1975).

This study focuses on the formation and nature of the relationships found within a Developmental Learning Community (DLC) fostering persistence. Providing understanding

about the social mechanisms at work within DLCs promoting retention, college achievement, and student development fills a void in the research on learning communities. This information may help optimize these programs so more nontraditional students of color, such as Latina/o students, succeed in college.

Research Questions

- What role does the DLC *program structure* play in supporting students' persistence and transfer aspirations?

  o How does the DLC develop students' bridging and bonding social capital? How does the DLC promote interactions with staff, faculty, and peers in the DLC environment and in the wider campus?

  o How does the DLC develop students' academic skills and additional academic capital?

  o How does the physical environment of the DLC operate to promote the development of students' social and academic capital and ultimately, their persistence and transfer?

- What role does the DLC *program culture* play in supporting students' persistence and transfer aspirations?

  o How does the DLC develop students' cultural capital? How does the DLC promote the values and meanings of the role of a successful student?

  o How does the DLC develop students' social assets and cultural knowledge?

- How does the cultural environment of the DLC operate to promote the development of students' cultural capital and ultimately, their persistence and transfer?

- How does the *program structure* and *program culture* work in conjunction to support students' persistence and transfer aspirations?
  - How does the DLC student develop social capital with the combined structural and cultural components of the program?
  - How does the DLC student develop academic capital with the combined structural and cultural components of the program?
  - How does the DLC student develop cultural capital with the combined structural and cultural components of the program?

Findings from my earlier pilot study revealed the DLC study lab served as a focal point for building community among participants (Appendix B). The program served to structure interaction opportunities between participants and faculty, staff, and DLC peers. I discovered student connections outside of the DLC were constituted through agentive staff and shared venture outside the DLC contributed to collegial connection, which propelled me to investigate the multiple meanings of developmental education from the vantage point of social capital theory.

Expanding upon this initial work, my current dissertation study examines how relational ties structured through a developmental learning community helped equip nontraditional Latina/o students to effectively cope with the transition into the community college mainstream environment. Using Granovetter's notion of strong and loose relational ties, the study examines how relational ties of mixed intensity sustained program participants' transition from the DLC

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into the larger college environment. I examine how social capital, in combination with academic capital and cultural capital, encouraged the formation of transfer readiness among participants.

By the term "developmental learning community" (DLC), I refer to a type of learning community oriented toward developmental coursework and the furthering of basic skills useful for success in the college environment. I am not using the term "developmental" in the commonly used manner by student affairs practitioners, wherein "development" is typically used to describe and discuss student growth, often along a linear trajectory relating to cognitive and/or identity development (refer to Appendix A – Key Terms). Thus, I am not interested in any particular cognitive- or identity-related change per se, but am instead focused on student perceptions about how their experiences in a DLC helped to prepare them to succeed in college-level academic work.

Overview of Dissertation Chapters

In Chapter 2, I discuss the historical context which shaped the perforated pipeline for Latina/o community college students. Then, I review previous research generally focused on the experiences Latina/o students in higher education and specifically in community college. Chapter Two concludes with a discussion of the conceptual framework I utilized to explore the experiences of Latina/o students. Chapter 3 includes my Conceptual Model of DLC Program and Structure (Figure 1) and explains how it draws from social capital theory, which sheds light on the Latina/o population and the DLC model in the community college setting.

In Chapter 4, I describe the broad aims of this project. Next, I give a detailed description of the qualitative methods approach utilized to answer the research questions. Lastly, I address my role as a researcher, which acknowledges the potential biases and personal perspectives I

carried into this study. I conclude this section with a discussion of study limitations and the steps I took to minimize these limitations.

In Chapters 5 and 6, I offer findings and results from the inquiry derived from 44 Latina/o zero-year students, who entered the community college with the intention of transferring to a four-year institution. The first half of Chapter 5 provides detailed findings based on the DLC environment with respect to the Program Structure, and the accrual of social capital and its transmutation to academic capital. The second half of Chapter 5 reveals the DLC environment with respect to the Program Culture revealing the values and meanings student participants acquired leading to greater cultural capital. Chapter 6 explains the progressive movement students made toward the big zone. All three chapters in my findings describe a detailed picture of the efficacy of the DLC program in helping students succeed.

In Chapter 7, I offer a review of the purpose of my study and the research questions, a discussion of the findings, social capital, and the two main themes of the findings. I utilize the qualitative results and findings to answer the eight research questions guiding this study while making connections with the findings and literature. Lastly, in Chapter 8, I provide important implications for practice, policy, and future research.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

In this chapter, I first discuss the context of nontraditional student diversity, which shapes the following section on Latina/o students' porous pipeline to higher education. I follow this with a review of the role of community college, learning communities, developmental education and developmental learning communities generally focused on the experiences of Latina/o students.

Nontraditional Student Diversity

Given my research was performed at a diversely-populated community college, I begin the literature review focusing on nontraditional student diversity from a critical perspective. Particular relevant aspects of critical theory help researchers overcome the pitfall of operating from an exclusionary set of values promulgating a mono-cultural viewpoint of how student engagement should appear (Chesler & Crowfoot, 2000). Societal patterns from which critical perspectives have developed are outlined historically in this section of the literature review. Next, the strengths and weaknesses in Tinto's integration framework, its applicability to community colleges, and the opening it provides for critical theory research practices are described. Finally, the relevance of critical perspectives is addressed with respect to the study of academic engagement experiences in a diverse population of community college students.

The social patterns and experience of European immigrants excluding racial minorities from mainstream society were recognized and challenged in the 1920s, at which time prejudice and discrimination was researched (Oudenhoven & Williemsen, 1989). A social psychological approach was taken based on the belief relations between dominant group members and it was determined that racial minorities resulted from prejudiced attitudes. A new paradigm on ethnicity arose in 1970, influenced by the industrial society which impacted sociopolitical behavior (Thompson, 1989). Ethnic and racial groups maintained separate boundaries and sought their

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separate interests while maintaining respect for each other. This approach places the responsibility on individuals and not society. Such cultural pluralism countered by Bourdieu's theories of social and cultural capital are based on a dominant ideology driven by greater social mobility, particularly with respect to education (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). In cultural pluralism the group or individual is to blame if they do not assimilate (Nkomo, 1992, p. 496; Tierney, 1992).

To his credit, Tinto (1975) intended to expand college impact theory to populations other than white males in elite educational institutions. Consequently, the interest in institutional impact and student involvement continues to grow into becoming more inclusive of all types of students in various learning institutions. However, the arena of college impact research receives criticism due to the lack of inclusion of nontraditional, underrepresented students (Tanaka, 2002) and commuter students (Braxton & Mundy, 2002).

The key to find a more inclusive door in Tinto's model is to unlock students' institutional experiences. Perhaps the opening occurs within the formal interactions taking place in the classroom setting and informal interactions referring to faculty and staff contacts outside of classroom settings. In the community college system, little involvement, such as extracurricular activities, will constitute formal experiences and day-to-day activities Tinto labels as *information* interactions. According to Tinto, each type of interaction is distinct and interrelated with each other. Obviously, this distinction may not apply to all educational experiences. The learning experience can potentially be a hybrid of two categories in learning experiences including out of classroom or field or group projects (Karp, Hughes, & O'Gara, 2008). The ability to successfully engage in these activities contributes to the student's level of social and academic integration.

Additionally, successful integration (membership access) in the dominant community and multiple communities increases student persistence.

Conversely, "negative interactions and experiences tend to reduce integration, to distance the individual from the academic and social communities of the institution, promoting the individual's *marginality* [emphasis added] and, ultimately, withdrawal" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Membership in subgroups contributes to persistence, especially in institutions where communities are very large. Likewise, community college membership poses connection problems resolved through subgroup membership, even if it occurs within a classroom (Karp et al., 2008).

Concerning membership, Tinto references Van Gennep's social anthropological study of the rites of passage in tribal societies and Emile Durkheim's sociological study on suicide for concepts analogous to his work in student departure. In Tinto's social integration model, successful integration into collegiate communities corresponds to Van Gennep's concept of incorporation. Incorporation is the ability for individuals to take on new patterns of interaction with members of a new group and to establish competent membership in the group as a participant member. Furthermore, by using Durkheim's study on suicide, Tinto utilizes the concept of egotistical suicide. To demonstrate the phenomenon of student departure, suicide is presented as a form of voluntary withdrawal from local communities being as much a reflection of the community as it is of the individual who withdraws, and a rejection of conventional norms and values of those communities.

Arguably, this Durkheimian formulation implies minorities would have to "undergo a cultural suicide of sorts to avoid an intellectual suicide" (Tierney, 1992). Tierney presents his view through a social constructivist lens in which he believes "theoretical models are not merely

to describe the world, but to change it" (603). Tinto borrows the term "ritual" but disconnects it from its cultural foundations. From a critical theoretical perspective, Tinto's widely accepted departure model misinterprets the notion of rituals in anthropological terms and "in doing so he has created a theoretical construct with practical implications that hold potentially harmful consequences for racial and ethnic minorities" (603). In Tinto's framework, the rituals occurring in colleges and universities are reflective of the *dominant* culture. Van Gennep spoke about rituals/rites of passages within a *specific* culture. Therefore, Tinto's use of ritual is inappropriate if the expectation is students from a particular culture must acculturate and undergo the rite of passage into the dominant culture where a uniform set of values and attitudes exist (Tierney, 1992). This restriction would potentially invalidate findings in community colleges wherein the socio-cultural context must be acknowledged, as many cultures are represented and observed.

While Tinto's integration framework is questioned with respect to social integration relevance in community college, a recent study supports the concept of attachment development in community college. Non-residential students with diverse backgrounds have been found to overcome the challenge of becoming engaged with their community colleges by experiencing social integration within the classroom structure (Karp et al., 2008). Both social and academic integration occur simultaneously as students develop *informational* networks, achieving the critical sense of attachment for community college students. These students reported empowerment through word of mouth experiences, which made navigation of college more manageable and created a sense of belonging.

As illustrated in Karp's study (2008), critical and postmodern perspective adds to the cultural equation for change through the empowerment of students who are encouraged to honor their identities as they seek to alleviate the oppressive expectations of mainstream

society (Tierney & Rhoads, 1993). Perhaps the most important notion from postmodernism in critical theory is the extension of knowledge, reality, and truth into practice. Postmodernists have attempted to deconstruct the marginalized status of the working class in the framework of capitalism. Critical theorists correspondingly aim to emancipate the oppressed from an imprisoning enculturation process (320). In viewing social integration, the role of culture threatens to shape groups according to the values of the dominant society maintaining the role of power working through and upon people (Giroux, 2002; Tierney & Rhoads, 1993).

Latina/o Students and Higher Education Attainment

The U.S. Latina/o population continues to grow in numbers as represented by Mexican Americans, Central Americans, South Americans, Cubans, Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, and multiracial Latina/os who self-identify as two or more races (Jones & Smith, 2001). Latina/o students will come to be the largest minority college-going population by 2015, relative to the percentage of Latina/os in the national population, while non-Latina/o white student trends will reveal less relative representation on college campuses over time (Carnevale & Fry, 2000). In 2010, the largest concentration of Latina/o students aged 18-24 comprised 45% of the California population, of which 31% attended public colleges and universities. Latina/o students represented 35% of the population enrolled in California Community Colleges compared to 27% in California State Universities (CSUs) and 15% in Universities of California (UCs), but only 23% received degrees (California Postsecondary Education Commission, 2011). More degrees were awarded to 38% of white 18-24 year old students comprising 32% of the total California population. Next, I address how Latina/o students currently fare as a population in colleges and universities.

With the insurgence of Latina/o students entering into higher education, Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) evolved from the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) in 1985 to support Latina/o students' college aspirations. The HACU strives to improve U.S. global competition by providing equitable education, promote the advantages of diversity in the workforce, and to advocate social justice and equity. The HACU provides support for institutions with 25% of their population comprised of Latino students to receive support for developing a curriculum appropriate to assisting Latino students in their higher educational pursuits (Flores, 2008). As Lyndon Johnson addressed graduates at Howard University stating, "You do not take a person who for years has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him to the starting line of a race and say, 'you're free to compete with others', and justly believe you have been completely fair," so does the HACU step in to tip the scales in favor of the Latina/o population. However, many HSIs constructed upon organizational structures are manufactured and driven by enrollment of the federally-required 25% representation of Latina/o students (Garcia, 2013).

As the largest growing population of Latina/o students aspires to complete degrees equally with their counterparts (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007), understanding the hindrances and advantages to attainment warrants investigation. A broader context of Latina/o experiences in the K-12 system helps paint a picture of the effects brought to the current higher education conditions that Latina/o students face in the community college. Higher education practices of exclusion and limited access trickled down from racial profiling practices perpetuating resistance to desegregation (Thelin, 1985).

A review of discriminatory practices provides the backdrop to access and success issues for Latina/o college students today. The beginnings of exclusion and racial profiling of Latina/o

members of society began when Mexican-Americans occupied the southwestern territory of the United States in the 1800s eventually had these territories taken over by European settlers. The methods of usurping included marrying the rancher's daughters, taking the land by force, squatting, or having leverage with the court system. At one point, the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 federally funded land grants to encourage settlers to utilize the land and create a society in which people could become educated (Cohen & Kisker, 2010).

Although declared unconstitutional in Arizona almost four years before Brown v Board of Education, Mexican schools continued to be a systematic problem in the Southwest (Powers, 2008). In particular, Mexican schools in Texas, California, Arizona, and Colorado offered manual labor training for males and domestic skills for females in crowded classrooms with poor teaching (Valencia, Menchaca, & Donato, 2002). Many Mexican American students in Oxnard, California, contributed to the city's growth as a farming region as the students were relegated to the workforce after dropping out of school. As a territory first occupied by Mexican Americans, the farms were now occupied by white settlers who trained Mexican Americans to work the farms instead of staying in school.

Mexican-American children were segregated either into classrooms separate from white children, and "Mexican schools" were built for Mexican-Americans (García, Yosso, & Barajas, 2012). Mexican-American children were placed into substandard classrooms with limited resources. The goal of learning the English language with poorly trained teachers was to assimilate the children into white society. When children were caught speaking Spanish they were ostracized by standing in a circle drawn in the playground and put on display for all to see. They also had their mouths washed out with soap and were spanked for speaking Spanish.

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Regarded by white folks as inferior, Mexican-American children received lesser quality education in the dual school system.

Two particular territories, the regions of Phoenix, Arizona, and Ventura County, California, are exemplary for understanding the legacy of Mexican-American students. In Ventura County, California, when the schools became very crowded, the school board, teachers, and superintendent were pressed to make a decision on how to manage the population growth (Barajas, 2004). Historical records reveal the cleanest and brightest Mexican-American students would be sent to the white classrooms which denoted the commonplace racism taking place in the early years of Mexican-American children's educational careers (Donato & Hanson, 2012; García et al., 2012).

Similar actions were taken in Arizona where children and their families were not given full rights of citizenship even though under the law they were considered to be white (Powers, 2008). In fact, those families were not permitted to swim in public pools or attend churches and cinemas along with other public restrictions. Since then, the Arizona Senate Bill 1070 of 2010 has emptied classrooms, particularly in Phoenix where the city has prospered over time, as the bill demanded Mexican-Americans reveal documentation of their citizenship status (Nill, 2011). This recent bill escalated the racial profiling having begun long ago in the southwestern states.

Additional conditions hinder Latina/o students' ability to complete longer term educational objectives. Working while enrolled, taking less than a full load, and being the first generation to attend college are examples of socioeconomic conditions hindering Latina/o students' progress in college. Incongruous or hostile racial climates in higher education institutions replicate societal conditions hindering progress for Latina/o students (Alfonso, 2006; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999). While transitional experiences of Latina/o

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students, affected by the campus climate, are similar to what most first-year students endure (Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996), diverse college environments help Latina/o students transition to college (Hurtado, 2003).

Latina/o students in transition to college benefit from noncognitive factors, such as social and environmental comfort as well as support from role models (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). For example, smaller niches within the greater college environment into which students can adapt provide one advantage for Latina/o students in larger four-year institutions (Hurtado, 2003). Another study suggests Latina/o two-year students in occupational, certificate, vocational, trade, and technical programs were advantaged in those environments as the researchers concluded Latina/o students sub-baccalaureate aspirations were reached at the same rate as their white counterparts (Alfonso, 2006).

Comparing white students to nontraditional students, who are considered in the minority as they are largely underrepresented in four year institutions and overly represented in community colleges, has commonly been referred to as the achievement gap (Carpenter, Ramirez, & Severn, 2006; Levin, 2007), which provides no known advantages for Latina/o students as an ethnic group. In fact, such a defined achievement gap may perpetuate socioeconomic advantages for some groups and replicate the inequalities of society (Bowen et al., 2005).

More equitable practices revealed by research indicate nontraditional students benefit from 1) a sense of belonging fortified by academic support, 2) programs enhancing relationships and skills to interact with diverse populations, 3) interdependence with diverse peers, staff, and faculty members, and 4) setting goals for everyone to be included in the pursuit of excellence (Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008). It is likely many student populations benefit

from the above-mentioned factors, providing institutional supports to overcome both socioeconomic and institutional environmental hindrances affecting students' college decision-making processes. Socioeconomic disadvantages may be overcome with institutionally induced advantages for Latina/o students' higher education attainment (Bowen et al., 2005).

A number of scholars acknowledge the discrepancy of Latina/o higher education attainment relative to the overall population (Rendón & Hope, 1996; Villalpando & Solórzano, 2005) and question deficit models adopted in higher education scholarship to explain attrition by blaming students and their lack of capacity rather than examining culturally insensitive practices of higher education institutions (Nora, Barlow, & Crisp, 2005). Despite the plethora of research performed to retain the myriad Latina/o students who aspire to attain bachelor's degrees equally with their counterparts (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007) strengths-based practices based on cultural congruity remains elusive in higher education institutions.

Rather than looking at attrition through a deficit perspective, institutions inclusive of the Latina/o culture would provide an atmosphere beneficial to helping Latina/o students adjust to college, then reach degree attainment. Understanding Latina/o cultures provides insight on aspects of transition to college previously unacknowledged in traditional pedagogical and college impact paradigms. The behaviors, attitudes, and values shared by Latina/o students as they transition to college is best understood by examination of Latina/o families of origin (Villalpando & Solórzano, 2005). Cultural congruity for Latina/o students, requires understanding and communication conducive to practices within the Latina/o culture, such as *familismo* (family ties) and *compradrazcgo* (companionship), both of which embrace loyalty and dedication in relationships.

Familial relationships provide a foundational support system for Latina/o students who rely on financial, psychological, and emotional encouragement from family members and mentors (Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1993; Nora, 1987; Nora, Cabrera, Hagedorn, & Pascarella, 1996). Latina/o individuals tend to hold conversations about important topics in a group setting with most family members present (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994). In this collective decision-making, family members and mentors make decisions and arrive to a consensus together (Born, Greiner, Arnp, Butler, & Ahluwalia, 2004) affecting both access and continuation for Latina/o students embarking on their transition to college.

Family-style decision-making as a Latina/o cultural value and practice emphasizes loyalty and closeness within the family unit, placing the needs of the family before the individual, even if it leads to personal sacrifices (Sy & Romero, 2008). Such sacrifices may come from Latina/o students taking on adult roles in family settings and fulfilling financial obligations, which can be major reasons for Latina/o student attrition (Sanchez, Marder, & Berry, 1992). On the other hand, familial support for the pursuit of higher education increases the likelihood of Latina/o student persistence (Flores, 1993). Understanding family values in relation to Latina/o students' transition to college allows scholars to fathom the complex negotiations taking place in a collective context – one encouraging individuals to make choices based on implicit and explicit messages shared within the group. Persistence for Latina/o students in higher education can be further understood by considering the crucial role decision-making plays for Latina/o undergraduates in conjunction with the impact college makes on families, (Hernandez & Lopez, 2004).

Mentors and role models acting as extended family members play an important mediating role in the decision-making process as well as parents and other family members (Valdes, 1996;

Vega, 1995). Similarly, mentor relationships in higher education affect Latina/o students adjusting to college. Mentorship helps Latina/o students adjust to college by witnessing the behaviors, thoughts, and beliefs of higher education professionals (Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000). Likewise, scholarship through peer interaction with students at varying skill and professional levels encourages students as they negotiate the higher education setting together. Supportive mentoring in family-like settings encourages Latina/o students to invest in relationships with faculty and peers inside and outside the classroom through experiential learning (Rendón, 2002).

As nontraditional students largely represented in community college, Latina/o undergraduates' transition to college is fortified by familial support and institutional diversity experiences including Latina/o cultural congruity, such as mentorship as a mediating role for retention. This review of Latina/o students and higher education attainment acknowledges the dire necessity to understand aspects of cultural congruity with respect to persistence in community college. The next portion of this literature review examines the role of the community college in higher education attainment for Latina/o undergraduates.

California Community College Role

Although California Community Colleges (CCCs) strive to prevent dropout by helping nontraditional students transition to college, there are limited programs geared specifically toward Latina/o undergraduates (Rendón, Jalomo, Nora, & Braxton, 2000). Latina/o first-year students comprised nearly half the CCC population graduating from California high schools in 2010, yet only about 13,000 Latina/o community college students transferred to UCs and CSUs out of approximately 54,000 enrolled Latina/o community college students (California Postsecondary Education Commission, 2011). Some high school programs, such as AVID,

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SCORE, Upward Bound, Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, and Project GRAD, among others, attempt to prepare Latina/o students for college, but demonstrate mixed reviews as to operative dissemination throughout secondary schools and effective college preparation (Fashola & Slavin, 2001). Although the need for these types of programs to assist Latina/o students in college entrance is apparent (Rumberger, 2001), such programs have yet to resolve the issue of more than 50% of Latina/o community college students in need of precollegiate instruction (Fry, 2004; NCES, 2008). Instead, most Latina/o students seek community colleges to provide necessary precollegiate instruction including study habits, time management, and basic skills coursework, such as math and English.

Recent legislation for the provision of basic skills shows promise for the fulfillment of precollegiate needs, however, the jury is still out as to efficacy of the Basic Skills Initiative of 2006 (Fulks et al., 2010). One of the important reasons CCCs offer basic skills is to prepare nontraditional students for transfer to California State Universities (CSUs) or Universities of California (UCs) as part of the California Master Plan (CMP). Since the CMP designates 54.2% of high school graduates not enrolled in four year institutions to community colleges (University of California Office of the President, 1987). CCCs function in a vital role of the CMP while working toward higher standing and greater legitimacy in this hierarchal structure of higher education (Rhoads, Wagoner, & Ryan, 2008). Consequently, CCCs seek to improve student retention rates and institutional reputation through effective interventions to help many nontraditional students in need of precollegiate coursework transition to college. Although the interventions do not specifically address Latina/o students in California, the interventions may offer some dropout prevention approaches appropriate to some California-based Latina/o students.

National interventions to ease transition to college through the community college include community college baccalaureates (CCBs), dual-enrollment, concurrent enrollment, and learning communities to help all students persist. Although CCBs deviate from the CMP, California Community Colleges may establish CCBs in areas of high workforce need (California State Legislature, 1987). CCBs, justified by rural locations far from four year institutions with low college-going rates and low baccalaureate attainment, may share responsibility and funding with other four year institutions (Russell, 2010). This type of CCB may appear to function as dual enrollment, which allows students to take coursework in community colleges and four year institutions simultaneously. CCBs curtail some of the complex problems discouraging students from persisting when they choose to attend multiple community colleges in order to complete the coursework to meet their needs (Borden, 2004; Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, & Rosales, 2005; McCormick, 2003). However, the costs involved in dual enrollment conflicts with the CMP goals to reduce redundancy in the higher education system. Likewise, costs for concurrent enrollment confound district revenue allotment[1] (Lowe, 2010).

Nonetheless, concurrent enrollment, a growing trend in high schools located near community colleges, provides early college exposure by allowing students in high school to earn college credit through instruction given by college instructors on the high school campus or for students to come to the community college for instruction (Bailey, Hughes, & Karp, 2002; Bragg, 2005). Unfortunately, CCC involvement with high schools averts the community college status, identification, and reputation in the CMP by reversing the historical movement of the community college away from high schools to associating with higher education (Cohen &

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[1] Since these students are enrolled in high school, the legislation in many states directs a state's K–12 revenues should continue to be allocated to the district, but now must (in some states) be used to pay for the most challenging course available— even when provided by an educational institution outside the school district.

Brawer, 2008). However, CCCs may take interest in reputational benefits from high-achieving students attracted by CCBs, concurrent enrollment, and dual enrollment programs. These types of interventions to help students access higher education may serve California high school Latina/o students if the upward trend of almost 30% of Latina/o students who presently qualify for entry into UCs and CSUs continues (California Postsecondary Education Commission, 2011). On the other hand, another intervention used in UCs, CSUs, and CCCs for meeting precollegiate and collegiate needs of undergraduates, called learning communities, offers a potential environment conducive to Latina/o student retention and transfer.

Unlike concurrent enrollment and CCBs, learning communities exist independent of location of the community college to the high school or four year institution. The learning community forms academically and socially supportive cohorts of students taking similar coursework together. As a reform movement, learning communities in community colleges provide a variety of critical factors, such as collaborating in coursework, networking for resources, and supporting nontraditional students (Malnarich, 2005). While not a utopian system, community colleges are less bound by district control and less limited by funding practices when establishing learning communities (Shapiro & Levine, 1999) than CCBs or concurrent enrollment. However, only a few community college programs focus on the Latina/o student population. One such program, the Puente Project, reflects practices found to contribute to persistence and retention of Latina/o students by offering teaching, counseling, and mentoring through affirmation of Latina/o identities and validation of cultural background and experiences (Rendón, 2002). The Puente Project began in 1981 as a California State Initiative recognizing a majority of Latina/o community college students were not transferring to four-year institutions.

Although not precisely considered a DLC, Latina/o students throughout the state of California have particularly benefited from the Puente Project, which informs my research.

Having investigated the condition of Latina/o students in higher education as well as the role of the community college and the programs in place to help Latina/o students adjust to college, I choose to focus on learning communities as an intervention. Learning communities in California possess greater likelihood for adoption in CCCs as learning communities exist in all segments of the CMP without opposing the essence of the CMP. Learning communities potentially ease transition to college for Latina/o students through developmental education components. My evaluation of developmental education follows the learning communities section and reveals the primary function of the community college to assist students with precollegiate coursework needs, which may be met through learning communities.

Learning Communities

Cooperative educational environments for the purposes of teaching and learning harken back to Harvard in the 1600's which evolved into several types of learning communities (LCs) (Pike, Kuh, & McCormick, 2011). LCs currently established in different institutional segments within the California Master Plan (CMP), have more recently caught the interest of community colleges. The usefulness of various types of LCs for community college students serve specific purposes such as introduction to college, provision of specialization, or combination of overlapping subjects to assist students in transition to college (Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, & Smith, 1990b). Intuitively, a cooperative learning environment makes sense to enhance transition to college through student development and student involvement, but evidence has yet to be established as to the efficacy of LCs in community college.

Before 1997, studies on LC studies were scarce and mostly anecdotal (Minkler, 2002). Conceptual pieces for theoretical justification, advocacy articles and books, individual institutional case studies, and survey data presently comprise the LC literature. Theoretically, instinctually, and methodically, the LC literature supports concepts of retention, which some researchers quantified utilizing survey data. Retention factors such as lowered risk of course withdrawal, increased satisfaction in college reported, increased cognitive skill and ability development, and greater academic performance levels from the National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE) and the Community College Survey for Student Engagement (CCSSE) quantitatively affirm LCs. However, the statistical methods and consequent analyses from NSSE and CCSSE, currently under question, may alter the affirmative renderings of quantitative LC research (Olivas, 2011; Pike et al., 2011). Although LC studies have yet to be adequately explained with narrative meaning through qualitative research to complement quantitative data (Commander & Ward, 2009), some qualitative research reveals particular barriers to successful LC implementation appearing to have occurred from organizational obstacles.

Institutions face problems initiating LCs due to the philosophical and organizational changes they require (Shapiro & Levine, 1999). Faculty, accustomed to teaching their subjects independently and institutions following this custom, have been embedded in the lecture hall model for information delivery. The drive to specialize in areas of knowledge and prioritize research efforts to serve the needs of the nation since the 1900s (Kerr, 2001) steered institutional and faculty autonomy interests away from collaborative teaching efforts required in LCs. The common hurdles addressed by Levine and Shapiro (2004) in their LC construction guide include the need for stable leadership and an administrative center in the institution; information and understanding for students, faculty, and administrators about learning communities; ongoing

communication between the chief administrator and participating faculty and students to discuss program needs; informing counselors concerning the program offerings; financial support for faculty and administrative efforts in the program; exploration of the use of adjunct faculty; the use of peer mentoring and peer advising; and linking remedial coursework with popular, general education courses. These recommendations provide some insight as to institutional resistance in adopting the LC construct. However, important scholarly contributions concerning the alleviation of drop out rates in nontraditional students through first-year experiences (Rendón, 2002) may justify the institutional effort to overcome organizational obstacles.

Thus far, scholars assert cohorts of community college students taking prescribed courses and studying together as LCs are highly desirable; particularly for the development and involvement of students in need of precollegiate coursework (Malnarich, 2005). As a precursor to transition to college, the four attributes of peer/faculty interaction, support services, collaborative academic practices, and community building engage students in academic and social endeavors in college. These attributes provide some evidence to justify adoption of LC programs, particularly in community colleges.

I provide an overview of the LC to understand the LC's function as an intervention for community college students. The LC serves two common purposes of overcoming isolation and incoherent curriculum among and between both students and faculty (Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, & Smith, 1990a). LCs are small study groups occurring within larger classes, thematic content classes, or interdisciplinary team-taught classes establishing curricular connection and building community among students (Malnarich, 2005). Five particular types are found in various institutions according to the specific purposes they serve (Gabelnick et al., 1990b). These five LC types are: (1) freshman interest groups, (2) federated learning

communities, (3) coordinated studies, (4) linked courses, and (5) thematic clusters. The following descriptions compare the differences between LCs with a focus on the utility of the thematic cluster LCs for community college students.

The first three types of LCs practice some elements similar to thematic clusters, which I outline for a basis of comparing and understanding LC types. The first LC type, the freshman interest LC, is designed to provide an immediate support system through which the LC student meets with a peer advisor (Gabelnick et al., 1990b). For example, classes of $25 - 30$ students chosen from the general education freshman enrollment are provided assistance for academic issues and resources through weekly meetings with their peers and peer advisor. Federated LCs advance a faculty member to be the "Master Learner" in a central theme, such as Mathematics. The theme is carried throughout three particular courses, but the courses are not intentionally integrated in the same way as seen in the thematic cluster LC. It is the Master Learner's responsibility to integrate the material from the courses in a seminar for the LC students. Finally, the coordinated studies LC, limited to one term as opposed to year-long in other LCs, employs a faculty team from different disciplines. The faculty team merges their individualized course offerings under a common theme, such as "Creative Expression." Separate seminars are held by faculty through which course topics are cross-referenced under the central theme (Gabelnick et al., 1990b).

The last two LC types most commonly used in community colleges share similar facets of curriculum connection (Weber, 2001). In linked courses LCs, small groups of students concurrently enroll in two courses focusing on skills in one and content in the other (Walker-Guyer, 1999). For example, a linked courses LC student would enroll in a writing course and an accompanying lecture course. In a thematic cluster LC, larger groups of students form clusters in

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thematic content courses as an expanded version of the linked courses. The pedagogy and curriculum are carried out by a team of faculty members who coordinate their interdisciplinary subjects under a central theme, such as "Literacy and Technology." An English instructor could assign a book to read while a computer science instructor could involve students in complementary electronic activities, such as computer games rewarding correct word definition from the assigned book under this theme. The versatility of connecting courses and the provision of a coherent theme makes the thematic cluster LC desirable for a diverse population of community college students and faculty. Some community colleges utilize the thematic cluster LC to address the students' precollegiate needs and enhance persistence in a developmental fashion.

The Developmental Learning Community (DLC) evolved as a relatively new type of LC to meet the needs of a majority of community college students. The DLC construct developed from the thematic cluster LC by pacing learning material according to the students' needs in a student-centered approach. These pedagogical and organizational constructs founded by John Dewey (1916, 1938) are based on the Socratic tradition of student development stemming from interaction between learners and teachers and branching out into community involvement. Likewise, as students responsibly participate in learning within mutually respectful and cooperative curricular constructs, they are personally empowered (Rogers, 1969). Rather than teaching by merely transferring knowledge, a student-centered pedagogical approach invites exploration of ideas, questions, and curiosities (Freire, 1970).

Curricular connection and community building occurs more readily through the developmental teaching model which places the student in the center of the pedagogy (Malnarich, 2005). To better understand how the DLC fits into developmental educational

approaches in community colleges, I offer a review of community college developmental education followed by an expansion of the DLC construct.

Community College Developmental Education

The role of the community college in offering developmental education and helping its nontraditional students to persist is monumental. Developmental Education (DE) prepares students for college level coursework through the provision of precollegiate coursework, particularly in math and English, for academic skill development. Influenced by student development theories related to how students acquire knowledge in postsecondary institutions, DE also includes the process of social and personal skill development (Casazza, 1999). Some student development theories involve cognitive- and identity-related changes occurring during the process of academic, social, and personal skill development.

However, this portion of the literature review emphasizes why and how California Community Colleges (CCCs) prepare students to succeed in college-level academic work while building social and personal skills. As described in the introduction, this study focuses on student perceptions about how their experiences in a DLC helped to prepare them for college-level academic work rather than cognitive- and identity-related changes. In so doing, I acknowledge the importance of many other variables contributing to academic outcomes, such as relationships with others, as asserted by Tinto (1975), Pace (1984), Astin (1984), Weidman (1989), Bean (2005), and Nora, Barlow, and Crisp (2005). CCCs offer DE to nontraditional students to gain not only academic skills, but also the social and personal skills through which students transition to college level coursework.

I recognize the interchangeability of similar terms for developmental education, such as remedial, preparatory, basic skills, and compensatory education, which tend to focus on the

academic (math or English proficiency) outcome. However, developmental education, as a term, carries greater regard for social and personal skill development contributing to academic outcomes (Boylan & Saxon, 1998; Clowes, 1980). For the purposes of this dissertation, I define developmental education as:

. . . curriculum and advising providing precollegiate and college level academic instruction together as well as support and strategies for developing a variety of noncognitive skills and characteristics, including, but not limited to attitudes, behaviors, competence, autonomy, sense of belonging, and ability to seek help.

Four assumptions underlie developmental education as defined above: 1) DE is a cognitive and affective process of development informed by psychological and learning theories rather than an outcome, 2) DE focuses on intellectual, social, and emotional growth combined, 3) DE assumes all learners have talents to support cognitive and affective processes, and 4) DE applies to all ages and stages of individuals in the process of learning. While focusing on cohorts of Latina/o first-year students among the 60-70% of CCC students requiring precollegiate coursework (Fulks et al., 2010), I define DE with equally important academic proficiency outcomes and social and personal skill development for CCCs to help nontraditional students transition to college.

Academic proficiency dominates social and personal skills in postsecondary education student admissions policies and research. Various college and university standards for undergraduate entry commonly define academic proficiency through quantitative measurement. Likewise, grade point average and standardized test scores are common examples of academic proficiency used by researchers. Research demonstrates the degree of academic proficiency measured depends upon the amount and quality of college preparation one receives during high

school. Proficiency standards placed on academic assessment tests, typically taken before college entry, then determine which courses students need to navigate the higher education pipeline (Au, 2008). Additionally, how well each student scores on the assessments depends greatly on the resources available in high school and the impartation of college application knowledge (McDonough, 1997). Consequently, a great number of students with lower scores are placed in precollegiate courses, which is obtained predominately in community colleges.

More than 60% of first-time community college students took at least one precollegiate course, compared to 29% of first-time students in public 4-year institutions (Bailey, Calcagno, Jenkins, Kienzl, & Leinbach, 2005). Almost 70% of CCC students enter needing precollegiate coursework in math and English (CCCCO, 2008). In response to this need, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO), representing 110 colleges serving 2.9 million students, engaged in a strategic planning process in 2006 which resulted in a Basic Skills Initiative to teach academic skills foundational to learning, such as those used in mathematics, reading, and writing. This initiative ensures community college students receive academic help unavailable at four year institutions (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). However, the delivery of the basic skills and precollegiate courses requires more than drilling students for the test. The ultimate goal of effective practices for academic proficiency would demonstrate equitable supportive practices to meet students' academic, social, and personal needs – and not just meet institutional test score quotas (Au, 2008).

Having identified the necessity of DE, I now examine how some developmental education practices offered in CCCs may prepare nontraditional students to succeed in college-level academic work. Many CCCs employ innovative pedagogical programs, such as Supplemental Instruction as voluntary enrichment workshops to accompany college coursework,

Writing Across the Curriculum as writing standards congruency in all disciplines, Summer Bridge as counseling and vocational goal setting, and Basic Skills as precollegiate math and English coursework. These CCC programs complement traditional practices of teaching and learning while incorporating some elements of social and personal skill development through group membership.

For example, Supplemental Instruction allows for groups of students to attend the workshops while enrolled in a corresponding college-level course (W. E. Maxwell, 1998). These supportive practices demonstrate how CCCs respond to the dire need to prepare students for college level work. However, research has yet to describe any definitive impact of these programs on persistence and college enrollment (Higbee, Arendale, & Lundell, 2005; Perin, 2005) and no current evidence reveals the programs' efficacy of college preparation in an equitable fashion (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007). One more innovative CCC developmental education practice, the Developmental Learning Community (DLC), appears to combine traditional practices with more extensive opportunities for nontraditional students' social and personal skill development than the aforementioned programs.

Developmental Learning Communities

Developmental Learning Communities (DLCs) provide more opportunities for students to ease into college by offering precollegiate coursework in conjunction with college level coursework and providing specific student services. These services offer multiple areas of support, including counseling, financial aid, time management, personal development, and opportunities for interaction with peers and faculty while scaffolding precollegiate coursework with college-level courses. The DLC uniquely combines academic, social, and personal aspects to help retain nontraditional students. I derive particular attributes and effects on students in

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transition to college from by vital retention factors substantiated in empirical studies (Bers &

Smith, 1991; Chapman & Pasacarella, 1983; Karp et al., 2008; Lardner, 2003; Tierney, 1999;

Tinto, 1993; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). These attributes and effects inherent in the unique structure of

DLCs are: 1) faculty and peer interaction which assists student transition to college yielding

greater persistence and retention, 2) curricular challenges which accelerates academic

performance, 3) collaboration in coursework which assists a sense of community membership,

and 4) supportive services and spaces assisting successful navigation of the educational pipeline.

These attributes help students ease into college socially and personally while providing an

ongoing academic structure.

Some community colleges utilize DLCs to improve persistence, finishing a course or

semester; retention, continuing into the succeeding semester; completion, accomplishing a

certificate, a two-year degree, or meeting transfer requirements; and transfer rates, moving from

a two-year college to a four-year institution. DLCs help students connect to faculty and peers

academically, socially, and personally while providing appropriate college preparatory strategies

for the myriad students in need of precollegiate coursework (Malnarich, 2005). For academic and

social support, DLC faculty members often collaborate with one another to develop an

interdisciplinary curriculum for cohorts of students (Gabelnick et al., 1990a). Instructors

motivate students with combined topics such as math and science, making new information

easier to understand while placing the academic challenge bar just above current ability levels

(Schuetz, 2008).

For personal support such as financial aid and counseling, student services provide tools

to help students navigate the educational pipeline and transition to college. DLCs purposefully

create an environment in which students connect with the curriculum, build community, and

develop personal skills through an innovative, nontraditional, student-focused, developmental approach (Malnarich, 2005). Although few DLCs focus on retaining the Latina/o student population, I draw from social capital resources to develop a conceptual framework from which to base my analysis of the DLC at Southern California Community College (SCCC, a pseudonym). Next, I offer a discussion of the conceptual framework I utilized to explore the experiences of Latina/o community college students in a developmental learning community.

Chapter 3 – Conceptual Framework

This chapter provides an overview of social capital theory, highlighting how it has been historically theorized, its applicability within the social science literature, and its relevance to this case study. I draw from this body of social capital literature to develop a conceptual framework from which to frame my analysis of the DLC at Southern California Community College (SCCC).

Capital is the stock of varying types of resources and assets one accumulates and possesses. Capital can be expanded, invested, spent, donated, and transformed into various forms. The notion of capital began with Karl Marx's (Marx, 1933 (1849), 1995 (1867, 1885, 1894)) work in his examination of the exchange of commodities between the dominant classes and nondominant classes in society. Dominant social members with excess capital invested in order to increase capital while nondominant social members gained essential capital through their work to sustain life. In this class-driven form of capital, the types of resources and assets accumulated varied greatly between according to one's class status.

Overview of Capital Theory

There are three forms of capital conventionally used in the literature. These varied forms of capital are largely attributed to the theoretical work of Pierre Bourdieu (1986), who was in turn influenced by Gary Becker's (1962) work in describing human behavior through economic analysis. According to Bourdieu (1986), there exist three basic forms of capital: economic, cultural, and social capital. Though not always apparent to the possessor of any form of capital, economic capital is the most sought after form of capital, providing the basis of power in our market economy. Cultural capital refers to a form of cultural knowledge acquisition potentially

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transmutable into economic capital to higher socioeconomic advantage. Social capital is based

upon the potential capital assets realized through the development of social ties; in effect,

relationships connecting to information and opportunities.

Other forms of capital include human capital, financial capital, and physical capital,

which are all examples of the contributions from various disciplines recognizing the value of

resource exchange at the individual and collective levels. Human capital refers to training for

greater productivity in the workplace; financial capital to money for investment; and physical

capital to property ownership (Becker, 1962; Marx, 1933 (1849)).

What distinguishes social capital from the other forms of capital outlined above is the

notion that shared resources are neither physical nor financial, but relational. The strength of

social capital lies in its transmutability with the other sources of capital. For example,

relationships formed may lead to job information, which may then be converted into financial

capital. The financial capital may then be transmuted to physical capital, which may in turn yield

cultural capital by way of the location of owned property and educational opportunities in the

particular community. What makes social capital so novel is the shared resources, information,

and knowledge, which are accessible through social ties.

Social Capital

The concept of social capital evolved from notions of civil society and social

connectedness (Adam & Rončević, 2003) social exchange theory and psychological contract

theory[2] (Durkheim, 1964). The term social capital was coined more recently as a

multidisciplinary theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). In a very broad sense,

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[2] Psychological contract theory relates to organizational theory based on the working relationship between employer and employer represented by mutual beliefs, obligations, perceptions, and understanding of the relationship.

social capital refers to the social relationships between people enabling beneficial outcomes often represented in the fields of sociology and economics. The empirical and theoretical literature points to varying ways in which social capital is manifest in our social interactions. These include such concepts as trust, membership, norms of reciprocity, and network resources. James Coleman's definition parallels Bourdieu's notion of "habitus" as social capital comes as a by-product rather than sought out by the person or group gaining the benefits received vis-a-vis social interaction. The benefits derived from flows of shared information in social interactions contribute to greater group value and public good.

Similarly, Putnam (2000) examines measures of community and organizational life, such as service, engagement in public affairs, and voting as additional forms of social capital. Expanding from civil society and social connectedness through multiple disciplines, social capital literature is more suggestive than definitive. Social connectivity is often understood as a key element in Putnam's idea of social capital. Essentially, he argues the correlates of increased levels of social capital include elevated individual commitment to one's community and the capacity for collective mobilization and action. For the individual, social capital allows a person to draw on resources from other members of the communities in which he or she belongs. These resources can take the form of useful information, personal relationships, or the capacity to organize groups (Paxton, 1999). Access to individuals outside one's close circle provides access to new information, resulting in benefits such as navigating social structures or advancing employment opportunities (Granovetter, 1973). Moreover, social capital researchers have found various forms of social capital, including ties with friends and neighbors, are related to indices of psychological well-being, such as self-esteem and satisfaction with life (Helliwell & Putnam,

2004). Mutual membership in a community contributes to social capital providing a sense of relatedness and ability to participate.

In general, social capital is seen as a positive effect of interaction among participants in a social network, but social capital may also be detrimental (Helliwell & Putnam, 2004). Potential downsides of social capital include: fostering behavior worsening rather than improving economic performance; acting as a barrier to social inclusion and social mobility; dividing rather than uniting communities or societies; facilitating rather than reducing crime, education underachievement and health-damaging behavior (Aldridge, Halpern, & Fitzpatrick, 2002). Ties to communities and group loyalties can make claims on individuals' sense of obligation and isolate individuals from information leading to greater social capital (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000).

Social capital may be accrued through a social network; a system of relationships simply expressed among individual friendship groups to the complex functioning of an entire nations. Social networks serve purposes greater than exchange of pleasantries; they provide information and knowledge with great potential for expanding one's resources (Lin, 1999). For example, consider a classroom of students in which one student may refer a helpful counselor to another person without concern for compensation. In another scenario, the same person refers another person to her employer for a job. Knowledge and resources are shared without having to give up the knowledge or the connection to the resources (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). Rather, the person with the knowledge and resources helps another person to reach her goals with little time and effort. These exchanges multiply as students exchange such gestures and offerings with trust, trustworthy behaviors, and mutual support. Some of the features of social networks demonstrate

individual and group attitude development and behaviors, which are often, but not always, reciprocated.

Social Capital in the Literature

The unique aspect of social capital, as applied to problems in education, is the prospect of shared resources being neither physical nor financial, but relational. The power of social capital exists in its transmutability with the other sources of capital. For example, relationships formed may lead to academic capital, cultural capital, and job information, which may metamorphose into financial capital. The financial capital can be transmuted to physical capital, which can in turn yield greater cultural capital by way of the location of owned property and educational opportunities in the particular community. The combined strength of all the sources of capital is the potential of sharing the quest for greater equity in our nation. However, social capital is more accessible through relationships, particularly in contrast to financial and physical capital. As greater equity is often the impetus for many studies performed in the field of Education, I now examine how social capital theory is applied in educational research.

Social capital is a particularly powerful theoretical lens for scholars who are interested in access and persistence for underserved, nontraditional students. Researchers have long argued social capital is an especially potent asset for underserved students who lack access to particular types of academic and cultural information, and places them at a distinct disadvantage in the social world of schooling. Social capital, therefore, offers opportunity to possess these important forms of knowledge (Loury, 1981; Portes, 1998; Teranishi & Briscoe, 2006). Furthermore, the transmutability of social capital can help nontraditional students acquire valuable academic, cultural, human, and financial capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). How and in what way social capital has been previously

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applied to educational research is of particular *relevance* to this dissertation project. Therefore, this next section addresses the value of social capital to student success as demonstrated through empirical studies.

The role of friendship groups in college student development measured by scholars between institutions was quantified in large part, with data from multiple institutions (Antonio, 2001; Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Attempts to quantify social capital were performed through social network analysis studies in the 1980s. These studies correlated social networking with grades and persistence as measures of college success, quantifying structural features of peer relationships at individual campuses.

For example, a large social network created at an urban public college was not associated with higher retention and higher GPAs for non-White students in their first semester (Antrobus, Dobbelaer, & Salzinger, 1988). Exceptionally, larger and denser networks were found to be associated with higher GPAs for this institution's Black population, which served the predominately Black community in which it was situated. Secondly, the students tended to network with students possessing similar GPAs, shared the same race, ethnicity, and gender. In the short span of one semester, the social networks were determined to be weak.

A predominately middle-class White, private, commuter college revealed students tended to establish networks with students with the same gender and earned higher GPAs as they participated in more activities by the second year of college (Culbert, Lachenmeyer, & Good, 1988). These early studies informed social capital theory through investigating social networks quantitatively, revealing strong social networks take longer than one semester to establish and result in positive learning outcomes, such as grade point average.

Social network analysis has been used in association with variables used in a student engagement model measuring academic and social integrations, institutional and goal commitments, and the student's intention to persist (Thomas, 2000). Here, reciprocity with other students and relationships between members of friendship groups yielded stronger effects on the above-listed measures. Students in dense friendship groups who relied more upon each other to the exclusion of others did not fare as well on the measures, suggesting exclusive interactions have undesirable outcomes.

Another study indicated students in first-year programs maintained social contacts throughout their college career when a private liberal arts college created an intentional environment for students to form close bonds (Portnova, Lock, Ladd, & Zimmerman, 2007). Students who shared common coursework lived together and those who shared science and math courses became more closely connected as group work and interaction were promoted. A broader range of support and access to various types of information from individuals helped students perform well in their coursework. However, the kind of bonds shared was more important than the number of bonds made.

More recently, studies of college student friendship networks formed online ask whether or not social network sites have the potential to enable the accrual of social capital. Using regression analysis, the value of bridging social capital was demonstrated by freshmen who were establishing new relationships. Maintained social capital helped students stay connected to students from high school (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). Similar to the above-mentioned studies, students are strongly inclined to befriend students who are like themselves with respect to race, GPA, alcohol consumption practices, and off-campus affiliations (Mayer & Puller, 2008). Additionally, online friendship networks possess similar

characteristics to on-campus networks for students with many ties connected to students who also had many ties.

The result of a study using regression analysis was performed on a learning community comprised of 48% white students and 42% Latina/o students, revealing Latina/o and first generation students made less academic progress than their counterparts (Stuart, 2008). Further, the more closely-knit the students reported they were to their peers, the higher their levels of satisfaction and trust, yet students performed at lower academic levels. These results suggest students may gain more academically with loose-knit ties to one another.

Some barriers to social capital for underrepresented students were discovered in K-12 institutional practices, from which a social capital model was developed to depict such barriers found in previous studies performed by various researchers (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2001). This network analytical model advanced minority socialization and schooling experiences in its depiction. Focusing on institutional personnel, social capital is gained through access to such personnel who represent the gateway to resources and information needed to prepare for entry into four-year universities. The institutional, structural, and ideological constraints are proposed to be overcome with strengths from individual and cultural agency. The ability to connect these strengths and skills to institutional agents through social ties provides more opportunity for underrepresented students to accrue social capital.

Relationships between underrepresented students to family members and to school officials were examined in this qualitative case study with respect to students' experiences in being included and excluded in an educational environment (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). In an

attempt to understand how social reproduction may be overcome with cultural capital, the authors conclude students fare better when they understand the rules for interacting with authorities. Students' relational skill levels vary and the privileges parents possess are not automatically passed on to the student. Institutional relationships building social capital appear to bear fruit for activating cultural capital for underrepresented students.

In a study using life history research methods, researchers pursued the question of how relationships with family and K-12 school employees influenced college decision-making opportunities for Latina high school students (González, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003). The findings suggest experiences in the K-12 system limited or expanded students' perception of their opportunities for college depending upon the degree of social capital possessed. Apparent institutional neglect or abuse in precollege experiences decreased students' perceived opportunities, strongly suggesting the powerful influence institutions have to pass on social capital through its relationships with students. Potential agents of social capital ranged from siblings to peers and counselors to instructors, as well as specially-designed academic programs and outreach efforts.

Although these studies inform the use of social capital theory in education, many questions arise, such as:

Can social capital be augmented over shorter periods of time?

What role does shared space and shared coursework play in augmentation?

How do closely-knit and loosely-tied relationships benefit students?

How do and what types of bonds matter?

What types of value and meaning do students gain from those bonds?

I am particularly interested in qualitative exploration of the role of structure and culture in a DLC in nontraditional student lives and the combined power of social capital, academic capital, and cultural capital to offer answers to these questions in this study.

Some of these patterns of social relations identified in empirical studies in education reveal the positive effects of social capital on nontraditional students. Continued attempts to apply social capital theory in education demonstrate the applicability to nontraditional students (Teranishi & Briscoe, 2006). Theoretically, students who have successfully accrued social capital will more easily navigate college. The acquisition of social capital, shown to enhance nontraditional students' persistence in school, is explicated through expectations, trustworthiness, norms, sanctions, and information availability of the social environment (Coleman, 1988).

The current application of social capital for nontraditional students addresses public good in the acquisition of social capital benefiting members of society without financial expenditure or profit (Carnevale, 1999). Social capital helps students benefit immediately from information gains rather than financial or physical gains. Further, *what* information students gain is less important than *how* students gain information and the meaning behind the information gained (Deo, 2009; Duggan, 2002). The environment in which students inhabit does matter and provides the context for the formation of social capital (Bankston III & Zhou, 2002). Closely-knit relations in the community and loosely-connected relations in colleges avail students of social capital through patterns of social relations affecting educational values and aspirations (Duggan, 2002). What distinguishes social capital from the other forms of capital outlined is the notion of sharing resources through the construction

of relational ties (Coleman, 1988). Social capital accrual holds promise to act as a conduit of success for the nontraditional student.

Bonding, Bridging, and Transmuted Social Capital

In this review of social capital I explain the value and benefits of individuals sharing time, energy, and resources with one another. I define social capital as resources accrued through the establishment of relationships of mutual investment and recognition. I now introduce Granovetter's (1983) notion of social capital as a viable explanatory framework for understanding the relational dynamics occurring within the DLC. There are two types of social capital as determined by degree of intimacy. First, *bonding* social capital amassed in tightly-knit circles, such as friends and family groups, draw the members into closely-tied and emotionally-close relationships (Granovetter, 1973, 1983). Second, social capital accrued with loose connections between individuals is distinguished as *bridging* social capital. These loosely-tied relationships may provide new, useful information or perspectives, but usually without emotional support. Additionally, when either form of social capital is converted into academic or cultural capital, the conversion allows one to leverage valuable connections while progressing through life changes (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). Maintaining social, academic, and cultural capital speaks to retaining valuable connections as one progresses through life changes, such as making the transition from high school to college (Granovetter, 1983). The value and meaning of these three types of capital guide how and why students enter into relationships of mutual investment and recognition.

Cultural Capital

The integration of cultural capital into college choice paradigms has been used to highlight the significant role of class and race in the college decision-making process

(McDonough, 1997; Perna, 2000; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). The type of institution a student decides to attend is predicated on the information they received from friends, family, and schooling environment. The social, cultural, and organizational context of the college choice process is important in shaping individual outcomes (McDonough, 1991, 1997, 1998). The organizational context illuminates the structural and cultural arrangements of institutions in reproducing social inequalities. The college culture greatly impacts not only college access opportunities for nontraditional students of color, but persistence and transfer for those in community college.

Persistence and transfer as individual outcomes shaped from socialization through college experiences, such as basic skills initiatives and academic preparation, are worthy of serious consideration as well. The lack of focus on or acknowledgement of communities in which academic preparation programs are being implemented is especially problematic in communities of color that do not reflect similar cultural norms as those typically found in the Academy, i.e., the scholarly field of higher education. Since students who choose community colleges as their first entry into higher education are largely representative of low socioeconomic status and students of color in contrast to students who choose residential living in a four-year institution, the acquisition of cultural capital will differ. A Bourdieuian cultural capital perspective used to understand how students persist and prepare for transfer from community college sheds light on how nontraditional students of color mediate cultural capital through their college socialization process.

Many community college students may have limited exposure to opportunities and resources outside their immediate communities, making residential colleges a rare option (Stanton-Salazar 2001). Sometimes the possibility of attending college at all is beyond many

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high school students' collective identity or habitus. Habitus, a durable set of dispositions that adapt to generational changes, is determined by socializing agents and the socializing environment (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu & Collier, 1988; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Nontraditional students of color, who are working at the outer limits of their habitus by even enrolling in college, are at a disadvantage to the many white students whose habitus expects or predicts their attendance. Further, only particular forms of cultural capital are rewarded by higher education institutions while other forms are ignored or discredited due to differences in the values, beliefs, and meanings of the cultural knowledge used as social assets and affording the cultural capital (Berger, 2000). A lack of resources, including cultural capital necessary for navigating the higher education system as it stands today, is a challenging obstacle that keeps students of color from attending institutions of higher learning and from performing at high academic levels (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Scholars argue that cultural and material barriers, rather than a purposeful oppositional culture or lack of investment in the educational process, keep students of color from performing up to their full potential (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998; Cook & Ludwig, 1997).

While scholars, researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers work diligently toward legitimizing many forms of cultural capital, unfortunately, the cultural resources possessed by many nontraditional students of color lacks appreciation, particularly by elite institutions (Bowen et al., 2005). All nontraditional students of color are human beings with distinct talents, virtues, interests, and problems to be taken into consideration by higher education institutions when helping them prepare for college (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996). A redistribution and/or extension of cultural capital along with the social capital and academic capital needed for success

in college for nontraditional students of color would bring greater access, equity, and opportunity (Gándara, 2002; Oakes, Rogers, Lipton, & Morrell, 2002; Yonezawa, Jones, & Mehan, 2002).

Capital in DLC Environment

The mediating effects of social capital, i.e., resources from other members of the communities in which he or she belongs, on nontraditional students of color identified in empirical studies help nontraditional students overcome obstacles (Teranishi & Briscoe, 2006). Further, students of color utilize bonding social capital, defined as resources from trustworthy communities and families of origin to fortify their resolve to succeed in the higher education system. While familial support is critical, empirical studies demonstrate the importance of bridging social capital for nontraditional students to gain information not accessible from bonding social capital sources. Nontraditional students who successfully accrue social capital will more easily navigate college and persist.

Social capital represents relational ties (close and loose) leading to additional valuable "assets" accrued en route to academic achievement and success, such as academic capital and cultural capital. Academic capital refers to experiences and formal educational gains transmitted through family members, peers, faculty, and staff in order to navigate the higher education system. Given the amount of education and academic experience determines career opportunities and earning potential in our society, academic capital and cultural capital are valuable assets derived from social capital.

First articulated by Pierre Bourdieu, the sociological concept of cultural capital describes how it acts as a social relation within a system of exchange including accumulated cultural knowledge that confers power and status. Cultural capital represents the values, beliefs, and meanings as social assets that promote social mobility beyond economic means.

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As is true with social and academic capital, cultural capital depends on many different factors, including transmission from families and educational institutions attended.

Additionally, social capital and cultural capital affect the accumulation and retention of academic capital. "Academic capital is in fact the guaranteed product of the combined effects of cultural transmission by the family and cultural transmission by the school (the efficiency of which depends on the amount of cultural capital directly inherited from the family)" (Bourdieu, 1984). In the United States, the power of academic capital is wielded through high stakes testing at the field level of education then carried into society to be converted into greater opportunities for career and financial gains (Apple, 1996; Au, 2008). Social, academic, and cultural capital represent examples of resource exchange at the individual and collective levels, which are leveraged for additional gains such as property, workforce, and social position.

How nontraditional students exchange information and knowledge their first year of entry into college is important to understand, as social capital varies for different types of student populations. Information exchange helps nontraditional students learn to navigate and decode educational systems in order to succeed in them (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). For some nontraditional students of color, making sense of their racial existence will be necessary for persistence, retention, and completion to occur as a result of accumulated social capital (Loury, 1981).

I explore how the DLC study lab serves as a social space for the members acting within it. Social space provides a milieu in which individuals can interact and build upon their relationships (Lefebvre, 1991). The DLC mediates resources in the provided space, thereby facilitating relationships through the interactions occurring in the space. Trust is fostered in the space where supports are offered through designated counseling, program director and program assistant availability, tutoring, laptops, printer, desks and chairs, textbooks, and wireless network

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is provided. The academic and social atmosphere created in this space creates a normative culture, reinforced by requirements for DLC membership.

I argue as students contribute to the social network, bonding social capital and bridging social capital is exchanged in the space of the DLC study lab. These exchanges constitute the student's own personal network in which students ultimately utilize accrued bonding social capital and bridging social capital to navigate the larger campus, referred to as the "big zone." Bonding and bridging social capital is converted to academic and cultural capital to navigate the big zone. At the same time, social capital is exercised when students keep in touch with one another in a larger campus area after physically disconnecting from the DLC. It is also possible DLC students experience a decrease in social capital when moving into the larger campus. Naturally, zero-year students moving to college create new friendships at college. However, some friendships will provide bridging social capital while others develop into bonding social capital, both of which can be converted to academic and cultural capital (Granovetter 1973, 1983). The combined power of social capital transmuted into academic capital and cultural capital may be demonstrated through both types of social capital in this program.

This tripartite of social, academic, and cultural capital accrual is the direct result of the social networking occurring primarily in the social space created by DLC and supported by DLC faculty and staff. While the DLC lab serves as the site in which social networks are created and sustained, the classroom contributes to extension of the social networks developed initially within the study lab. Not all the relationships formed within the learning community cohorts will be strong; however, the opportunities for students to interact in the

DLC environment facilitate the formation of bonding and bridging social capital throughout the academic year.

The DLC program provides the structure and culture in which social capital is accrued (Figure 1). The student, centered in the DLC network, possesses a personal network of three types of capital: social, academic, and cultural. As each student initiates or responds to others' initiations, the student possesses his or her own set of connections. Additionally, each student holds a unique position within the social network. Imagine a cohort of 90 students gather in the study lab, yielding a potential of 90 possible relationships. Further, each cohort may have ties to individuals from other mutually beneficial cohorts. Consider individuals possessing bonding social capital due to interactions and relationships built in the closely-knit group also building bridging social capital with individuals outside the closely-knit group. The potential for the individuals to bring bridging social capital into the closely-knit group extends the benefits of bridging social capital in a collective sense as well as for individual benefit.

Additionally, the social space created by the DLC faculty and staff serves as an instrument of thought to foster critical pedagogy in the DLC students. Social capital, conceived of as both a cause and an effect of interaction with others, can lead to greater gains for individuals and groups (Adler & Kwon, 2002) by connecting information from one another. Students are able to connect information gains to self-empower and initiate constructive personal and community changes (Giroux, 1997) as a way of accruing and utilizing social capital. The advantage of the heuristic power of social capital in the context of social space is it frames social action leading to constructive social change.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model of DLC Structure and Culture.[3]

DLC Program Structure and Culture

DLC = Environment where students develop the social, academic, and cultural capital in order to persist and transfer

PROGRAM STRUCTURE	PROGRAM CULTURE
ENVIRONMENT	CULTURAL CAPITAL
SOCIAL CAPITAL • Bonding • Bridging	VALUES • High Performance • Transfer ready at completion
ACADEMIC CAPITAL	MEANINGS • How to be a successful student
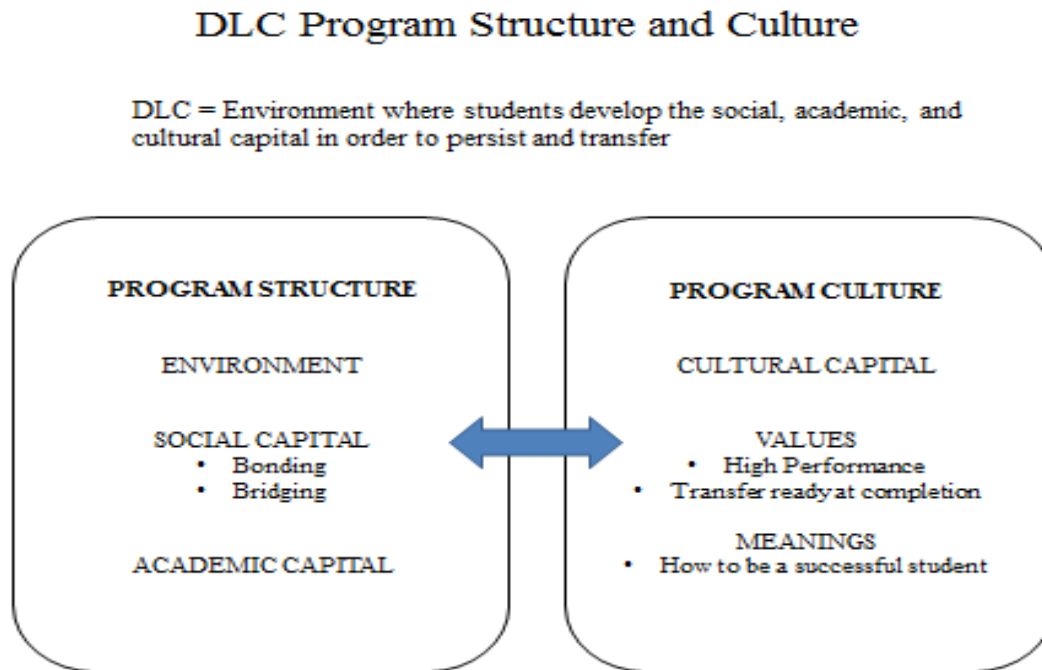
The DLC social network mediates resources, such as laptops, counseling, program director and program assistant availability, tutoring, laptops, printer, desks and chairs, textbooks, and wireless network in the space provided for the DLC members. These resources serve as conduits through which students gain information and knowledge and form bridging social capital. Students exchange from existing personal networks of social capital and students accrue more social capital within the DLC social network to exchange. The use of these resources and consequent bridging social capital equips students to propagate more social capital in their personal network and the DLC social network, as they continue to participate. Further, the

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[3] Figure 1. DLC Program Structure and Culture. The DLC structure provides an environment in which social capital is accrued along with academic capital. The program culture results from the transmission of values and meanings to help students to persist and transfer.

student utilizes the accrued bridging social capital to avail themselves of the student support services in the big zone.

As a result of the supports students receive through the DLC resources listed above, trust is fostered while establishing closer relations between the DLC members, including peers, faculty, and staff members. These closer relations contribute to the students' stock of bonding social capital. Bonding social capital equips students to propagate more social capital in his or her personal network and the DLC social network. Bonding social capital contributes to navigating the big zone in pursuit of student support services and faculty support.

The DLC social network facilitates relationships through the academic and non-academic interactions students encounter or initiate. Consequently, depending on the nature of the interactions, the DLC student accrues bridging social capital or bonding social capital in his or her personal network. In response, each DLC student participates in the development of the DLC social network through his or her interactions. In addition, each student utilizes bridging social capital and bonding social capital to navigate aspects of the big zone.

The expectations and requirements for DLC membership create norms of attitudes, behaviors, and cognitive processes within the DLC social network. Students have an effect and are affected by the generated culture. Therefore, bridging social capital, bonding social capital, and transmuted social capital contribute to the DLC social network from the individual members. Secondly, the student's personal network benefits from all three of the accrued types of capital, particularly as the student ventures out into the big zone.

Conclusion

I've chosen to use Granovetter's understanding of social capital (Granovetter, 1973, 1983) as a theoretical framework for explaining how loosely connected relationships, called

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bridging social capital, might play an important role in the educational attainment goals of underrepresented students of color. In my dissertation, I situate a community college-based Developmental Learning Community (DLC) in its social, academic, and cultural contexts to demonstrate the role of relationships insofar as assisting students to persist in their educational pursuits. Bridging social capital suggests students launch from the safety of core relationships, called bonding social capital, to gather more information and resources for greater social mobility. Further, both bonding social capital and bridging social capital may be transmuted into academic and cultural capital to enable students to navigate the college system and progress in their educational studies.

Academic and cultural capital transmuted from social capital occurs with continued contact and interaction between students and their peers, faculty, staff, high school friends, family, community members, and the like. Bonding social capital with the already known core group of persons provides stability for students in the DLC locale. Bridging social capital stems from programmatic mandates of the DLC, requiring participants to engage with the larger campus by connecting with other students and college faculty, staff, and support services embedded within the larger campus community. These connections yield bridging social capital to broaden nontraditional students' resources and help the students consider their alternatives with respect to what courses and services are available (Deil-Amen, 2011). I investigated the DLC as a mediating space with regard to bonding social capital and bridging social capital becoming transmuted into academic and cultural capital to assist the nontraditional students' college transition, navigation, and success.

Nontraditional students face high attrition rates, limited by their usual social contacts and inadequate information, knowledge, and resources within the context of college preparation

(Dowd et al., 2008). Students' frames of references for college preparation and success initially depend on the source of bonding social capital. The efficacy of the resources for social capital depends upon the type of preparation, attitudes, and expectations received or perceived in high school from relationships with family, community, and institutional members.

Drawing on resources from members of communities in which one belongs builds social capital. As one's social capital increases, one's commitment to a community and the ability to mobilize collective actions also increases. Such mobilization results in greater access to new information, which results in increased ability to navigate social structures. For individuals, social capital allows a person to draw on resources from other members of the communities in which he or she belongs.

Chapter 4 – Research Design and Methods

This dissertation utilizes a case study approach to examine how one community college-based learning community supported the first-year experiences of its Latino/a participants. Of particular concern to me, was the relationship between the program and its participants. Building upon initial findings generated from a prior pilot study conducted two years ago (Appendix B), I sought to document the participants' lived experiences in order to better understand how they established relationships once admitted to the DLC. I sought to understand the nature of the relationships fostered both within the milieu of the DLC and within Southern California Community College (SCCC) at large, and the function of these relationships in supporting their acclimation to SCCC. This chapter provides details on the research methodology chosen for this study, data collection methods, sample, research site, data analysis, and steps undertaken to ensure the trustworthiness of my study.

Research Questions

This case study is best understood as filling a gap in our understanding of best practices in the retention of Latina/o community college students. I do this by examining how a developmental learning community supports Latina/o first-year students through a Title V funded retention program located in a large, HSI-designated suburban community college. The following questions guided my research:

- What role does the DLC program structure play in students' social and academic relationships?
  - What role does the environment of the DLC play in establishing those relationships?
  - What types of interactions occur in the DLC environment?

- What types of interactions occur in the wider campus?
- What role does the DLC program culture play in establishing those relationships?
  - What role does the DLC program culture play in transfer readiness and college student identity?
  - What role does the DLC program culture play in student persistence?
- How does the DLC program culture impart values and meanings of the role of a successful student?

Based on the initial findings from the pilot study conducted in 2010-11 and informed by the existing literature on community college retention initiatives, my hypothesis that the DLC experience impacted students' ability to develop their goals was proven because the DLC provided a source of support for students to establish relationships in order to sustain the challenging transition from high school to college. The DLC helped students learn how to manage an assortment of institutionally-based relationships with a host of different community college constituents represented within and outside the DLC, including peers, faculty, and college support staff.

This current case study of a DLC at a community college in Southern California revealed ways in which the DLC facilitated a successful transition to college for the program's Latina/o participants, encouraging them to proceed on to their college-level coursework. This qualitative investigation allowed the voices of the participants to be heard and explored with respect to transitional experiences in the DLC. Based on my belief that knowledge is constructed by an individual's experience (Palincsar, 1998), I made observations and performed interviews through this lens. I did not teach in the DLC program at the time this study was performed. However, I hoped to have contributed to the students' transitions to college through this study. The

transcribed interviews, extensive notes and drawings of class and study areas, and my reflection journal notes were interpreted through social capital theory, as described above in the Conceptual Framework section.

Methodological Approach: Case Study

As a contextualized phenomenon, the DLC served primarily Latina/o students as an institutional intervention particularly suited to a case study research strategy. The case study approach focuses on relationships and processes in natural settings, such as the SCCC campus where Latina/o students sought precollegiate coursework. The case study was well-matched for the use of multiple sources and methods of data collection, such as document analysis, observations, interviews, and surveys (Creswell, 2009; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). As noted by case study methodologists, exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory research strategies can be single- or multi-site cases (Yin, 2003); particularistic or heuristic (Merriam, 1998); or intrinsic, collective, or instrumental (Stake, 1995). For the purposes of explaining my methodological approach, I focused on the heuristic and instrumental strategies for this case study.

The heuristic strategy for this case study served to illuminate understanding of the phenomenon under study by confirmation, extension of experiences, or new discovery to identify problems and possible theoretical solutions within the case (Eckstein, 1975; Merriam, 1998). As an experience-based technique, the heuristic strategy helps in problem solving, learning, and discovery. With the quest of contributing to possible solutions to the retention problem, addressing the obstacles to learning, and discovering DLC students' perceptions of how their relational experiences in a DLC helped them prepare to succeed in college-level academic work, I explored social capital as a theoretical explanation.

Focusing on the DLC as a specific group, I strategized an instrumental approach in this case study to facilitate understanding the role of the DLC program's contribution to retention for nontraditional students. In addition, I established the DLC program as the focus of my study in advance, based on the pilot study, and proceeded with the case study method accordingly. From an instrumental viewpoint, this case study of a community college DLC targeting Latina/o undergraduates provided a context for further examination of the general issue of retention for nontraditional students in higher education as well as a promoting a critical understanding of the DLC program culture impacting persistence, retention, completion and transfer rates of its participants.

The heuristic strategy helped my theoretical understanding of the DLC, particularly as it relates to the relationship building associated with social capital theory. The instrumental strategies of this case study helped my practical understanding, such as the use of the space provided, of nontraditional student retention. The utilization of the heuristic and instrumental strategies in this case study provided a platform for in-depth investigation to ultimately inform theorists and practitioners of retention programs and practices in community colleges.

This case study focused on a DLC targeting Latina/o students at SCCC. Serving a widely diverse population of whom 25% are full-time equivalent students identifying as Latina/o students, SCCC was designated a Hispanic-serving institution (HSI). The DLC's Latina/o students, who comprise an average of 78% of the DLC cohorts, recently entered from high school and were preparing for transfer to four-year universities. The types of data collected were observations of DLC students, faculty, and staff members in classrooms and labs, and semi-structured individual and group interviews of DLC students.

This proposed study was a single-site case study at a large community college in Southern California, referred to as Southern California Community College (SCCC). Upon initial examination, my interest in SCCC was due to its strong commitment to the transfer function, as depicted in SCCC's mission statement and the activity of the Transfer Center in addition to SCCC's history in serving the Latina/o population as an HSI.

SCCC was one of the many community colleges representing half the total number of 252 HSIs funded by Title V in the United States and Puerto Rico. Community college HSIs serve approximately 500,000 students, representing 54% of all Latina/o higher education students (Benitez & DeAro, 2004; Santiago, 2008). Further, the highest transfer rate occurs in California Community College HSIs (Contreras, Malcolm, & Bensimon, 2008). Thus, SCCC not only provides a good representation for the community college culture consisting of the Latina/o population as a representation of nontraditional students, but also reflects a higher transfer rate as an HSI. Many colleges and universities do not avail themselves of the Title V support as it was intended for HSIs (Garcia, 2013). However, SCCC provides a model for respectable use of funding at the Hispanic-serving institution (HSI). SCCC features several learning communities, which are designed to help a variety of students persist, from zero-year students to returning adults.

SCCC captured my attention as a potential site for this case study when I learned the DLC modeled itself on various types of learning communities designed to increase retention via rigorous English and math programs (Lorch & Roth, 2008). Not only did DLC staff and faculty benefit from previous learning community experiences at SCCC, they attended a weekend-long learning community seminar at Evergreen State College to better inform the DLC's planning and

design. The Washington Center for Undergraduate Education at Evergreen State College facilitated the growth of the learning community movement through its leadership and advocacy.

In a prior campus environmental scan study, a colleague and I assessed the quality of the learning environs at SCCC. What we learned was SCCC followed a loosely-coupled, bottom-up organization *by design* (See Figure 2). At first blush, this discovery seemed paradoxical, in loosely-coupled units interacting in a pattern of bottom-up organization which typically do not do so in a uniform way (Levy & Merry, 1986; Weick, 1976). It was our assessment that SCCC's history, culture, climate, selection of key players, and demographics presented a fertile environment in which programs, such as the DLC, would survive. We further believed the loosely-coupled, bottom-up approach enabled faculty to assess the initial successes and shortcomings of the DLC and in effect "learn" what changes were necessary through their faculty learning community called a "Community of Practice" as the DLC was entering its second year.

The administrative staff remained "hands off" and allowed the Community of Practice (CoP) to work through the adjustments they needed to make. This self-questioning ability, according to Morgan (2006), "underpins the activities of systems able to learn and self-organize" (84). My colleague and I sought to understand the SCCC's planning and decision making processes for the development of the DLC by mapping our interviews with key players, our observations of the campus and symbols therein, onto our understanding of the local and national community college environment and the interconnections of various higher education sectors. We translated this understanding through organizational theory and interpreted the development of the DLC program to have fallen into an organic progression of an on-going culture at SCCC.

The results of this environmental scan revealed SCCCs affiliation with a prestigious private university whose president delivered a speech at the opening ceremonies many decades

ago. SCCC adopted the private university's colors and maintained a vanguard aura which sought to emulate prestigious four-year colleges and universities in terms of rigor and focus on traditional academic excellence instead of modeling on similar-situated colleges within its field. I found SCCC even more intriguing as I learned about new administration challenges to a long-held campus intimacy perception, moving from a "growing family" atmosphere to a small city environment.

In spite of these new challenges, SCCC has a strong culture and climate embracing change through innovation as an important norm. Transformative approaches were necessitated by the demographics indicating a service base of students who were 70% non-native English speaking. The SCCC history and underlying saga dramatized a commitment to excellence and transfer amid external threats to persistence during increasingly difficult economic crises for community colleges over the past several years. In harmony with the SCCC saga, for example, the DLC's Community of Practice (CoP) was intentional in applying technology in the DLC as one of the ways to address issues involving underachievement of Latina/o and other nontraditional students at SCCC. Specifically, students used the laptops to apply for FAFSA, perform research, write papers, and carry out their online assignments.

Organizationally, the confidence and cooperation of the faculty and staff members who comprised the committees and departments responsible for the formation of the DLC was secured by a key player. This key player/gatekeeper helped me gain access to the DLC for this dissertation project. The key player emphasized aspects of first-year students' learning perspectives and advocated a bottom-up organization within the DLC. In fact, personnel were encouraged to experiment and learn, brainstorm and discuss. The key player viewed the DLC as a transformative program holding promise to influence change in the broader college

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environment. In hopes of institutionalizing the most useful concepts of learning communities, Vincent Tinto, a forerunner in the learning community movement, was commissioned by the key player to speak to all members of SCCC in the first year of the DLC program's initiation.

Another important preparatory move for program development made by administrative personnel was to fund all DLC personnel to participate in a five day National Summer Institute on Learning Communities through the Washington Center[4] at The Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington. In so doing, the personnel formed their Community of Practice (CoP) comprised of practitioners and leaders collaborating in curriculum development and delivery and sharing common interest in the success of the DLC. The CoP addressed common issues and developed staff capabilities in a culture of collaboration and cross functioning (Hildreth & Kimble, 2002). However, the CoP was not a panacea; in fact, I discovered philosophical differences among faculty within the DLC may have been due to the short-term assignments of non-tenured faculty who may not have acclimated to campus culture and climate.

I noted the make-up of the faculty and administration may have impacted instructional viewpoints and techniques, as most of the personnel were Caucasian. Additional people of color would have provided added valuable perspectives and contributions. There were lessons to be learned in the bottom-up approach taken by the personnel – much more than I could discover in the environmental scan at that time. The key player allowed this learning to occur without administrative interference, which made the SCCC site for my dissertation more intriguing.

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[4] The Washington Center provides resources for two- and four-year higher education institutions, as a public service center of The Evergreen State College. The guiding purpose of the Washington Center is to provide assistance to the higher education institutions to create learning environments for all students to succeed, but particularly those who are first generation to attend college and have been historically underrepresented in higher education.

In particular, the programmatic level of the DLC formation and development caught my interest in SCCC as a potential site of my study. When attending a planning meeting, I was privileged to observe the internal evaluation team, director, and the CoP discuss their operational definition of "success" for the program and the students. Integral to the objectives of the DLC and SCCCs strategic planning, reference was made to the series of reports outlining both internal and external trends shaping the future of California community colleges.

Figure 2. DLC Organizational Chart.
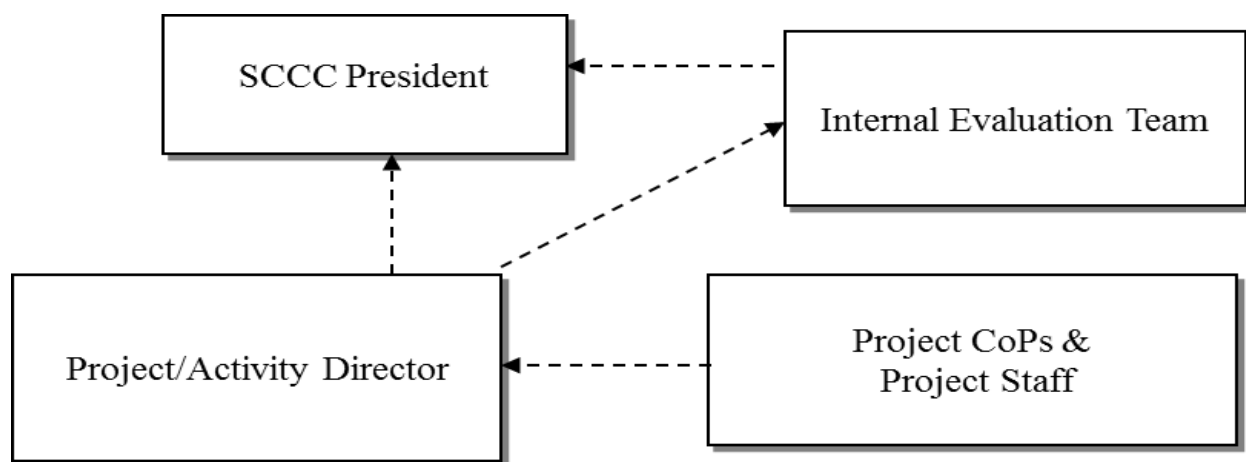
Recruiting Strategies

As gaining access and negotiating entry to research sites is a crucial and delicate task (Marshall & Rossman, 2010), I relied on two major approaches to negotiate site entry for this dissertation study. First, I relied on the already established contact with key DLC players, including the director of the project, in order to recruit more research subjects and fully conduct this case study[5] (Lorch & Roth, 2008). Second, I had previous working relations with the designated counselor who maintained student records. The director and counselor were updated

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[5] The Project/Activity Director of this Title V Project had full authority and autonomy to administer the project according to the federally approved plan of operations. The Director supported the work of the Communities of Practice (CoPs). CoPs were first developed as a business method, but are now widely used in higher education to encourage and enable productive teamwork between functional areas.

on my near-future dissertation study intentions and agreed to assist me in gaining access to students. Furthermore, I was continuously invited to and participated in social gatherings with students when the DLC hosted reunions.

With approximately 100 students in each cohort, I randomly selected 44 Latina/o students primarily from the two most recent cohorts of 2009-10 and 2010-11. The interviews were approximately one-hour long, digitally recorded, and transcribed verbatim. Prior to the interview, subjects completed a consent form and confirmed their age and Latina/o identity. Near 18 years of age and transitioning from high school to college, 44 Latina/o students were randomly chosen and recruited from a list of qualifying students from the four cohorts of approximately 100 students each.

The list provided by the director was confirmed by the designated counselor to comprise students identified as Latina/o, including multi-racial backgrounds. Another criterion included the student entered into the DLC from high school at approximately 18 years of age at the time of interview (See *Sample* section below). Qualifying students finished the yearlong program in one of three cohorts entered between Fall 2007 and Fall 2010.

After having obtained permission from the DLC administration and individual instructors, I introduced myself in several classrooms, inviting student to participate in my study. As an incentive, I offered breakfast or lunch and drink along with a $10 gift card. After explaining the nature of my study, I informed students I would contact them via home phone, cell phone, text, or email and we would meet in the study lab.

<center>*Sample*</center>

This study included zero-year students, defined as students who have not completed more than 15 hours of college credit work and enrolled in this public two-year institution, who began

their college experience in the DLC. All students interviewed ranged one to three levels away from collegiate level coursework. Otherwise, there was no other distinction made as to what degree of college preparedness a participant may have demonstrated. For example, a participant may need only one precollegiate course (e.g., College Prep English) or may need several precollegiate courses (e.g., College Prep English, College Prep Reading, and/or College Prep Math). In addition, the number of participants was limited to the zero-year student members participating in a one-year program in four cohorts at a particular community college in Southern California. Five of the 44 students interviewed who did not complete the one-year program were interviewed according to Appendix E.

Many entering college students were academically underprepared for the rigors of college work. This study was not concerned with identifying the effects of previous educational history (e.g., faulting high school preparation). This study did not directly gather data regarding economic status, race, ethnicity, religion, or any other demographic descriptors. While some demographic self-reported data was collected with respect to age and ethnicity, this study was not directly concerned with any correlation or causation these demographics may have had on persistence.

All student participants for this study met the initial qualification for DLC membership by having been assessed for precollegiate math and/or precollegiate English coursework and by having stated the intention to transfer to a four-year institution. Chosen participants qualified for this study in the following ways:

1. Students identified as Latina/o (including multi-racial backgrounds)
2. Students entered into the DLC from high school
3. Students approximately 18 years of age at the time of interview

As the objective of this study was to examine Latina/o students' transition to college experiences, I took into account subject demographics within larger organizational contexts by employing criterion-based selection to obtain appropriate participation (J. Maxwell, 1996). In this proposed case study, one-fourth of the 21,000 students at SCCC identify as Latina/o students and 78% of the DLC population identified as Latina/o. Additionally, the DLC under study was funded by Title V, which provides funding for programs targeting Latina/o students. Therefore, my selection of Latina/o students from the DLC reflected the intent of the community college and the Title V grant to serve Latina/o students in their academic endeavors.

Selection

Participants for this study met the criteria of identifying as Latina/o and entered into the DLC from high school. Since the DLC was designed for the zero-year experience, all of the students were near 18 years of age. The students' college preparation varied from having received no high school diploma to having passed the GED or having graduated from high school. Eligibility requirements for DLC membership in Fall 2009 were inherent criteria for this case study sample (see Table 6) including students having been assessed into Levels 3 or 4 Math and either a preparatory course for English or Freshman English. In the 2009 cohort, participants enrolled in math courses ranging through four levels of precollegiate and college level math requirements. I refer to Level 1 as Freshman Math in which students enrolled with the general population.

In the Fall 2009 cohort, 20% of the students took Intermediate Algebra in Level Two, Level Three as Elementary Algebra II, and 45% qualified in Level Four Elementary Algebra I. Half the DLC students qualified for the preparatory course for college-level English in the Fall 2009 cohort. While the students' socioeconomic status varied somewhat, the greater proportion

of students benefited from traditional financial aid with the exception of those who were not documented at this time. Particular students' personal and demographic characteristics shared by Latina/o students' cultural and ethnic background provided a social foundation upon which students relied for interaction (Rendón, 1994). Many worked for income while maintaining extensive obligations to their families. Likewise, many students commuted from home (Levin, 2007).

While I had the privilege of interviewing students who did not continue in the DLC and some students who did not enroll at SCCC in the succeeding semester, my focus was to select DLC students who *qualified* to enroll in the succeeding semester according to the criteria for DLC membership.[6] The designated counselor provided me with lists of students who qualified during the Fall semester and those who did not. I emailed students who listed their email addresses on the DLC roster and telephoned the students who did not provide an email address. Calling students at home proved to be more successful than emailing. About half the students owned cell phones at the time and asked me to communicate with them by calling them directly, leaving voice messages, or texting. After introducing myself, I reminded the students of the visits to their classes where I passed out my research information sheet and explained the nature of this study to find out how the DLC helped students succeed. I then asked the students to identify their ethnicity to confirm background characteristics, participants' Latina/o heritage, and specific age requirements.

Data Collection Methods

My study focused on 44 Latina/o members participating in a DLC at a community college site in Southern California as the main unit of analysis. As an embedded case study design (Yin,

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[6] I account for data from discontinuing DLC students in Appendix D – Noting the Exceptions

2003), subunits of analysis included documents describing the purposes and function of the DLC, and the DLC site at SCCC, including designated classrooms, the study lab, and staff offices. This case study included common forms of qualitative research data particular to case studies (Creswell, 2007; Yin 2003), i.e., observations of the classrooms, study lab, and staff office activity and individual and group interviews with Latina/o DLC students.

Given my dissertation study aimed to examine and explore nontraditional community college students' DLC experiences, the case study was the ideal method to best capture the students' perceptions.

This section offers insight as to the motive for this dissertation study. I then follow the discussion with a description of the three-pronged approach to data collection through document analysis, observations, and individual and focus group interviews explained in detail. This methods section ends with data analysis including a discussion of the reduction of the data, a display of the data operationalizing a final set of codes, and validation and triangulation of the data.

After proposing and implementing an interdisciplinary approach to math, a college introductory course, and a wellness and fitness course, I worked with a faculty team, known as a Community of Practice (CoP) (Wenger, 1998), which encouraged my interests in the Developmental Learning Community (DLC). Consequently, I worked with the CoP to implement a summer bridge and participated in the creation and implementation of interdisciplinary classes and field trips in the summer of 2007. My fascination with the process of learning rather than outcomes drew me to the DLC as I recognized the potential in students fresh out of high school. I envisioned the students experiencing the fulfilling rewards I have

known so well as a perpetual student who now knows the journey is more significant than the outcome.

Complementing my doctoral studies, I performed an environmental scan and organizational evaluation of the DLC which revealed solidity and preparation through a promising background of SCCC's interest in serving its diverse population through learning communities.

As a result of the organizational evaluation, I proposed to perform a pilot study of the DLC. As discussed in the beginning of this chapter, the pilot study left many questions unanswered leading me to perform this in-depth case study.

Document Analysis

I created an annotated bibliography of the documents collected for reference (Yin, 2009) for the document database from the community college website, catalog, strategic plan, pamphlets, funding Title V grant (intended for Hispanic-Serving Institutions to expand educational opportunities for Latina/o students), student profiles, organizational structure, policies, and recruitment practices of the DLC. I organized these materials according to my interpretation as to the intent of the DLC publication with respect to rhetorical strategies, particularly in reference to aiding the students in transition from high school to college. I compared the uniqueness of each document with the overarching representation of the DLC. The documents provided a background for comparison with interview and observation data to assess the relationship between the mission of the DLC and the students' experience.

Observations

I performed observations of peer and faculty/staff interactions in DLC designated courses with detailed field notes of the physical environment and observed behaviors within

classrooms and the study lab (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). These observations revealed the quality

of relationships between DLC students and faculty, staff, and peers. The time spent in the

classrooms and study lab exposed me to the culture and climate of the DLC. I observed

behaviors indicative of supportive relationships between the students and their peers as well as

students' interactions with staff and faculty members. I observed and took photographs of the

messages coming from the arrangements and décor of the classrooms and study lab. Making

the drawings of the layout of classrooms and the study lab increased my awareness of the

ambience I experienced while observing as well as the implicit and explicit messages

conveyed. Observing the interactions students had with one another, staff, and faculty

illuminated the relational behaviors and supportive gestures made amongst the members. I

compared these interactions with those reported by students while interviewing.

Individual Interviews and Focus Group

The central data source provided for this dissertation was obtained from audio-recorded,

semi-structured interviews of 44 Latina/o students. Five of the 44 Latina/o students had

discontinued the DLC program after one semester. The interviews were transcribed verbatim

and checked for accuracy. Six students were asked to participate in both semi-structured

individual and a focus group interview (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006) with the latter serving the

purposes of member checking. The 45-60 minute interviews provided a means by which to

investigate students' transition to college through the DLC. The semi-structured technique

allowed me to respond and adapt to the student's emerging viewpoint of their transition to

college, as well as explore new ideas concerning this transition (Merriam, 1998). The semi-

structured technique augmented: 1) my exposure to the students' processes occurring during

their zero-year at SCCC (and while a participant of the DLC), 2) the contextual understanding

for me as the researcher, and 3) the validity of this study (J. Maxwell, 2005, 2012). Open-ended

questions drew participant responses, which helped me to ascertain the ways in which the DLC

may have facilitated relationship development through the use of the space and support therein,

as well as interactions with faculty and peers en route to formal entry into the larger

mainstream campus.

Student interviews concentrated on the student's use of the DLC space. Further, students

were asked to describe the support mechanisms they found particularly helpful in their experience

and to elaborate on their interactions with peers, staff, and faculty (Appendix C). Finally, students

were asked about their entry into the larger campus, particularly after having completed their

year-long commitment in the DLC. The focus group concentrated on the changes having taken

place in students' lives since completing their zero-year in the DLC (Appendix D).

Data Analysis

Analysis for the study was ongoing from the moment data collection began in order to

constantly assess whether changes to the study would be necessary. Although not a completely

linear process, I followed six primary analytical steps: 1) organized and prepared data, 2) read all

transcripts and documents thoroughly and reflected on their general meaning, 3) began a coding

process for detailed analysis, 4) used this coding process to describe the setting and the

participants' process for analysis, 5) wrote a narrative of the findings with representative quotes,

and 6) linked data to the literature review, adding literature as needed (Creswell, 2005).

In gathering data from the primary interview source, I compared the individual interviews

to one another (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I used my notes from classroom and lab observations,

and the transcribed interviews to identify themes and patterns emerging in relation to the

research questions. The notes and drawings of the study lab environment were coded for

symbolic messages lending to the topic of transfer to four-year institutions. Formal observation

notes were also coded from the classroom experience. These codes helped formulate codes from

individual interviews as the primary source. Overall, I searched for meanings consistent as well

as contradictory, as represented across various contexts of the study (Erickson, 1986).

Data Reduction

In reading and re-reading my field/observation notes and interview transcripts multiple

times, I immersed myself in the data to identify key constructs for coding. I listened to the

interview recordings and read each transcript from 44 interviews total, paying attention to

similarities and differences in the responses for each interview question posed, especially when

the interviewee voluntarily expounded upon the posed question. I pondered the meaning of the

responses over time while carefully considering each interviewee's experiences reported. For

example, I noted parallels were made to students' DLC experiences when students made

reference to their high school experiences, suggesting their developmental process. Listening to

the interviews for voice inflection and reading the transcripts helped me to synthesize the data.

Each transcript from the interviews was uploaded into Atlas.ti wherein I assigned a

pseudonym for each interviewee. As I highlighted quotes, I assigned words as codes to begin to

designate meanings for the responses reflected in the quotes along with electronic memos, within

the Atlas.ti software, for reflection and consideration (see Table 2). Most of the memos I made

represented contradictions or unexpected responses from the participants. As the number of

codes I created increased, the number of corresponding quotes increased. In this initial stage of

coding I discovered, named, and categorized themes that emerged. I connected the rich data

obtained primarily from interviews to the research questions and conceptual framework to

identify social capital in the DLC program. The next step I took was to reduce the data into

"families," a function in Atlas.ti designed for the purpose of data reduction.

Table 2. Codes.

Ambience	Frequency of Visits
Assistance	Language
Belonging	Maintaining
Bonding	Peers
Bridging	Reasons
Counselor	Resource Awareness
Cultural Differences	Resources outside DLC
Cultural Similarities	Self-Knowledge
Faculty	Social Life
Family	Staff

Table 3. Analytical Matrix.

Research Questions (RQs) (actual research questions from dissertation)	Related Protocol Questions (interview questions (Appendix C) directly responding to the RQs)	Theme Findings with Codes and Subcodes (analytical categories *responding to* the RQ)
RQ1 How do DLC students establish social and academic relationships with DLC peers, staff, and faculty? ■ What types of interactions occur in DLC designated spaces? ■ What types of interactions occur in the wider campus? **[social network, bonding (close ties), bridging (loose ties)]**	1. How are you doing in school now? 9. Did you feel you belonged? Why or why not? 10. Tell me about your time spent with peers. 11. What was it like for you to be among the majority of DLC students who were Latina/o? 12. Was there something that made you feel you could relate to other Latina/o members when you entered into the DLC study lab? 13. What is it like now to be in classes that have fewer Latina/o members than the DLC classes? 14. Do you have a new place to go to that is anything at all like ACE? What does that place have in common with your DLC area experiences? 15. Tell me about your counseling experiences. 16. Describe times you interacted with faculty members? Staff?	**Forging Relationships** Counselors Faculty Peers Staff Self-Knowledge, Social Life **big zone** Resources Outside DLC Cultural Differences Cultural Similarities Language Ambience (SPACE) Belonging (SPACE) Reasons (SPACE) Frequency of Visits (SPACE) Assistance Social Life
RQ2 What role does culture play in establishing those relationships? ■ What role does the DLC program culture play in encouraging readiness and college student identity? ■ What role does designated space play in establishing those	10. Tell me about your time spent with peers. 11. What was it like for you to be among the majority of DLC students who were Latina/o? 12. Was there something that made you feel you could relate to other Latina/o members when you entered into the DLC study lab? 13. What is it like now to be in classes that have fewer Latina/o members than the DLC classes? 2. Take me back to the DLC study lab. 3. How often did you go there? 4. How did you feel walking into the study lab? What were the reasons you	**Culture** Cultural Differences Cultural Similarities Language Ambience (SPACE) Belonging (SPACE) Reasons (SPACE) Frequency of Visits (SPACE) Assistance Social Life

relationships? **(personal network, shared space)**	went to the DLC study lab? 5. What would you have done if the DLC program didn't supply for these reasons? 6. How would that absence have affected your experiences in the DLC study lab? 7. Describe a typical visit to the DLC space. How did the activity there affect you? 8. How did you feel walking out of the DLC space? 9. Did you feel you belonged? Why or why not? 14. Do you have a new place to go to that is anything at all like the DLC? What does that place have in common with your DLC experiences?	
RQ3 What types of support are necessary for continued connection to peers? ■ To the institution? **(maintained social capital)**	15. Tell me about your counseling experiences. 16. Describe times you interacted with faculty members? Staff? 17. What was it like to go to workshops? Did you participate in extra workshops or take advantage of other resources outside the DLC? 18. What was it like to go outside the DLC area onto campus? Did you feel you belonged at SCCC? 19. Do you still see your DLC peers? What are your relationships like with others outside the DLC program? 20. Do you feel you belong at SCCC at this point? Why or why not? 21. Are there any questions you would ask if you were the researcher? Any particular questions for me?	**Support** Assistance Cultural Similarities Resource Awareness Social Life **big zone** Resources Outside DLC Self-Knowledge

Data Display

I used qualitative data analysis computer software, Atlas.ti, to help organize the data and compare the patterns and themes generated. Throughout coding, I found overlapping categories as patterns emerged; e.g., many peer interactions revealed a degree of support and cultural

influences students received. Creating a matrix to define terms outside of Atlas.ti, I defined and

organized the concepts I formulated from my analysis (see Table 4). To facilitate the creation of

codes and subcodes, I developed a codebook for a coherent analytic structure in addition to

organizing the data in Atlas.ti. Then, I aligned my codes with the research questions and

interview questions in a matrix (see Table 3). Next, I created categories for the codes (see Table

2). As I began to recognize the centrality of relationships contributing to a unique culture within

the DLC and assisting students in their gradual entry into the big zone, I created new categories.

Finally, I went back to the literature to research themes such as transfer culture, relationship

building, and transfer from community colleges. After having linked my data to the new

literature, I created a narrative of the representative quotes in the findings section. Finally, I

created the concluding matrix representing ways the new literature informed the themes (see

Table 4).

Table 4. Concepts Operationalized.

Concept	Definition	Operationalized	Possible Examples
Social Capital	Social capital is the accrued information and resources of an individual or a group participating in a community comprised of invested and recognized relationships.	Latino students' membership in DLC sharing mutual academic goals and establishing social contact.	I was in AVID in high school, so when I came into the DLC, the structure was familiar to me. I found it natural to make friends and go to classes together.
Social Network	A social structure made up of a set of actors (such as individuals or organizations) and the dyadic ties between these actors.	Latina/o students' consistent contact and interaction with peer, faculty, and staff members of the DLC.	I would go into the study lab every day and say hello to Katie (the Director) and ask Lydia how her baby was. They would always ask me how my classes were going.
Personal Network	A number of dyadic relationships an individual sustains at a given point in time.	DLC students made new friendships and acquaintances with peers, faculty, and staff while maintaining some high school contacts.	Some students were referred to the DLC via word-of-mouth and interacted with one another once the students became members. When I couldn't find the

			word, I said it in Spanish.
Shared Space	A mutually shared physical area consistently occupied by members who invest time and energy in recognized, intentional activity.	The study lab provided opportunities for students to build community and connect on a collegial level to peers, faculty, and staff.	One student said, "A space is more than the space itself; it's a frame of mind."
Bonding	Type of social capital accrued by an individual or a group participating in a community comprised of core, stable relationships of mutual trust and intimacy.	Density of peer interactions in study lab continuing in shared classrooms and in personal lives.	Each of my friends agreed to bring some food to share at lunch. The Director of the DLC gave me a loan and I paid her back with my next paycheck.
Bridging	The type of social capital accrued through loose connections with persons outside the individual's core support group.	Tutors, counselor, faculty colocated in space made themselves available to students.	My professor knew my first name and always greeted me when I saw him around campus.
Converted or Transmuted	Valuable bridging or bonding social capital students leverage toward their academic progress as they transition to the larger campus.	Forays made into the larger campus with peers to connect to additional services offered by the larger campus community.	My friend and I agreed not to take the same class together – we knew we would talk too much and be distracted. But when we finished a class, we exchanged our books and notes with each other.
Public Good	Benefits received by individuals for the well-being of the group without financial gain for the recipients or contributors.	Culture of trust and trustworthiness created in the DLC as well as Latino culture shared amongst DLC members.	Every member of the DLC felt the impact of trust being violated when a laptop was stolen and tighter controls were implemented. A student worker was assigned to distribute and receive the laptops during the study lab hours.

Data Validation

The individual interviews and focus group interview for member checking provided a

central data source from which themes and patterns emerged. A series of member checks

(Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) on the interpretations and conclusions identified through analysis

provided validity to this study. The focus group participants were presented with the findings and

I requested feedback on the transcription of quotes and vignettes of the participants' experiences. The feedback was incorporated as appropriate to this study while I maintained my interpretation.

Classroom and study lab observations as well as the semi-structured interview transcripts were analyzed through the lens of my social capital conceptual framework with nontraditional students. Recurring themes and patterns from all the sources are included in the final report. This case study approach to understanding the Latina/o student experience in the DLC and how it was aligned with the conceptual model validates themes emerging from the interview data and observations performed.

Researcher Positionality

I now address my positionality to address any threats to the validity of this study, in response to Maxwell's (2005) point researcher bias and reactivity, i.e., subjectivity and influence on the setting under study. In this way, I can be aware of the ways in which this piece of qualitative research may have been influenced by bias while not disregarding the discoveries leading to the conclusions.

Employing triangulation as a way of confirming findings produced through interviews, observations, and document analysis was one way I have reduced systematic bias. In addition, I built rapport with the research participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) by first introducing myself in classrooms, then making phone contact, and then meeting students at the student lounge to chat on the way to the conference room in the pilot study. In this study, I decided to interview students in the office I share with other colleagues in order to provide a smaller setting and further disclose my role at the community college. In qualitative research it is critical the researcher build rapport with research participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness and authenticity of this study verified the credibility, confirmability, dependability, and consequent transferability by invoking persuasive and reasonable criteria for selection of the sample, site, research design, and methods to perform this case study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The argument for DLC assets contributing to Latina/o community college retention was confirmed or disconfirmed by the findings of solid inquiry. The research design provided credibility through the thorough three-pronged approach to and in-depth understanding of the DLC program under study, thereby guaranteeing the production of valid and believable findings.

The use of multiple sources increased confirmability by authenticating the research findings and data interpretations. Both credibility and confirmability of this study was strengthened by collecting the data over a prolonged period of time (from March 2012 to May 2013), involving multiple data resources (interviews with students who differed in their transition processes yet persisted in the DLC), and collecting data via various methods (document review, classroom and study lab observation, individual and group interviews, and informal interaction and observations).

The constant comparative data analysis allowed me to compare the raw data, the interview transcripts, and literature review on a regular basis to assure the accuracy of the data analysis. The research design provided reasonable and replicable methods for other researchers to reach similar conclusions in similar research designs and conditions, making this study dependable. The goal for the findings to apply to other kinds of settings heightened transferability by providing detailed descriptions of the research sites and participants while ensuring the confidentiality of the participants. The methods for trustworthiness emphasize the credibility, confirmability, dependability, and consequent transferability of this case study.

The trustworthiness of this study complied with IRB standards; therefore, I did not

provide any identifiable information of individuals and their institutional affiliations. All

participants were informed in advance their participation was completely voluntary and they

could have withdrawn their participation at their will anytime. Although the research poses

minimal or no risk to participants, all participants received a research information sheet, which

included: purpose of the study, procedures, potential risks and discomforts, potential benefits of

subjects and/or society, payment for participation, confidentiality, participation and withdrawal,

identification of investigators, and rights of research subjects.

I employed the technique of member checking in which I shared the analysis and

interpretations of the interviews with an advisory panel. The advisory panel consisted of six

Latina/o DLC students from the research subjects (formed by a subsample of the participants) to

discuss the validity of the interpretation and seek alternative explanations of the data. The

advisory panel compensated for the "outsider" status by providing me with deeper understanding

of the Latina/o DLC student culture and serving as a means of member checking. Input and

comments from the advisory panel helped confirm the accuracy of my interpretations and

findings of this study. The advisory panel's feedback was examined and included in this final

manuscript, based on the relevance to this study.

As the participants of this study contributed, influenced, and shaped dynamics and

relationships among other participants, including me as the researcher, I was mindful of how

personal backgrounds and values can bias the study (Creswell, 2009). While I cannot control

others' backgrounds and values, my self-observations and self-reflections recorded in my

research journal augmented my awareness of how my background and values intersected with

the conceptual framework. I acknowledge the combination of my worldview and various

identities as a Caucasian-American woman, a prior community college student, a doctoral student of higher education, and a community college educator inevitably shaped my conceptual framework, data collection, analysis, and interpretation process.

<div align="center">Study Limitations</div>

My role as the researcher and human being makes me susceptible to mistakes and personal biases (Merriam, 1998). Therefore, I identify myself in this section with an explanation of my background for readers to better understand the topic of this study as well as the setting and rapport with the subjects as I was privileged to interpret their experiences (Creswell, 2009). I started my higher education in the community college and I needed to consider my own bias toward the experiences community college students encounter. In addition to being a faculty member on campus with connections to the DLC, I served as an instructor for a summer bridge program the first year of the DLC existence. While I did disclose to all of the participants that I worked on campus, I emphasized this project was part of my graduate studies. I did not hear nor detect any concerns with my faculty status; however, I am not able to know how this fact influenced the students' participation.

The research design had a number of limitations. One key limitation relates to the restricted amount of time I had to spend with each student. While it would have been ideal to follow each student throughout his/her first academic year in the DLC, the intensity of this type of relationship would be unrealistic for most students, and certainly the researcher. Secondly, the DLC changed some of its policies and offerings from year to year, so each cohort had varying requirements for membership. Finally, the focus of this study was to explore the particular experiences of Latina/o students as nontraditional students of color. The findings and implications of this case study are limited to the representative sample of the Latina/o population

as nontraditional students of color, particularly those who participated in the DLC as an intervention program, and cannot be widely generalized.

Conclusion

A prior pilot study I conducted two years ago steered me toward further exploration of the value of the DLC in assisting Latina/o students as nontraditional students of color in the community college to prepare for transfer into a four-year institution. The history and characteristics of the study site as a community college of innovation, which I discovered through the environmental scan, revealed the value of investigating the DLC in a case study design. The data generated from the collection process of document analysis, observations, and interviews provided rich sources for analysis. Subsequent to reduction of the data, a final operationalized set of codes, and validation and triangulation of the data, findings of value and quality were identified in response to the research questions posed. In examining data from student participants, I concentrated on how Latina/o DLC students utilize relationships inside and outside the safe zone to move out into the big zone. While analyzing the data, I paid attention to how the participants perceived the DLC and the cultural aspects of their interactions with peers, faculty, and staff. I focused on how all these characteristics contributed to or inhibited the success of Latina/o DLC students to persist and enter into the big zone.

Chapter 5 Findings– The DLC Environment: Structure and Culture

The DLC Environment: Structure

The physical surroundings of the DLC encouraged students' involvement in college-going activities intentionally designed by the DLC program. The DLC area is comprised of a study lab, adjoining classrooms in singular bungalows, and an outside space predominantly used by DLC students. These intentionally-designed areas strategically provided an enclave for DLC students based on best practices with respect to the learning community model. Congruent with the overall goal to provide students access to resources in a fully supportive milieu, the program structure combined the joint efforts of faculty and student service professionals. Working cooperatively, their mission to develop common learning outcomes, integrate curriculum, and strategize student engagement techniques contributed greatly to the overall program structure. For example, the study lab invited students into the space Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. until 5 p.m. Figure 3 depicts the physical layout and poster messages on the walls of the study lab.

The DLC area was conveniently located within the heart of the college campus. Situated next to a host of classrooms, administrative offices, and scenic outside locations where students could work, the study lab represented an all-purpose space where work and socializing easily coexisted. Upon visiting the study lab's outdoor space, I observed the following:

> Just outside the study lab door stood patio-type round, metal tables with adjoining curved benches and an enclosed basketball court with four hoops. Students utilized the tables and courts to connect with one another by chatting, sharing food, and shooting hoops. This space seemed to invite students to sit under the Jacaranda trees, which were sprinkling purple flowers onto the grass where students were meeting. [Field Note 1].

Figure 3. Layout of the DLC Study Lab Space and Poster Messages.

Window	Text bookcase & Magazines	Whiteboard/ Projector Screen	Window	Plant

	Study Table with six chairs		Study Table with six chairs	P o s t e r 2
Sink and Pantry with Shelves				

Poster 1

Whiteboard Workshop & Scholarship Information

Study Tips

| | Study Table with six chairs | | Study Table with six chairs | P o s t e r 3 |

	Student Worker/ Tutor Desk	Study Table with six chairs	Study Table with six chairs	P o s t e r 4
	_____			
	Portable Computer Storage			

Poster 5

Bulletin Board with Non-DLC-Information

Hallway

	DLC Grad Photos & University Destinations	Wall with unobstructed window	Projector and Printer
			Staff Office
	Entry to Office		

DLC Entry

Framed Poster 1

Just because something is difficult doesn't mean you shouldn't try; you should just try harder.

Framed Poster 2
You miss 100% of the shots you never take.

Framed Poster 3
Knowledge
One's mind, once stretched by new ideas, never regains its original dimensions.
--Oliver Wendell Holmes

Framed Poster 4
Einstein Asked Questions

Framed Poster 5
People can ALTER their minds by altering their ATTITUDES

As a place where students could both work and play, the lab operated as an academic home for members. This space seemed to encourage relationship building between participants as well as with college and program staff. In this way, the study lab space reinforced the importance of space as a symbolic representation of college student status.

The study lab space also conveyed programmatic academic expectations. This was evident not only by the physical presence of computers and printers onsite, but also in the shared commitments of participants to using the space as an academic worksite. Consider the following field note based on an observation I made one afternoon in the study lab:

Entering the study lab, visitors would likely see bustling activity. In addition to students working and interacting busily at the desks, the printer was constantly at work with a student nearby. A student worker/tutor was signing out a laptop to a DLC member and checking their ID. One student ducked in to say hello to a staff member while friends found a work table to share. A singular desk next to the north wall sat adjacent to six tables with six chairs each. A window to the office gave a view of the staff working at their computer desks, answering phones, and greeting other students coming to sit at the round table to speak with staff members or the designated counselor.

Two bulletin boards lined the walls of the short hall leading from the office to the study lab. The bulletin board on the side of the hall leading to the office had a list of requirements for continuation in the DLC program as well as course offerings for the year. Posted next to it was a political cartoon depicting Native Americans looking out from shore onto the Mayflower ship, saying, "They don't look documented to me!"

On the other side of the hall, photos of previous cohorts on field trips covered the wall with small college pennants next to individual photos demarcating the colleges to which

DLC graduates transferred. Official college posters lined the rest of the bulletin board, inviting students to visit and consider particular colleges and universities offering tours and information sessions. The messages students received from the walls seemed to say, "You are welcome here and we will help you. We have a track record – look at the students who have gone before you." [Field Note 2]

The tangible resources available in the study lab, including laptops, textbooks, and the printer were important for the students. Nearly 7 out of 10 students interviewed mentioned a primary reason for entering the study lab was to utilize the laptops, and roughly half these students stated they almost exclusively did homework in the study lab. In part, the reason given by half of these students for doing homework in the study lab was to avail themselves of the textbooks as well as the laptops. Six students mentioned they used the printer regularly and three added they were permitted to eat and relax in the study lab during the time they were in the DLC. Tables, chairs, and messages in framed posters set a stage for helping one another with homework and studying together (see Figure 3). The room and the materials within the study lab set a tone and provided resources for students to launch into their academic pursuits.

The physical space of the DLC represented a structured mechanism of support for participants; a space where critical tasks such as priority registration and precollegiate as well as college-level coursework occurred. Additional support, including on-site academic counseling and financial aid advice, was constantly available through interactions with the DLC staff and counselor. These structured mechanisms provided a platform for conveying the high academic expectations for the students' performance.

The intentional structure of the DLC program provided an environment conducive to helping students connect to one another, interact with faculty and staff, and learn the academic "ropes." The physical location and arrangement of the study lab, classrooms, and outdoor area

helped students to consistently connect, interact, and learn. The vital physical space provided a safe place where participants could work cooperatively and develop academic skills. The study lab was a lynchpin of the DLC environment. Overall, members described the study lab as a safe zone for students to "come home to" before, after, and between classes. Further, the location of the study lab, offices, and classrooms facilitated peer, staff, and faculty interactions within the program structure.

Relationships

The program structure facilitated the cultivation of relationships in the DLC. Students developed formal and informal relationships within the DLC and indicated that they appreciated the different nature of the close ties they fostered with staff versus the ties they fostered with peers within the program structure. The students were gratified to be in the program together; they helped one another, exercised individual agency, and shared similar goals – particularly to persist and transfer.

Formal

The cohort structure inherently offered an immediate peer group for students in which close ties could be established based on shared identity as zero-year college students who strived to persist and transfer. The students shared a sense of identity as zero-year and, in most instances, first generation students entering the college setting. The mutual experiences in classes, the study lab, and meeting requirements[7] extended a sense of belonging, drawing students together.

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[7] The specific requirements for membership were mandatory workshops, tutoring visits, enrollment in precollegiate English or math course and a college skills course within the DLC, various choices of college level courses, and a visit to the DLC designated academic counselor.

An overwhelming majority of students interviewed said they passed time in the study lab daily or at least every day they came to school. It was not unusual for a student to spend a total of two to three hours a day in the study lab, especially if a time gap occurred between classes. Most commonly, students would enter the study lab before and after classes. When it was time to leave the study lab to go to class, Isaiah described a sentiment of solidarity:

> I mean normally it would be...some of us would just walk out together. A whole class would walk out. It was for Ethnic Studies; everyone had it like 9:00 to 10:00 something. Everyone would walk out together from the [study lab]. Like an **ARMY** [emphasis added] or something – going to the class.

Many students reported similar sentiments about the study lab space, using other words besides 'army' denoting togetherness, like 'home,' 'community,' and 'warm place.' Figure 4 provides a frequency map of the common adjectives used by participants to describe their perceptions of the DLC. The various types of relationships formed within the study lab contributed to a friendly, comfortable, safe, and welcoming ambience. The ambience created stemmed from the various types of relationships formed within the study lab.

As a vitally important space in which participants could connect socially, develop academic skills, and cooperate on shared academic projects, the study lab was a lynchpin in the DLC. In speaking about the study lab, Maria, Gina, and Dario expressed the comfort level they felt working on their homework as their peers labored alongside them. Overcoming the temptation to stop working, these members challenged each other to stay on task.

> It encourages you. I mean sometimes you're like "Ok, I'm going to leave this off, do it at home" but then everybody's doing it there, you're like "Ok, I'm going to get it started, get it done right now." So it's like everybody pushes each other. [Maria]

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But I also felt like if I had accomplished something during that time I was in there; you

know, thanks to the [study lab] that I was able to finish my homework. Now I don't have

to worry about going home and having to do it … since I don't have the book. [Gina]

Dario echoed these sentiments:

I only had one class on Friday, so like I would go in and there would be already people

there and sometimes I'll stay outside and just have my breakfast bar and people will pass

by and like, "Oh, did you do the homework?" Like, "No, I didn't do it." "Oh, let's go do

it." So we'd just go inside and everybody's I guess doing their homework too, so we'll be

just like…we'll just be all doing our homework. I like that.

The centrality of the study lab combined mutual purposes of social and academic

connections for students. Surrounded by peers who used the study lab to do their homework,

Maria, Gina, and Dario were encouraged to stick with it. They took advantage of the opportunity

to get homework done. It provided a much needed, welcoming place in which to work; an

environment unlikely duplicated in the participants' actual homes. What became apparent from

my observations and interviews was the drive to persist was palpable and readily contagious

among students; it represented a shared ethos compelling them to work together, to share in their

studies, and to feel a part of the DLC.

Many of the students who regularly spent time in the study lab sought assistance for their

subject matters in DLC-designated courses from the faculty. Students reported meeting with

instructors who held office hours in the study lab.

It was helpful when [the instructors] went into the [study lab]. I would only go [for the

office hours] when I knew I had no idea what she's talking about, or he. I would go there

and ask for help and tell them, "I have no idea what you're talking about." [Isaiah]

. . . the English teacher . . . so did the Math teacher. If you had a question, she'll be like,

"All right, let's go to the [study lab]," and then she'll just help you right there and tutor

you for a little bit and then she'll say, "Ok, well I have to go." [Maria]

The availability of instructors helped students in their ability to confidently approach

faculty. The communication of correct information and knowledge added to students' social and

academic capital. Students also connected with tutors who were regularly available in the DLC.

The figure below portrays words that students used in their description of the study lab.

Figure 4. Study Lab Descriptions Proportionate to Word Frequency.

Students expressed gratitude for the exclusive tutoring services meant to assist them in

math and English. Although some students felt they didn't need these extra services, they chose

to comply with the requirements. As Jackie expressed, "I only took advantage of [the tutors]

because we had to, per se. There was one assignment that I didn't really understand so I went and

they helped me out." The requirement for tutoring provided an incentive for the students to get

exposed to the kind of assistance helping them perform better in their courses while they were still in the safe zone as well as later in the progression of their education.

Recognized for their academic strengths, students like Camilla were solicited to tutor in the DLC. Four students verified having landed positions as student workers and tutors at various points during the four years the program was in operation. Through daily communication, Jorge recounts establishing close ties with staff and later being hired as a math tutor.

I talked to [the director] about my classes. My sister, she's a math major. From time to time, we'll just be talking about our daily drama with mathematics and then they realized, "Oh, both of you are very good at Math." I got B's in Calculus. They were like, "Oh, you must be really good at Mathematics then." I took Trigonometry twice in high school. I think I told that to [the staff] so they were like, "Oh, you already have at least more practice than the other students." I still meet with one of the students and I helped them last week with his Trigonometry homework.

Students like Jorge became supports as tutors and created close ties to students, just as the tutors had been supported by the staff. Jacobo referred to his first introduction to one of the tutors who was available during the DLC's summer bridge: "[The tutor] was the one that talked to us about [the DLC]. It was my uncle, my cousin, and me. Juana talked about getting to know each one of the tutors the year she was in the program. Juana shared, "Usually the tutor hands out the computer. I knew all of them; Angela, Pedro, and Adriana. I'll talk to them a lot. I'll talk after passing through the office; I'll talk to the person working."

The types of relationships developed between students and tutors in the DLC provided strong modeling for students. As administrative supports, the counselor, staff, faculty, and tutors alike contributed to the well-being and support of the students by speaking with them, providing

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input and suggestions, recognizing their strengths, and even empowering them with paid tutor positions, which promoted invaluable academic benefits for the students. In addition to the role of tutoring, on-site counseling and financial aid advice were offered to and accepted by students.

One of the most vital mechanisms of support in the DLC was the on-site counseling offered formally by the designated counselor and informally by the staff when the students sought advice. The familial setting and open-door policy were enhanced by the staff and counselor checking in with students about their progress as the students came into the study lab or happened to pass by a staff member. For many students, the designated counselor in particular played a surrogate role as a family member whom they relied on for support in making decisions. Nino talked about the counselor's part in introducing him to the "patterns" in college and how student-development instruction informed him.

> I come from like a first generation of Americans. My parents just came over here, so they really don't know much academic and so once college came, they didn't know what financial aid was, they don't know, they pretty much don't know anything, so [the designated counselor] played a part of that. She introduced me to BEOG [the Basic Educational Opportunity grant, a federally funded source of financial aid] which helps a lot. She also, I could see following – just patterns. Also, like in your second semester, I believe, you take Student Development and [the instructor] tells you a lot about the college experience.

The counselor and student-development instruction introduced students to college and helped students in ways their family members often could not. Carmen describes her perception of the counselor as a friend who motivated and stood by her.

[She] was a friend, she was a big motivator. She was always so encouraging; making sure

you took the right classes and guiding you. She was just there for you.

The counselor's physical presence encouraged students' continued communication with

her. She was accessible in person, by email, and by phone.

Marisela reported, "I would call [her] to ask if I could change a class and she said, "Yes,

go ahead, just make sure that, you know, keep everything good and arranged."

Sometimes I emailed her and asked if I can make an appointment for this day or anytime

you have."

Students did not need to confirm appointments, but would see the counselor come into

the study lab, at which time she would interact with students and follow up with them. Jorge

reported:

I would see her much more because I was in [the study lab] for longer periods. She'll

walk in during the times and wash her hands or talk to a student to confirm an

appointment. Yeah, she'll go herself and talk to them. [Jorge]

The counselor's accessibility and availability were a great help to students who needed

vital information, such as the necessary classes to transfer, help for AB540 (undocumented)

students, and interpreting terms such as "recommended" versus "required." Gina said:

Well, [I needed help with] my classes, which ones I needed to take, the requirements to

be able to transfer.

Likewise, Eduardo held these sentiments:

She's the one who told me about the AB540 and how I could join the club and get help

from them. She also told me what classes would get me to my transfer faster and with

less problems to a better school.

Isaiah also found value in access to the counselor:

There was times where she would tell me, "You don't need that class. It says

recommended but not required."

The counselor was an extremely valuable resource for students by being accessible and available for appointments and offering follow-through with students as she saw them in the study lab. Her role to provide instruction, knowledge, and resources to students would not have been readily accessed otherwise. Students continually reported how they availed themselves of her consultation through the membership requirements. As evidenced below, students also warmly described their supportive relationships with administrative personnel.

Some students especially liked being able to speak Spanish with one particular staff member, indicating the degree of comfort they felt in understanding one another and sharing an important aspect of their culture. For example, the staff celebrated these particular students' birthdays by bringing in birthday cakes and singing "Happy Birthday" in English and Spanish. This nurturing received by many students reinforced a sense of belonging and security. Sylvia likened two staff members that kept her on track to maternal figures.

When I talked to [the assistant] or [the director] it was like, I saw them more as a mother

figure here at school because they kept me on track also and good support, too, at school.

In addition, Sylvia described a sense of accountability to the staff she leaned on for support and assistance. Lilly brought up the encouragement and influence a staff member provided by talking about her life experiences and-aspirations.

I saw [a staff member] last week and when I was in [the study lab] I was thinking about

being a criminal justice major and then she had worked in the jails, so I kind of got an

insight of like what I would be getting myself into if I decided to be that major.

Lilly also expressed comfort in sharing her aspirations, gaining insight, and receiving valuable feedback from the staff member. Likewise, Miranda said she spoke with staff a lot, as they would chat about weekend activities coming up and her passion for politics and community service.

> Like I always tell them what I'm doing on the weekend, like my math teacher invited me to a fundraiser for Haiti. I always talk to them about different stuff like politics or what volunteer services I'm doing. I mean, [a staff member], she knows how passionate I am. She told me I should be a student ambassador or something, so I'm looking into that and right now . . . I'm in the Student in Service program on campus, which is like you serve 300 hours of community service and you get scholarships and you can also use the same hours to apply for scholarships on campus and also outside.

Miranda further described the staff as a source of encouragement, and she recognized some of her strengths through the interests she shared with the staff members, who referred her to more resources. Similarly, Lucy benefitted from the presence and availability of staff members who were in the office in the mornings.

> I feel support when there's [staff] there to help me, when I can talk to someone that works here. [The staff members] are always there in the morning, so I always go talk to them. They're always available, so I always go talk to them and they always give me advice too and they just want the best for us. That's what I like the most, that they don't want us to stay here. Their main goal I feel is for us to strive for something better and not stay here for three years. They want us to leave [within] two years.

The support offered by staff encouraged students to strive toward transfer and provided appropriate advice to the students. In spite of the fact that she will not be in the DLC or at SCCC

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for an extended period of time, Lucy acknowledged the importance of her relationships with the staff members whom she trusted were looking out for her best interests.

In addition to staff role models, students also described the modeling they did for one another. Students thrived in the study lab where they established relationships as they became familiar with one another. As Isaiah described earlier, the students met before class in the study lab and walked out all at once – sharing a sense of camaraderie. The structural components of the program afforded students the opportunity to build on their relationships with one another. Maria contrasted the difference between being in the classroom and getting time with her peers in the study lab.

> Well, I didn't know many people from the beginning but as time went by I started to get to know them better . . . you don't really get to socialize as much in classrooms, so what we didn't do in class, was at [the study lab]. Socialize, keep up with each other. I met a couple of friends but I don't think the friendships stayed as strong as the ones involved in [the DLC].

Maria reserved socializing for outside the classroom in the study lab where she could stay in touch with her peers. She added her relationships with peers outside the program were weaker than those in the DLC. Maria recognized that the strength of the friendships she made in the DLC was unique. The friendships continued even after finishing the program. The membership and cohort model provided a structure within which students shared close ties and academic commonalities that launched them into the big zone.

The relationships students fostered with one another, the counselor, other staff, and faculty differed slightly in tone, yet participants described all relationships respectfully and warmly. The relationships students described with the counselor tended to be friendly in tone

while those described with staff were maternal. Students considered faculty as approachable, safe authorities. Many students described cohesion and trust in relationships with the personnel performing in administrative functions. These formal relationships indicated intimate ties contrasting with informal relationships.

Informal

In contrast to the intimate ties fostered within the program, looser and less intensive relationships also existed. These less direct relationships made outside the DLC represented valuable associations and interactions with key college personnel and non-DLC peers. While these relationships did not offer the level of intimacy and comfort within-DLC relationships provided, my findings show these loosely coupled ties were invaluable in moving students forward in their academic careers. My findings also revealed that almost an equal amount of interaction with faculty/staff occurred inside and outside of the DLC, although twice as many interactions with peers occurred inside the DLC as outside the DLC. See Table 5 below:

Table 5. Cohort 2009-10 Reported Interactions with Faculty/Staff and Peers.

Actor	Inside DLC	Outside DLC	Total
Faculty/Staff	324	291	615
Peers	219	112	331

Students shared their experiences and perceptions as they began to establish their relationships with personnel on the larger campus of SCCC. For example, Moises talked about the relationship he fostered with tutors, one from the DLC and the other in the big zone. Moises described the way he keeps these tutor-friends company while riding the bus home and in the big zone:

[The study lab] is where I socialized and on the bus with the tutor. Honestly, after that I have a friend that tutors Physics . . . I'll go and visit him and I'll just sit around but he has to be tutoring, moving around and stuff like that. This day specifically we go and eat.

A symbolic alternative to the larger campus, the study lab served as a launch pad for students like Moises. The relationships he established within the DLC extended to off-campus interaction, which exposed him to the new tutor. Moises described the investment he made in his relationship with the tutor he befriended in the big zone.

Like Moises, DLC students intermittently stepped out into the big zone together while meeting the requirements for membership. As the participants became acquainted with the larger campus, they demonstrated relational and networking behaviors analogous to ways they had fostered relationships. Relationships within the big zone were loosely-tied rather than closely-tied. The relationships with non-DLC students helped students to gain bonding social capital. Further, informal relationships helped students fortify their college identities and acquire more academic capital. Finding common ground with others permeates the accounts DLC alumni shared about their network formation. Derek shared a *small world* story about meeting someone in the DLC who grew up three doors down from his home. He met another high school peer he hadn't known before he entered into the DLC.

> One of them I knew from the Summer Bridge program because I took the bus home and he took it, too, and I told him, "Where do you live?" And he lives on my street, too, like three houses down and I was like, "What? I never seen you." He's like, "Yeah, I've lived here since I was little." Another guy, I met him at the bus too. I was going home and he's like, "Oh, I've seen you before in the [DLC]." I'm like, "Oh, yeah, I've seen you too," . . . he went to my high school.

Derek found common ground with students who shared the DLC experience with him.

Realizing students from his own community were small world experiences contributing to

Derek's knowledge that he was not alone in his pursuits.

Like Derek, other students extended their peer network as they stepped outside the DLC

area. Various classes, clubs, and services offered students opportunities to get involved in other

areas of the campus with new faces and influences. These relationships extended across the

campus and suggested more strategies and activities for student engagement. This extended

involvement modeled more persistence and more pathways to transfer. Diego compared the

experiences he had in the big zone with those he had in the program.

> . . . The classes are a little bit larger than in [the DLC] where it's like 28 or 30 students,
>
> the other classes are 60 to 80 students. Like my language class, my professor actually
>
> helps us talk to each other. So we actually meet a lot more friends that way. The
>
> professors actually help us get like into groups, work together.

Although the classes are larger, Diego described meeting more of his peers in his history

class as the faculty member encouraged connections. Diego also acknowledged that talking to

and working with one another in a cooperative manner was one aspect of the class. Parallel to the

DLC experience, academic excellence and relationship cultivation were encouraged in some of

Diego's other classes.

Camilla described how she learned about academic expectations for transfer when she

was exposed to an AB540 club with mentors and peers. She found support from the club

members and formed new relationships through the club.

> . . . There is two guys there; they say, "When we started the club there were like 15
>
> people only. And they were residents because the people AB540 were afraid to say, "Oh

you know what, I'm an AB540 and I want to join the club." Now we're at like 45 students. We have mentors; my mentor is transferring to...I don't know if it's a Cal State or a UC but she's transferring there and she told me if you have any questions because I took the courses here so if you need any help or you have questions regarding the major just let me know.

Camilla also fostered relationships in a club outside the DLC offering her help and support toward her transfer goals. This extended network proved to connect her to other resources beyond the DLC. A common source of extended interaction and involvement reported by DLC students came from peers helping each another. Particularly when spending time in the study lab, students discovered one another were significant sources of information and a great benefit of belonging to the DLC. Felicia also talked about the difference between connecting with students inside and outside the DLC.

I don't have no friends; now is so hard because the first day of school, you want to sit next to someone that speaks your language or looks almost like you and then make conversation and in [the DLC] the professors were like, get each other's numbers in case one day you don't have the homework or you miss class and you can call your buddy, but this time teachers are not like asking for numbers or anything. Now you're forced to ask for the numbers. It took me like, about three weeks to make at least one little friend in class, in my Sociology class, and we talk and she's Salvadorean and Mexican, so it's different, but it's the same, she speaks Spanish. And that's when I need help, like I have homework or anything like that, I'm looking for someone, but I have to wait until like the afternoon or the same date of this class to find them.

Felicia's strategy to find other Spanish speakers to help her with homework represented the way her DLC professors encouraged her to persist in getting help by fostering relationships with peers. Although the friendships were sparse, Felicia reached out to her peers. Some students, like Adrian, found friends of friends to be good resources for networking.

I just had one friend that I knew in this [non-DLC class] because she's my best friend's sister and she had that class, so I would go to her house or something and she would help me out with a couple of things.

While Adrian's connection to a friend's sister is somewhat serendipitous, these types of connections helped students recognize they are not alone in their academic pursuits. Likewise, Fiona acknowledged it would not behoove her to be quiet and figure out the academic challenges she faced on her own. Fiona met athletes and trainers who encouraged her to connect with peers.

I made a lot of friends in the training room, so every time I go there, I know most of the people that are in there, the injured people. I made a lot of track, football, and other sports friends that I thought I would never, ever get to talk to. [The trainers] made me not be shy and just be out there and to be yourself and then everyone will like you. So I'm starting to talk a lot more, so it's actually better for me because I'm starting to make new friends in classes that I thought I would never talk to. Like if I needed help with a problem, they would help me out, and I was too afraid to ask anyone for help, so I would just be quiet and then just try to figure it out at my house, but then I realized it wouldn't hurt to ask. So that helped me out and I actually started making friends too in classes. So now I'm more talkative in class too.

The experiences Fiona had with the trainers and the athletes modeled strategies for persistence by helping her speak up, make friends, and ask for help. Fiona extended her peer

network through her athletic involvement. As students began to connect with students on the larger campus, more relationships were established, along with greater exposure to the larger campus. Not all students simply received the help they needed when they spoke up. Emma faced some hostility, which she endured and overcame.

As Emma's case highlights, even negative experiences in seeking support services helped produce the resolve to push against hostility and persist with her transfer goals.

I went to the [other support service] counselor and he treated me like I was stupid because I was asking so many questions. I came back to the DLC and told my friends and they said he had no right to talk to me like that. So I went back with a friend and talked to someone else in the [other support service] who talked to the counselor. After that, the counselor apologized.

This bonding social capital fortified Emma's resolve to address the hostility she met in a visit to a support service office. Even though Emma felt insulted and discouraged by the support service counselor, she leveraged her social capital in such a way to benefit her transfer goals. Consider Luis' case to leverage social capital as he shared his desire to reciprocate after having finished his year in the DLC.

I actually felt like that's – I want to do that when I grow up – actually help students. I think financially, to actually build and open places for students in college or in community colleges. Because, actually, that helped me and I want to see that education continues and students don't drop out. Because some people that actually can't go to universities, they come here, and . . . .

Recognizing that his transformation and empowerment could be valuable to others, Luis considered ways of investing his social capital into others' lives.

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DLC Structure Summary

My findings suggest that bonding social capital and bridging social capital were accrued and converted to academic capital as students utilized their relationships differently inside the DLC than outside. Stemming from the membership requirements, students formed an extended network that spread to the larger institution. As participants shared their experiences of stepping outside the DLC and meeting new college personnel and peers and finding common ground, these new connections seemed to elicit interest and wonder. New connections were made on the larger campus and students adjusted to different ways of receiving support, contacting faculty, attending classes, and fostering relationships. The nature of these loosely-tied relationships broadened students' outlook on college life.

Relationships fostered within and without the DLC area were instrumental in developing within participants a sense of belonging, empowerment, and agency. Students achieved a critical sense of attachment beyond that experienced in classroom alone (Karp et al., 2008). The program itself supplied opportunities for close ties to DLC members and loose ties to the larger institution. The administrative support received from faculty and staff instilled the understanding that the students were in the program together. As a cohort, the students developed an appreciation for one another as individuals, each with the capacity to create a community and share goals. The students also exercised agency as they helped one another cope with the range of academic challenges they faced.

As the students met the requirements for membership, they periodically stepped into the big zone together and became acquainted with the larger campus and other non-DLC faculty, staff, and peers. As the members networked with one another and other non-DLC peers, they met in the big zone and created relationships of mixed intensity. The accrual of bonding social capital

from the DLC fortified students to make their way into the big zone. Consequently, loosely-tied relationships were made and bridging social capital was accrued within the larger campus and among the members therein. The accrued social capital was converted to academic capital as students learned the ropes of the big zone.

The pedagogical and organizational practices of the DLC augmented bonding and bridged social capital through the provision of a physical study space. Students thrived in the inclusive atmosphere where no one was marginalized. They availed themselves of the resources within the space and interacted with each other, faculty, tutors, the counselor, and staff. The cohort structure and administrative support modeled success by allowing students space for accruing social capital from their relationships and converting social capital into academic capital as they honed their skills. Mimicking behaviors from the DLC, students established relationships with others in the big zone.

The DLC Environment: Culture

When examining the culture within the context of the DLC environment, study findings indicate that the socio-cultural milieu was program-driven and student-centered. Students report their recognition of the DLC expectations, exposure to success, and responses to persist-and-transfer messages. As evidenced below, students experienced a sense of belonging in an atmosphere of success and high expectations within a "persist-and-transfer" culture of the program. From the DLC culture lens, students described the transition onto the larger campus.

Referring to the transition process, students addressed the contrasting differences of the DLC and the larger campus. For example, when asked if there were other spaces on campus similar to the study lab, students sometimes mentioned science labs, library study rooms, the cafeteria, bleachers, the quad (chess area), and the weight room. Although these spaces provided a place to congregate, they were inconsistently available, and students used them inconsistently. A science major contrasted his experiences in the science lab to the study lab: "It's a very busy, very cold environment. I don't really get to socialize with many of them unless it's kind of like business wise. I'll get out of the lab and I'll feel kind of bad . . . I'll go to [the study lab] and in [the study lab], [the director], the tutors, the rest of the people and I'll be like, 'Oh man, these are people.'" Unlike the science lab, the DLC provided a consistently warm, inviting atmosphere to students.

An AB540 program to support undocumented students provided a few documented and undocumented DLC students with a space similar to the DLC. However, the AB540 program's space was limited to a table and chairs, and students' time there was mainly limited to weekly club meetings. Maggie shared, "There are like a few friends who are there and just talk or just to study. Yeah, in the Student Center. There's tables from each club . . . You can even just sit there

and just relax." The students participating in the AB540 program expressed disappointment in the difficulty of bringing their colleagues together and missing the sense of "coming home" that the study lab provided.

High performance and eventual transfer expectations were pervasive messages in the environment. The program maintained specific requirements for membership, including, but not limited to enrollment in precollegiate English or math course and a college skills course within the DLC, various choices of college level courses, mandatory workshops, tutoring visits, and visits to the designated academic counselor. The students consistently encountered college faculty and support personnel inside the DLC area, who imparted useful information for students to succeed. The DLC encouraged student agency through the program messaging, advocating a sense of personal identity, politicization of identity, and a college student identity. Expectations for high performance and eventual transfer permeated the environment.

The program held high expectations for student academic performance. Academic excellence was encouraged through the many rigorous program requirements. Students had to choose from a number of mandatory resources and services provided through a list of requirements for membership. The list included two workshops, two tutoring visits, enrollment in a precollegiate English or math course and a student development (college skills) course within the DLC, various choices of college level courses offered each semester (see Table 6) and two visits to the designated academic counselor. I offer quotes from students who talked about the program's high expectations for academic performance by meeting the membership requirements, advancing through the requirements, upgrading study habits, applying knowledge while working in a group, and becoming motivated by faculty and staff academic expectations of students.

Table 6. DLC Student Fall Coursework Taken.

	Participant Pseudonym	Cohort Year	Art	Ethnic Studies	Sociology	Preparatory English	Freshman English	Elementary Algebra I	Intermediate Algebra I
1	Adrian	2010				X		X	
2	Alejandro	2010	X		X			X	
3	Alexis	2010	X			X			
4	Angel	2010	X						
5	Anna	2010	X			X		X	
6	Aricela	2010			X		X		
7	Axel	2008				X		X	
8	Beto	2009			X	X		X	
9	Bobby	2009			X				X
10	Camilla	2009						X	
11	Carlos	2010			X	X			
12	Carmen	2009	X	X		X			
13	Daniel	2009			X	X			
14	Diego	2010		X	X	X			
15	Dina	2010	X						
16	Edgar	2010			X			X	
17	Eduardo	2008			X	X			
18	Emma	2009	X		X		X		
19	Enrique	2008					X	X	
20	Fiona	2009	X			X			
21	Gina	2010				X		X	
22	Isaiah	2009			X				X
23	Jackie	2009			X	X		X	
24	Jacobo	2008	X					X	
25	Jorge	2009		X				X	
26	Karina	2009					X	X	
27	Lara	2010		X		X			X
28	Lilly	2009			X		X	X	
29	Lucy	2009				X			
30	Luis	2009	X		X	X		X	
31	Maria	2009			X				X
32	Marisa	2010		X			X		
33	Marisela	2010							X
34	Marta	2010			X		X		
35	Miguel	2009	X	X				X	
36	Miranda	2009	X		X		X		
37	Moises	2009	X		X		X	X	
38	Nino	2010			X	X		X	
39	Ricky	2010	X		X	X		X	
40	Rodney	2009		X				X	
41	Sylvia	2009	X		X		X		
42	Victor	2010	X	X				X	
43	Wendy	2010				X		X	
44	Will	2010			X		X		

Miranda talked about meeting the membership requirements and recognized the

advantages of being in the program and adhering to the expectations to fulfill the membership

obligations.

[There were] requirements, yeah, but as a student, you have to do what it takes to be in a

program like that. It helps a lot . . . I went to a library workshop; I did, because it was a

requirement for the [DLC] and for my English class. Yeah, but I didn't actually go into

the library. They held one right next door to the [study lab], they had one in there.

Exclusively designed for the students, these workshops utilized technology to demonstrate access

to assistance, information, and knowledge through the internet. In navigating the internet with

the students, academic performance was augmented through e-technology.

Students who chose the library workshop became acquainted with the research database

available to students online. The workshops and courses students chose varied according to the

student's interests and needs. Some students recognized they would be applying themselves

diligently and working hard to realize the academic distinction expected of the students through

the program. Lucy and Denise talked about their struggles to change their ways of applying

themselves academically.

At first, I didn't want to write on the book because it's too expensive, but I was just like,

"No, I have to get an A in this class," so I started highlighting and taking notes in the

book, so I think that's helping me more. [Lucy]

I told myself that I really had to learn how to manage my time and stop procrastinating so

much. [Denise]

Lucy and Denise reported independent and individual changes they adapted to prioritize

their academic progress. Other students learned how to cooperate with others while prioritizing

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their academic progress. For example, Fiona talked about using technology and being conscientious as she worked through faculty expectations for collaboration with her peers. Academic performance included demonstrating the ability to work effectively in a group in DLC classes, as Fiona described.

> We were reading a book and [the instructor] told us to present a Power Point. We had to work in a group and talk amongst ourselves to separate the work and just know what we were going to do and made sure that we had all our parts correct and that what we were going to present was right.

> Fiona talked about particular expectations of one of her classes which included reading a book, negotiating with others in a group about their topic presentation, dividing the responsibilities, assuring the communication was understood by the members of the group, and presenting an appropriate Power Point together. The instructor and Fiona's peers had expectations for her participation in this class setting Fiona described. Fiona entered into a microcosm of college culture in that class setting with her academic capital. Lydia shared how the DLC director affected Lydia's belief about herself and her abilities. Lydia shared her motivation to meet the director's expectations for her academic performance.

> I showed [the director] my resume and she was like, "Really, you did this?" She thought I was a really good, smart girl, so that's motivating me more. I was like, "OK, I have to take more classes; I have to get my As."

> Lydia received the high expectation of the director as a truth about her own abilities and set her mind on earning good grades and taking more classes. The message of high expectations motivated students like Lydia. Meeting requirements, advancing through the requirements, upgrading study habits, and applying knowledge while working in a group were all ways in

which students evidenced their understanding of the high academic expectations set forth in the program.

DLC Expectations

The program culture revealed a persistent mindset of excellence to prepare for transfer. This mindset was conveyed through program messaging. Program expectations and the application of academic capital facilitated the accrual of cultural capital. As students interacted with each another while attending classes, workshops, and investing time in the study lab, they created a cultural context for their college experiences. Faculty and staff upheld high standards and shared knowledge and information with the students. The interactions between students and faculty encouraged students to invest time in the classroom and study lab.

Academic and transfer expectations were evident through the student environment via program messaging. With the student in the center of the program, *the persist-and-transfer* message was strongly conveyed through high expectations of academic performance, shared academic and institutional knowledge, and by student agency to encourage a sense of identity.

Students who regularly spent time in the study lab helped one another on subject matters in their courses. Gina reported, "I felt like I had accomplished something during that time I was in the [study lab] that I was able to finish my homework." I witnessed first-hand the kind of intimacy the peers shared in the study lab as they talked about their personal experiences and academic pursuits with one another during an 8 a.m. visit to the study lab.

> Students resembling those you'd envision on the bleachers at a high school football game
> sit in the designated study lab around tables designed to accommodate six people at a
> time. The companions have iPod earbuds on and laptops open in front of them while they
> look at each other's notes. The students interject their conversations with memories of

their morning preparation – one person shares her shower had suddenly gone cold while she was in it. The others laugh and share similar stories before getting back to the academic subject at hand. Another student asks if anyone "got it" when the teacher explained an assignment. The person next to the student takes one of his earbuds out and sticks it into a companion's ear to listen.

This vignette provides a description of a morning interaction as a symbolic narrative for the cultural capital students shared with their peers as they invested time in one another and their coursework. Further, students gained cultural capital through the counselor who guided them through their Student Academic Pathways (SAPs).

The designated counselor taught a Student Development course and met with students a minimum of twice per semester, as required for membership. Pivotal to the success in obtaining classes and establishing an educational plan, interactions with the designated counselor were aptly described by Daniel:

Yanna was a great counselor and well; I got to know her also because she taught a student developing class. And she was there to actually go through, so I was actually comfortable to talk about what I want to be and stuff like that. Like I wasn't - it's not like when I go to one of the counselors here in the [counseling] building. It's more like I need to explain myself again or, through my records they can see anything, like my changes or anything. But it's more straight to the point with them than with Yanna. Yanna actually helps me like this . . . we took a class and I didn't know I needed to go back to the administration building, but she helped me out.

Daniel was learning the DLC had expectations with respect to his coursework. About a third of the students interviewed continue to see Yanna and appreciate being able to follow through with a "friendly face." Students also reported how they invested time in one another in class and in the study lab. Miguel shared how he received valuable information from athletic peers while he was in the program.

> Yeah, because we kind of talk and then we see kind of who's in your level, within your level, and then it's actually cheaper sometimes to take a class with a teammate you only gotta buy one book, you know, so it's actually…you pretty much go around and you ask, "How is this teacher?" or, "How did this teacher go?" or, "What class are you taking?" And they sit us down also. I think it's about half a week before priority starts and then you sit down with the coaches and then you say what classes you want to take and then you kind of could tell your teammate, "Hey, what class are you taking? Let's take the same teacher." It just ends up getting cheaper.

Diego described the advantages of sharing information with his peers and gaining the knowledge he needed to succeed in college. In addition, Diego found a financial advantage in sharing resources with other students. As students gained more information and knowledge concerning navigating academic and institutional standards and expectations in the program, they became more socially, academically, and culturally advantaged outside as well as inside the DLC.

Persist-and-Transfer Culture

The DLC espoused a persist-and-transfer culture, which provided an atmosphere in which students could explore options for their academic careers. The program message encouraged student agency through a sense of personal identity, politicization of identity, and college student

identity. Students' interactions with college faculty and support personnel provided academic and institutional knowledge for the students. With the student in the center of the program, the persist-and-transfer message was strongly conveyed through the high expectations of academic performance, shared academic and institutional knowledge, and imparted student agency. The establishment of a persist-and-transfer culture indicates a socio-cultural milieu that was program-driven and student-centered. The persist-and-transfer culture of the program helped students experience a sense of belonging, discover options for academic careers, and integrate their burgeoning college student identity via the transformative experiences provided through membership requirements. The pedagogical and organizational practices of the DLC produced a persist-and-transfer culture sustained in the following ways:

The designated space signified membership within an academic "home." The safety and familiarity of the study lab evoked a comfortable milieu in which the participants worked toward mutual goals. The layout, décor, furnishings, rules, proximity, and availability contributed to a symbolic alternative to the big zone. The physical layout cultivated a spatial sense of belonging in an exclusive enclave for members. Further, the physical layout informally and formally signaled to students the program expectations for academic excellence, persistence, and ultimately, transfer to a four-year institution.

Academic and transfer expectations permeated the students' overall environment via program messaging. The consequent interactions students encountered with college faculty and support personnel imparted academic and institutional knowledge for the students. Finally, the program message revealed the inherent role of the DLC, in encouraging student agency through a sense of personal identity, politicization of identity, and a college student identity.

DLC Culture Summary

The DLC culture evolved from the congruous places and spaces in which students could meet, study, and interact. An atmosphere of high expectations, combined with a sense of belonging, contributed to student success through their precollegiate and college-level coursework. The DLC culture permeated through messages to persist-and-transfer in places and spaces where students met with peers, faculty, and staff. Environmental messages to persist and prepare for transfer to a four-year institution contributed to the DLC's unique college-going culture. A program-driven and student-centered socio-cultural milieu effectively helped students convert social and academic capital to cultural capital.

Chapter 6 – Integration of Program Structure and Culture for Transition

The structural and cultural findings revealed how relationships and accrual of bonding and bridging social capital provided opportunities for students to make a gradual entry into the big zone. The findings regarding program *structure* illuminated the conversion of social capital to academic capital. Students like Miranda gained academic capital by advancing through the program requirements. Students also gained academic capital by upgrading study habits like Lucy and Denise. The findings regarding program *culture* revealed students applied knowledge in a system of exchange while working as a group. Thus, students applied academic capital to create a cultural context for their college experiences. In addition, students were motivated by faculty and staff academic expectations. As students adopted the values, beliefs, and meanings of these expectations, they acquired cultural capital.

My findings revealed the DLC provided a safe zone as an antidote to the anxieties students reported from unfamiliarity and the unknown. Further, students described how the formal mechanisms of the DLC and its requirements facilitated movement into satellite areas of the DLC. As students took workshops and classes no longer exclusively structured for the DLC students, they were still tethered to the safe zone. Finally untethered from the DLC, students were initiated into the larger collegial environment (Figure 5).

Figure 5. DLC as Entry Point to the Big Zone.

Untethered in Big Zone

Tethered

Satellite

Safe Zone of DLC

Movement toward Big Zone
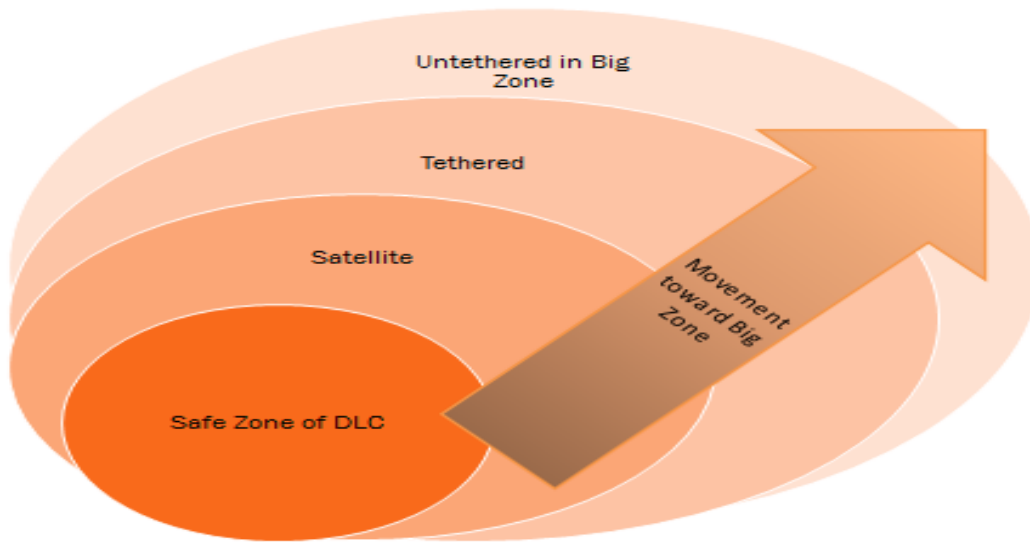
Conceptualization of the Big Zone

The DLC structure and culture helped students connect and accrue bonding and bridging social capital, academic capital, and cultural capital. Demonstrated by students in the program *structure* findings the conversion of social capital to academic capital occurred primarily through both formal and informal relationships. Examples of the conversion of academic capital to cultural capital are demonstrated in the program *culture* findings primarily through membership requirements and expectations. My analysis of documents, field observations, and student interviews also revealed two other important features contributing to the efficacy of the program. My analysis suggests the program structure and culture offered an alternative introduction to mainstream campus life through building community. As a smaller and unique community, members engaged with each other at levels or to degrees different than the casual or usual student interaction on a large metropolitan community college campus. In addition, the DLC was responsible for gradually exposing participants to the campus via a persist-and-transfer culture. I

have identified five "topographical zones" representing the gradual movement by participants into the big zone (Figure 6). These five zones depict discrete steps along the pathway to the larger campus, as a precursor to transfer.

Figure 6. DLC Supported Pathways into the Big Zone – A Conceptual Topography.

The Safe Zone: The DLC as Antidote to Mainstream Campus "Entry Anxiety"

The DLC program was a critical source for community among students. While participants took comfort in their membership within the program, the DLC was also responsible for helping students to establish themselves in the mainstream college environment – the big zone. Acting as a soft place to land after high school, the DLC served as a microcosm of the larger campus (see Figure 7). A gentler alternative to the larger campus, requirements for membership simulated the steps students would have had to take for success if they were on their own in the big zone. The course offerings and accountability in the program influenced the ways students participated in support services and interacted with faculty, staff, and peers.

Figure 7. Safe Zone of DLC as Microcosm of Big Zone.
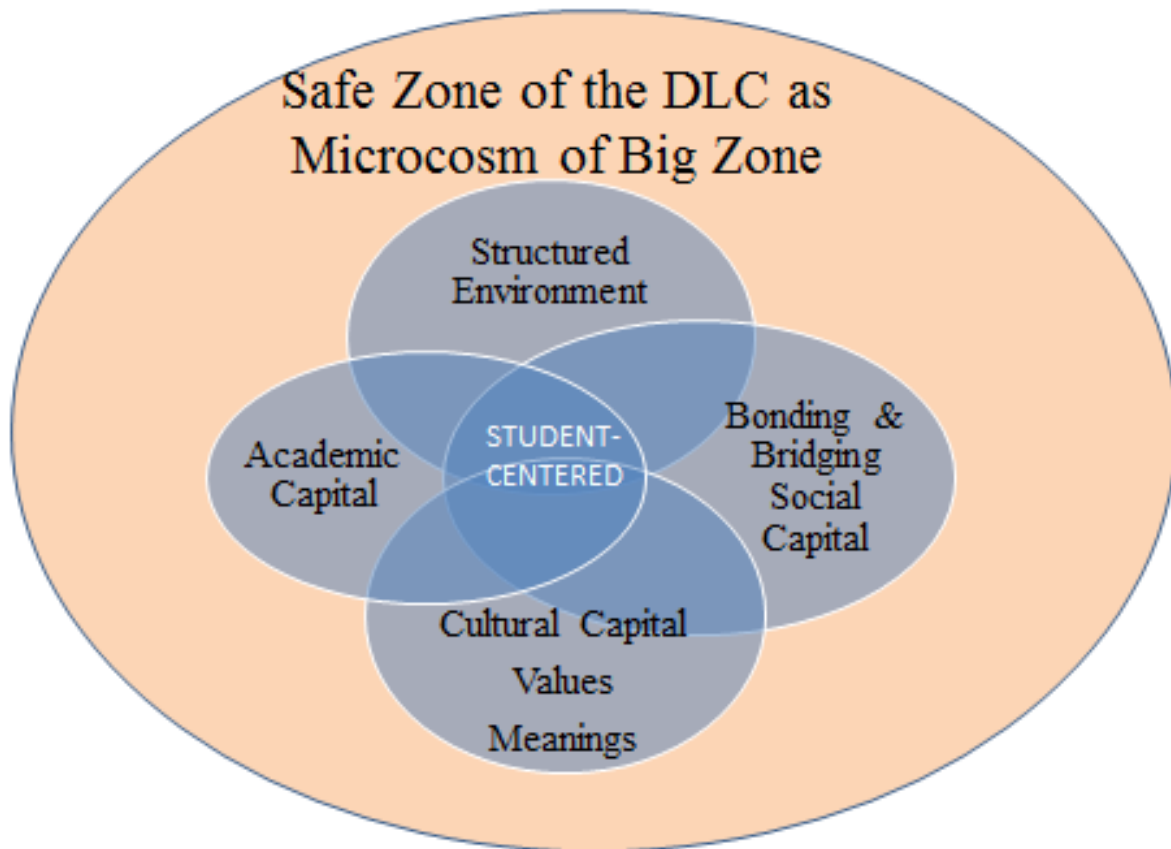
At the time I performed the interviews, most of the interactions and influences reported by interviewees occurred in the study lab. The lab was the focal point of students' sense of belonging to the college. This sense of belonging significantly contributed to students' sentiment of a "safe place" within the DLC environment. Students looked out for one another and were encouraged to do so. They also had opportunities to explore college life together, such as taking classes and workshops together and discussing the course and workshop requirements (see Table 6). Illustrating this point, Lilly described the DLC as "…a safe zone. I knew I was fine there and everybody knew me. I guess I felt comfortable." This sense of comfort in being known and

sharing community, as well as academic expectations, led to many important student interactions. The majority of interactions originated from either the requirements for membership, such as coursework and workshops within the DLC, or course and workshop related support services.

Every participant made reference to their interactions with peers as well as various DLC personnel. The personnel included the designated academic counselor who also taught the student development course, the director of the program, an office assistant, student workers, and tutors. Recall from Table 5, there were almost equal numbers of interactions reported with faculty and staff working outside as those working inside the DLC. The reported interactions indicated the importance of the contacts made outside the DLC, which originated from the membership requirements.

The DLC mirrored components of the larger campus. For example, the designated counselor referred to the Student Academic Pathway (SAP), which outlined the course sequencing, completing, and timing. The SAP helped students anticipate and prepare for gradual entry into the big zone. The SAP was also commonly used by academic counselors at-large when meeting with students. Students even received information about scholarships available to all qualified students.

Satellite Experiences

Students were offered opportunities to connect with the extended campus of SCCC through workshops requirements and coursework support. These offerings were the stepping stones into the interactions and involvements the students described as entering the big zone. Students revealed how they understood the gradual entry into the big zone in relation to their

participation in the DLC. Marisela recognized the gradual ascent into the larger campus by describing her awareness of reluctantly starting to go off on her own:

Most of the classes are in the DLC area. But some of them were starting to branch you out, and my mom so she was like: They were probably trying to start you going off on your own. And I'm like: That's kind of obvious; they are sending me all the way over there. Well, that kind of works.

Likewise, Miguel described the extra credit incentive the program and individual instructors offered students:

[The DLC] used to give us extra credit to go [out for workshops]. Not just only [the DLC] . . . other English teachers would do the same, "I'll give you a 10 point credit if you go to this workshop." I guess because one of the librarians is their friend or something. Sometimes I didn't understand what they were saying. Since I'm not really computer savvy or technical savvy, I have no idea what they're talking about. Some things I do and some things I don't.

It was obvious to Marisela (and her mother) that the encouragement to branch out into the larger campus was intentional. Marisela realized she was being sent away from the DLC area to continue on with her academic career. In contrast, Miguel recognized the extra credit incentive offered but did not fully comprehend the underlying reasons for the workshops. The fact that some students understood the underlying reasons and others did not demonstrated a difference of sophistication in the degree of college involvement and developmental progress. This progress was gradual, as was symbolically represented by the exposure to the big zone in Figure 6.

Most of the evidence points to big zone exposure and exploration of physical spaces. However, Ruben describes being exposed to big zone *ideas* [emphasis added] he then chose to

explore. Ruben talked about the value of the program exposing him to information that made him more aware of the world around him. He reported, "I guess being in [the DLC], you see all these things and [the program] makes you more aware about life and they make you more aware about this world around us, more than the news ever did as a matter of fact." Ruben valued the information he received through the program more than other information sources. He attributes his exposure to worldly news to his involvement in the DLC. While he was in the program, Ruben peeked through a window to get a bigger picture of the world. Symbolically, one of the greater purposes of the program was to provide the window through which students could safely explore a bigger piece of the world; this was the satellite zone.

Tethered

As students called upon their social, academic, and cultural capital to venture out of the safe zone into the big zone, they began to use more of the big zone resources. Recall that students had a choice to attend workshops in the library, transfer center, or career center. Additionally, some faculty had requirements within courses to utilize big zone resources. For example, Ivan was instructed to go to the Math Discovery Center, a big zone resource, when tutoring was not enough.

> [The DLC math instructor] used to tell us to go to the Math Discovery Center. "If you
>
> guys don't know what you're doing, you got to go to the Math Discovery Center." He
>
> would say that a lot. It's true because they do help you out over there. Instead of going to
>
> my teacher, I'll go there sometimes.

Ivan received additional assistance from the Math Discovery Center while he was a member, and he continued to utilize this resource after finishing his year in the DLC. The

reinforcement Ivan received from his instructor compelled him to enter another space to receive assistance.

The program also afforded students the structure and culture to seek reinforcement from their peers. Supporting one another often led students into the big zone. When Getta learned some of her DLC peers were not eligible for financial support, she rallied for the ineligible students by becoming part of an organization outside the DLC:

> I'm one of the only [documented] ones [in the AB540 support group]. I want there to be more non-AB540 students [in the support group]. Sometimes people that are documented...even [Latino/as], they don't value that they have the opportunity to study and I want them to see other people here that don't have it and strive to succeed, but it's harder for them.

Getta committed to supporting AB540 students by showing up and participating in the support group as an ally. She also wanted to educate other students concerning the difficulties AB540 students encounter.

Moving from the DLC to the big zone wasn't always easy for students, some of whom longed to return to their familiar study lab. Rodney described his gradual exposure to the larger campus as necessary. He knew he couldn't stay in the DLC area and was willing to acquire a new viewpoint. Similarly, Lara reported her fears of navigating the campus after leaving the safety of the DLC area.

> It was weird at first because, after I knew I wasn't going to continue in [the DLC]. I knew I could go back there, but I had to get away from it because I knew if I just stick to there, I'm not going to know what it's like to know the whole campus. So at first it was weird because you got the library, you got the cafeteria where you could hang out, or the

quad. So you just got to find somewhere where you can feel comfortable to hang out and

study or just hang out and look at the environment everyone's in and stuff like that.

Because [in the DLC study lab] all you see is the four walls and you don't see much sun

so when you go out it's a whole different world, a whole different view. [Rodney]

I'd have my classes right there. At first I was like, "Oh my God, I'm not going to know

where all these classes are." But then after, it was easy to find them. I thought it was

going to be a big challenge since the [DLC] classes were right next to each other. But, I

was able to find my classes and get used to it. [Lara]

Rodney knew he could go back to the familiar DLC, even as he was venturing out onto

the larger campus. He described the contrast between the DLC area and the big zone as a

different world. Despite initial anxiety, Lara was successful in finding classes on the larger

campus. Some students were drawn back to the DLC in order to meet with their former DLC-

designated counselor. After finishing her DLC year, Anna returned to the DLC area to visit the

designated counselor. On the other hand, Jacobo expressed eagerness to glean information from

academic counselors other than his DLC-designated counselor. Bobby and Isaiah talked about

the somewhat frustrating counseling experiences they were having in the big zone.

Even my second year, even though I didn't really need her so much for the SAP - the

Student Academic Pathway - because I already had that planned out. It was more just like

go back and just talk to her. It was always really helpful. She was always there. [Anna]

[The designated counselor] is good, but I don't know - I want to try someone else. See

like who's better. I feel like there's better; more knowledgeable people out there than her.

But I don't know - maybe I'm wrong. Yeah, I'm going to try some more people though. I

have no clue like who are the good counselors or anything. [Jacobo]

When I go to one of the counselors here in the counseling building, it's more like I need to explain myself again or, through my records they can see anything, like my changes or anything. [Bobby]

The counselors [in the big zone], it's kind of hard to get an appointment with them because everyone wants to see them [In the big zone] you kind of rotate between them, depending on who's available. [Isaiah]

Students described their experiences in the tethered zone in these examples, saying they had struggled much more with counseling outside the DLC. Yet, at this stage, as the students experienced academic counseling in the big zone, they knew they could still check in at the DLC.

New doors opened up for Nancy when she took up the offer to participate in a field trip to visit various universities. She learned about the Transfer Center and the trip opportunity from the DLC. Nancy described, "[The DLC] opened up many doors for me. Because of them, I heard about the trip to San Francisco they had right here in the Transfer Center and it was amazing. It was just a wonderful experience." Nancy seemed surprised that she had such a positive experience launched by DLC into the Transfer Center right on SCCC's campus. It was an eye-opening experience for Nancy to make an extended trip to other colleges and think about her future.

Students in the "tethered" position had a strong sense of the program's success in launching them into the big zone. They were therefore particularly perplexed that the seemingly successful program was being eliminated. When Juana was asked if she had any questions for me at the end of our interview, she wanted to know why the program was going to be discontinued. She believed that the program had been successful in helping students become comfortable with the big zone:

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I would ask someone like - probably the director on campus or someone if the [DLC] program, which to me seemed quite successful in making the students comfortable with the bigger campus, like why would they take out such a program?

As Nancy moved further away from the DLC, she, too, relayed her understanding of the value of the program. Nancy acknowledged her awareness that the purpose of the program was to help students become more familiar and comfortable with the bigger campus. She seemed baffled that such a successful program would be removed.

Untethered Interactions into the Big Zone

After their yearlong commitment to the DLC had concluded, many students spoke about helping one another in classes together as well as passing along information. A few students reported that they intentionally avoided taking classes together after finishing their DLC commitment so they would not distract one another, but they still passed along information and resources when it was time for a DLC colleague to take a course another had completed. This type of decision indicated these students were better supported to continue their classes together in combination with the elements of support the DLC offered. However, as disconnected members navigating within the larger college population, the students may have been less inclined to stay on track in terms of coursework. Intuitively, I would have expected students to report that they chose to take courses together to experience more support from one another. However, these particular students departed the safe zone to brave the elements of the larger environment, knowing they could still reunite for continued encouragement.

Even though sometimes we would take classes together and we're like 'Oh, bad idea, we talk too much.' But we still keep in touch . . . if we already have familiarity with that subject--we help each other as much as we can. Or like 'Oh,

I need help with this or with my homework, give me advice.' Or we try to help.

But we can't take classes together. Too many distractions. [Ada]

Ada's decision to avoid classes with friends was echoed by Marta who said, "Sometimes when you have your friends there, yeah, you do get distracted a lot." Ada's core group of friends continued to support one another outside classroom spaces. For example, one student would take a speech class and exchange materials, knowledge, and experiences with another student who had taken an English class. Ada went on to say she continued to seek and offer help with non-DLC students with whom she became acquainted in new classroom settings.

. . . Usually I'm very sociable; make friends quite easily. Usually share with, 'Oh, what classes did you take or what classes are you taking?' and if we are taking similar classes or they have taken similar classes, we'll usually ask each other like 'Oh, well for this homework, what did you do?' or just help each other out. [Ada]

By deciding not to share classroom spaces with members of their core group, these students chose to create new relationships rather than having their academic progress potentially complicated by the ongoing presence of friends. Furthermore, the information each student acquired in classes taken independently, could be shared with their core group, often times in exchange for other helpful information.

When asked about their perceptions of the big zone, several members expressed their reluctance to leave the familiarity of the DLC. Nevertheless, these members also acknowledged gains forged by entering into the big zone.

It was kind of like a new experience, kind of like I was discovering new places. The school looked pretty big to me back then but now it's kind of smaller. It was like "on my OWN" when I had to go to financial aid. It wasn't that bad, I guess. [Enrique]

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. . . [at] the college fair, I was just looking for stuff around for the Nursing program. To me, it was kind of a drag because I knew that I didn't want to do [go to fairs]. Now I know to just go to the schools that will help me with that. [Carlos]

When I left [the DLC], and I had to experience the whole campus, I think I was –it was much harder to make friends just because I was forced, but I remember as soon as like . . . little by little you get more and more used to it, I remember as soon as I got out of [the DLC] I discovered the little [game] area . . . I started playing [a game] . . . as soon as I left [the DLC], I met some of my great friends I found out we had a lot in common . . . really helped me change my life. I think I had to get out of [the DLC] to experience these kind of things, but I never, I don't [forget] what I learned at [the DLC]. [Diego]

David talked about missing the study lab space and not quite landing in any particular place to meet with his friends. Yet he made new friends who started up a dance club and discovered a shared interest in wrestling and mixed martial arts (MMA).

Honestly, I've just been drifting every now and then, like; I drift from place to place. Sometimes by, in front of the school with my friends, we have a little circle of friends, or I remember in two thousand and . . . well, last year in the first semester, or the Fall semester, we started up a dance club. We danced to all different types of songs and then from dancing we came, we found wrestling and MMA and that's what we're doing right now. I like to contribute or just my friends in general, our ideas contribute, but we're very energetic and outgoing and we just change every now and then, but I haven't found anything close to what [the DLC] has offered me. [David]

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The circle of DLC friends contributed to David's entry into the big zone. He found spaces outside the DLC by meeting in front of the college and participating in activities like dancing and wrestling in new spaces with his circle of friends.

A few students found places on campus reflecting some of the aspects and resources of the DLC. They attempted to replicate helpful aspects of the DLC in the big zone. For example, after fulfilling his year in the program, Jorge found a space to study outside the DLC study lab. He felt nostalgia for his authentic and emotional relationships with peers and staff in the DLC, yet he recognized an element of belonging in his Chemistry class that was based on students' mutual struggle with the course material.

The Biology laboratory, it's all open to the students so I go there. They have fish tanks so they have to maintain the fish tanks so it's kind of cold. That's why I usually carry my huge sweater every day of the week. I can survive the cold with this huge sweater. So every Tuesday and Thursday I'm there from 6:00 to 10:45 just in that [Chemistry] room studying. It's pretty lonely. It's pretty lonely and quiet so I get to relax. You just hear the hum of the fish tank. Overall, still very good. . . even though I don't get along with the people there. I have been with them for a while so you're like "Oh man we've struggled together." We've struggled. We've seen each other and we see how we do on the tests. Yeah, I DO feel part of that – just not emotionally I guess. [Jorge]

Jorge also found a space to study in his department, but he didn't directly interact with students there. He didn't sense the same kind of DLC-closeness to the students with whom he struggled through Chemistry courses, but he recognized a degree of shared struggle.

After finishing his year at the DLC, Nino makes a conscious effort to reach out to students in his new classes, though he was not met with the kind of warmth he experienced at the DLC. He also drew a parallel to his DLC experiences as he spoke about participating in instructor-directed group discussions.

> The first week of class I ask the person next to me, "Do you mind if I have your number in case I miss a class or I have a question on anything?," but you get that strange – I don't know what it is – but people are kind of weird with strangers. You don't get the same vibe as you do with the [DLC] students. They're like, well yeah, I see you [DLC student] every day, and even if you didn't get their [DLC peer] numbers, you know you would see them the next day . . . I noticed the teachers that bring in group discussions or do group activities, that's where you . . . it's a little flashback of [the DLC], because you can talk to fellow students.

Although Nino's reference to himself as a stranger in the eyes of his classroom peers suggests a contrast to the relationships he had with DLC peers, he still made the attempt to connect with someone in the non-DLC classroom. Further, the classroom offered opportunities paralleling the experiences he had in the DLC.

Summary

As a precursor to transfer, students acquired bonding and bridging social capital through relationships inside and outside the DLC. They experienced continued interactions with faculty and staff, and acquisition of academic and cultural capital through skills developed via gradual exposure to the big zone. The first zone, the safe zone of the DLC itself, provided a familiar structure in which students adhered to the membership requirements. The students had a

selection of workshops and courses from which to choose, as well as times to meet with the designated counselor. Some of the workshops and courses were exclusively structured for DLC students, but took the students outside the DLC area proper. I identified how four topographical zones (DLC Safe Zone, Satellite, Tethered, and Untethered) provided scaffolding for pathways into the larger campus. I identified the satellite zone as the DLC-cooperative areas of the big zone. The next zone I identified as tethered, as students became involved in courses and activities in smaller groups and took advantage of big zone opportunities with non-DLC students. The untethered zone represented the big zone itself, in which students were likely to have no DLC peers and be involved in activities such as college-level coursework, support services, and workshop opportunities. These activities led to college involvement independent of the DLC. The structural and cultural function of scaffolding for transition from the DLC was a precursor to gradual and successful navigation into the big zone.

Two distinct findings tell the story of a developmental learning community (DLC) that provided a structure and culture which helped its student members persist in college. Structurally, the environment provided students with designated space that generated social capital through interactions with peers, staff, and faculty. The conversion of social capital to academic capital occurred as students obtained appropriate information and gained useful knowledge to navigate the big zone, i.e., the campus-at-large. Culturally, formal relationships fostered within the DLC and informal relationships fostered outside the DLC were instrumental for the acquisition of bonding (closely tied relationships) and bridging (loosely-tied relationships) social capital. The program culture provided transformative experiences that allowed students to see themselves as legitimate players in a larger college culture. The DLC

culture, laden with the values and meanings of the persist-and-transfer messages, contributed to students' cultural capital.

The findings unfold the results of my study into three chapters: The DLC structure, culture, and the integration of both. The structure chapter describes formal and informal relationships contributing to students' accrual of social capital, which was transmuted into academic capital. The culture chapter depicts the values and meanings attributing to student success, as operationally defined. The last findings chapter explains the scaffold movement students made toward the big zone. All three chapters in my findings: structure, culture, and integration of structure and culture, describe a detailed picture of the efficacy of the DLC program in helping students succeed.

Chapter 7 – Discussion of Findings

Review of Purpose and Questions

To achieve a more nuanced conversation regarding the DLC's impact on participants' sense of self and future aspirations, I work within the framework of social capital theory. This section of my dissertation serves to discuss the purpose, research questions, and findings of this study.

Consistent with my earlier pilot study findings, the study lab represented a social focal point for building community among participants and structuring academic connections between participants and faculty, staff, and peers. Through this examination, I aimed to further understand the role the DLC plays in support of persistence for nontraditional students of color. Current literature acknowledges nontraditional students in community colleges differ greatly in characteristics and representation from traditional students at four-year higher education institutions (Levin, 2007). However, the leveraging and conversion of social capital to gain academic and cultural capital in this study expands the understanding of nontraditional students in community colleges. As exemplified by many of the Latina/o students in this study, the nontraditional student often has financial need, works 20 hours or more per week, and commutes from his or her family home (Choy, 2002; Horn, 1996). The power of structural and cultural pathways to persistence depicted, offers alternative compensation for the time Latina/o students spend off-campus in contrast to traditional students.

Researchers and scholars contributing to higher education literature point out that it's not only academic involvement, but social involvement as well that contributes to college student persistence (Astin, 1975, 1984; Bean, 2005; Nora et al., 2005; Pace, 1980; Tinto, 1975; Weidman, 1989). My study extends the notion of social involvement to the power of social

capital and subsequent forms of capital. In addition, the scaffolding that occurred to help students enter the big zone demonstrated not only how social and personal skills contributed to persistence, but also how students leveraged social capital. The program structure and program culture findings extended the current literature on Latina/o students' persistence in higher education by revealing how social capital was instrumental in helping students not only persist – but thrive. This dissertation contributes to understanding the way social mechanisms operating within the DLC support college persistence and achievement.

Introduction to Discussion

This discussion of my findings directly responds to my original set of research questions. In the first question, I sought to understand how within the program structure, students established relationships with peers, staff, and faculty within the DLC and in the wider campus. I concluded that the various types of support promoted through the requirements and programmatic connections between participants and the institution allowed students to scaffold into the big zone to navigate and persist in the larger campus. In accordance with the second research question, I examined the program culture and explored how these relationships played a role in establishing cultural knowledge. I discovered that the program culture encouraged aspiration and college student identity. A persist-and-transfer culture permeated the program and allowed students to support one another and receive support from staff and faculty. Finally, the combination of program structure and culture allowed students to move through various transitional zones to acclimate to college life.

Discussion

I offer a discussion of how social capital gained through the relationships students established with peers, staff, and faculty helped students persist toward the goal of transferring to

a four-year institution and added value to their lives. These relationships provided respect for individual uniqueness, a sense of agency, support, a sense of belonging, mutual appreciation, coping with challenges together, and role modeling to help them build upon their knowledge, information base, and resources to build social capital.[8] Outreach contributed to a sense of belonging and aided students in meeting membership requirements while also supporting their gradual entry into the big zone. These students continued to seek support to make connections with peers, staff, and faculty in the big zone as they were channeled into courses and services outside the DLC. These connections provided social capital, which was converted to academic and cultural capital.

In both precollegiate and college-level coursework, students made connections in the safe zone of the DLC. The connective pathways created there provided a symbolic alternative to the big zone, as students created relationships in the larger campus analogous to those formed through experiential learning in the DLC. The evidence of parallel relationships created outside the DLC represents how social capital accrued during students' zero-year experiences in the smaller community was leveraged on the larger campus. This behavior functioned as a symbolic representation of norms encountered via navigation of the campus at-large.

Students established relationships of mixed intensity with peers, staff, and faculty. The program promoted closer ties to members with whom students had frequent and meaningful contact. DLC programming allowed for space where relationships could be established and cultivated. A spatial sense of belonging in an exclusive enclave empowered students to create community and to support one another through their personal and academic challenges. The

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[8] Social capital as operationally defined in my methods section: the accrued knowledge, information, and resources of an individual or group participating in a community comprised of invested and recognized relationships.

freedom to express themselves and identify with one another gave them an appreciation for their differences and similarities.

The students' development of a sense of group intimacy brings to mind meaningful, closely-tied educational experiences described by Parker Palmer (1993). In Palmer's model for authentic teaching and learning, he advocates for the development of students' personal voice and agency through shared educational communities. This constructivist[9] approach to education acknowledges the value of knowledge discovered by the individual as opposed to a traditional view in which the instructor possesses knowledge to be imparted. The constructivist approach calls for a paradigm shift of academic roles from indifference to convivial existence with shared interaction and experiences (Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1970; Rogers, 1969). These scholars view education as a social process in which the web of communal relationships allows students to have a sense of their own reality and a shared reality as they seek knowledge, understanding, and useful information. As a place and a process, the DLC community was dynamic in seeking knowledge and accumulating the associated social capital. Students established closer ties to one another in the DLC and accrued bonding social capital while preparing for entry into the big zone.

Social Capital

In this discussion of fostering relationships, I refer to social capital to explain the value and benefits of individuals sharing time, energy, and resources (Zhou, 2005). I define social capital as resources accrued through the establishment of relationships of mutual investment and recognition. I have introduced Granovetter's (1983) notion of social capital as a viable

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[9] Constructivists explain the construction of knowledge in reference to the foundation of existing knowledge formed by life experiences. Cognitive psychology and biology contribute to the understanding of knowledge adaptation as more information and resources are received by individuals.

explanatory framework for understanding the relational dynamics occurring within the DLC. The social capital transferred to participants represents the conversion of relational ties (close and loose) into valuable assets accessed later and applied en route to academic achievement and success. In this way, the participants are able to convert social capital into academic and cultural capital. Each form of capital represents examples of resource exchange at the individual and collective levels. What distinguishes social capital from the other forms of capital is the notion of sharing resources through the construction of relational ties (Coleman, 1988).

There are two particular types of social capital as determined by degree of intimacy. Discerning these two types, I argue, leads to the development of more effective learning environments as demonstrated through the DLC. First, *bonding* social capital amassed in tightly-knit circles, such as friends and family groups, draws the members into closely-tied and emotionally-close relationships (Granovetter, 1973, 1983). Second, social capital accrued with loose connections between individuals is distinguished as *bridging* social capital. These loosely-tied relationships may provide new, useful information or perspectives, but usually without emotional support. Additionally, converted bonding and bridging social capital allows one to leverage valuable connections for academic and cultural gains while progressing through life changes (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). Converted social capital speaks to transmutable connections as one progresses through life changes, such as making the transition from high school to college (Granovetter, 1983). The value and meaning of social capital guides how and why students enter into relationships of mutual investment and recognition.

My findings revealed the value of both bonding and bridging social capital gained from relationships established by students. Initially accrued through requirements, bonding social capital was leveraged in the big zone and converted to academic capital. Bonding social capital

accrued from the safe zone provided the catalyst for the accrual of bridging social capital in the big zone. Subsequently, both types of social capital provided the initial "currency" that students converted to academic and cultural capital.

Program Structure

The designated space provided a warm climate supporting and sustaining strong, intimate ties among participants and other key program constituencies. Students interacted with each other and with faculty members in classrooms adjacent to the study lab, particularly when exams and project due dates approached. This context of availability developed a sense of belonging as students became socially and academically engaged with one another, the staff, and the faculty.

Students gradually made contacts with peers, staff, and faculty in the wider campus as they became exposed to some of the college services. Contact outside the DLC was generally less intimate, but valuable to students as they gradually broadened their social and academic parameters. As required, students stepped out of the secure confines of the DLC to participate in workshops and non-DLC courses and to avail themselves of student services. The students formed loosely-tied relationships with non-DLC students, staff, and faculty in the wider campus, which provided a basis for identifying with college life.

The formation and nature of the social relationships under investigation could be characterized as "mixed intensity." Though the various relationships experienced by participants differed in tone and levels of intimacy, the relationships established inside and outside the DLC were a well-constructed network of close and loose ties, respectively. The closely-tied relationships yielded bonding social capital for the members while the loosely-tied relationships yielded bridging social capital. The relationships students had with one another differed tonally

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from those with staff and faculty. The mixed intensities of social affiliations and emotional

support provided by these relationships were accompanied by educational activities and

supported not only academic abilities but also navigational skills for the entry into the larger

campus. This insight on the value of relationships and the subsequent accrual of social capital

helps optimize programs for nontraditional students' success in college.

One of the most important services participants received from the program was the

opportunity to visit the designated counselor who provided strong transfer counseling. Although

the first cohort received some academic counseling from the staff and counselors teaching

student development courses, the designated counselor on the DLC site working with the

second cohort quickly became indispensable. The SAP drawn up for each member provided

students a proverbial lamp by which they could read the map of their transfer pathway. Indeed,

the exclusive counseling and the membership requirements helped students gain the information

they needed to proceed.

Of course, the program provided exceptional support. However, as discussed in the

findings, the DLC channeled students to additional support services in the big zone, such as the

Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS) and the AB540 program that assisted

students on their journey toward a four-year university. These services benefit students by

offering additional support for their socio-economic situations. Unfortunately, such programs

service only a fraction of those students who would benefit from them (Gándara, Alvarado,

Driscoll, & Orfield, 2012).

The findings suggest the program effectively structured the support mechanisms students

needed to succeed. The opportunity to foster relationships and the intentional design for gradual

entry into the big zone were unique elements not to be found in any other support program at

Southern California Community College (SCCC). The bonding social capital students established in the DLC arced into relationships from which students procured bridging social capital.

As Emma's case highlighted in the program structure findings, she was able to leverage some bonding capital from DLC peers. With her peers backing her up, Emma confronted the discouragement and resistance she experienced from a counselor who spoke negatively. Had Emma not had the program as a source of support, the outcome could have been different.

The developmental viewpoint of the DLC allowed for unlimited inquiry and constant support for the student members. Pivotal to improving the odds of entry into the big zone and eventual transfer, the program focused on students' developmental needs. The findings revealed exposure to SCCC's student services was essential to DLC students' pathway to transfer and made a significant deposit into students' reserve of social capital.

Loosely-tied relationships occur outside the DLC, providing an extended pathway into the big zone as the next step toward transfer. Gains of bridging social capital from loosely-tied relationships are also valuable; they provide students with new information, knowledge, and resources as they navigate the big zone.

Relationships

My findings revealed the DLC social network as a system of relationships of mixed intensity and varied tones depending on the nature of the relationship. Social networks serve the purposes of exchanging information and knowledge and expanding one's resources (Lin, 1999) as demonstrated by the behaviors of the students in my findings. My analysis revealed students shared their knowledge and resources to help one another reach their mutual goal to ultimately transfer to a four-year university. The existence of the DLC area and the program mechanisms

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facilitated this exchange. Trust, trustworthy behaviors, and mutual support contributed greatly to

social networking and the accrual of bonding social capital in the DLC. As relayed in the

program structure finding, some reports suggested students did maintain relationships from the

DLC experience, whereas others had not, as they gradually made their way into the big zone.

Bonding Social Capital from Unity without Uniformity

The program provided a platform upon which staff, educators, and students could

communicate with each other about how they understood and made meaning of the world in

which they operated. In this way, educators and students were free to experience life together,

authentically relate to one another, be transformed, and potentially transform the reality in which

they live (Freire, 1976). Consequently, students accumulated bonding social capital with the

actors in the program and were free to make decisions about their next steps in college and take

conscious action accordingly. Egalitarian in its pedagogy, the DLC gave agency, i.e., the ability

of students to make independent choices, to students through relationships established with

peers, staff, and faculty. The directed activities aimed students toward realizing their goals. The

bonding social capital accrued stemmed from mutual support and personal agency. Further,

components of the program structure offered academic capital growth. The consequent sense of

belonging, valuing others, being valued by others, and coping with challenges together helped

students accumulate cultural capital.

Bridging Social Capital from DLC Requirements

The program helped high school students get ready for transfer by reaching out to the

neighboring high schools and providing the needed services. Those services included not only

strong transfer counseling but also immersion into a persist-and-transfer culture. Students were

provided with developmental non-college credit coursework as well as college credit courses that

would lay the foundations of their transcripts. The accomplishment of college credit courses further encouraged persistence and transfer. The findings reveal the gradual exposure and entry into the big zone fostered relationships with college personnel and peers and fortified students' resolve to transfer as students. The DLC helped students, some of whom initially tested four levels below college level math, by offering support while working on precollegiate courses on their early pathway to transfer.

Precollegiate work can actually serve as a significant impediment to transfer for students with developmental needs. Since precollegiate courses are not listed on their transcripts, students can easily feel discouraged by a perceived lack of progress (Hagedorn & Lester, 2008). According to the rather sizeable Achieving the Dream database, less than half of the students who initially test just one level below college level math and English completed the courses they need to transfer. I refer to this database because the goal for Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count, a multiyear national initiative sponsored by the Lumina Foundation for Education, was to ensure success for more community college students, especially students of color and low-income students (Rutschow et al., 2011). Achieving the Dream indicated community colleges' need to receive funding, utilize staff and faculty in success projects, and provide additional services to complement classroom instruction. These recommendations parallel the DLC program and the established milestones by which to measure student success.

My methods section outlines the definition of success as the rate at which students achieved milestones including persistence, completion, and earned certificates and degrees. As suggested by Achieving the Dream proponents, success for nontraditional students of color is incremental and developmental. Outreach, referral, and consequent engagement, as initial steps

toward success, helped students enter the big zone with social capital. Continued institutional involvement and support from the program helped students persist.

As I demonstrate through the findings, the complementary effects of the DLC administrative staff and faculty's successful interaction with institutional support services provided passage for students into the big zone. The findings suggested students were fortified by the bonding social capital accrued while they were in the DLC. Yet, as evidenced by some of the students' accounts, the larger educational environment may not have provided the best opportunities for nontraditional students of color to succeed. To facilitate continued success, academic support must align with the learning needs of the students (Tinto, 2012). The community college must assure the social capital students gained through the course of their DLC participation continues to increase in value as they advance into year two and beyond. Students continue to need to belong, to adjust to new demands in college, to choose a major, and prepare for transfer. The secure path for transfer success of community college students of color depends upon special programming like the DLC, which is not always measured by the community college's reputation for transfer overall (Gándara et al., 2012). As a special program designed to help students persist-and-transfer, the DLC functioned for four years, ensuring over 400 students profited from the program. Although limited to the four years of funding allotted, the DLC encouraged students to persist and provided an early pathway to transfer for each year's cohort.

Networking

My findings suggest students accrued bonding and bridging social capital by virtue of a shared social network in which students established relationships in a structured program. The requirements for membership and the DLC resources helped students accrue social capital in a

personal network. I liken the personal network to a bank account in which deposits of bonding

social capital and bridging social capital pay interests and dividends. However, if the capital is

not utilized, it could depreciate in value. Relationships fostered in social networks inside and

outside the DLC contributed to social capital, some of which was converted into academic and

cultural capital. As depicted throughout my findings, the personal networks contributed to the

social networks and vice-versa. The students' individualized, personal network carried over into

the big zone as they leveraged their social capital in incremental steps onto the larger campus.

Program Culture

The program culture played an important role in helping students establish relationships

and provide mutual encouragement. It reinforced normative behaviors and beliefs through the

academic expectations, resulting in a culture of success – what I refer to as a "persist-and-

transfer culture." Peer inter-reliance contributed to a trusting, warm climate in which students

met the program's academic expectations through frequent contact with one another, staff, tutors,

a counselor, and faculty in the DLC space. These factors contributed to student aspirations to

transfer and to college student identity, which was essential to creating a program culture. As

students developed a sense of belonging, they began to identify with the norms, behaviors, and

cognition of college life and transferred this perception into the big zone.

The program culture helped students establish relationships and provide mutual

encouragement while working toward their goals to transfer. Peers relied upon one another to

meet the program expectations and made frequent contact with one another as well as staff

members, tutors, the counselor, and faculty. Normative behaviors and beliefs were consistent

with the academic expectations in which all participants were guided to persist to the second year

and to develop transfer aspirations. Essential to student success, the persist-and-transfer culture

of the DLC contributed to student transfer readiness and forging of a college student identity. The high expectations and membership requirements provided a roadmap for student success. As students perceived they belonged in the DLC, they found meaning in the involvement of the membership requirements. These students began to identify with the norms, behaviors, and cognition of college life and transferred the resulting cultural capital into the big zone.

I now delve into the benefits of closely-tied relationships and focus on the process and the gains in bonding social capital for students. In fostering closely-tied relationships, the students accrued bonding capital and experienced education as a mutual and inclusive process with one another. I consider the pertinent elements of fostering relationships in the DLC while exploring how mind and heart can work in the learning process (Palmer, 1993).

Belonging, Supporting, Valuing, Coping

The demographics of California Community College students reveal the nontraditional student is in great need of special support programs in which to participate, contribute, and belong. Community colleges with specific programming dedicated to nontraditional students of color, particularly African American and Latina/o students, have greater transfer pathways built as a result of strategizing culturally appropriate interventions and meeting students' specific needs (Gándara et al., 2012). A generalized transfer culture fails to impact nontraditional students' need to feel they belong.

Perhaps one of the reasons the generalized transfer culture fails to impact nontraditional students' sense of belonging is the lack of a critical mass of diverse students, and, in particular, inadequate representation of the nontraditional students of color (Grier-Reed, Madyun, & Buckley, 2008; Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000). In contrast, programs intended for nontraditional students of color, such as the DLC, provide a sense of belonging to an academic

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"family." Without a sense of belonging, nontraditional students of color entering into a generalized transfer culture in the community college miss opportunities to accrue social capital.

To initiate a sense of belonging, outreach is an invitational gesture, helping students feel wanted, as Maria felt when she talked about receiving a phone call from the designated counselor after taking her assessment tests. Maria reported, "For some reason they want me. I got a call from someone telling me about [the DLC]." Once a student becomes established with a sense of belonging in a safe milieu, social capital can be accrued, particularly bonding social capital in which the student feels a great deal of trust.

Students had an understanding with one another and endeavored together to overcome reservations and fears related to the newness of college life and the unknown future. The program goals – for everyone to be included in the pursuit of excellence – became the students' goals, which fortified their relationships. The students shared a partnership with the DLC instructors who invested in them both in the classrooms and the study lab, providing a sense of security for students who knew they didn't have to be on their own. As reported in the findings, Camilla became closer to her instructor and was given a position to help teach in supplemental instruction. The students developed an understanding that they were all in this academic endeavor together along with staff and faculty support.

The sense of belonging, fortified by academic support, became the mortar with which students could build bonding social capital with one another. The fostering of relationships in the DLC closely mirrored some of the equitable practices Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, and Oseguera (2008) outlined in their publication concerning campus climate for students' transition to college, such as the sense of belonging and academic support. Through a sense of belonging and co-existence with peers, staff, and faculty, students lived in a microcosm of an educational

community reflecting possibilities of life in the larger scope of the world in an empowering context.

Paulo Freire (1970) spoke extensively about education for students and educators as a mutual process and a practice of freedom. Rather than just study citizenship and democracy in the United States through their curriculum, the DLC cohort structure offered a degree of independence and solidarity as students co-existed with one another. As reported in the findings, students like Magaly, Daniel, Anna, and Lucy spoke about eating together, speaking Spanish and Spanglish, venting to one another, and encouraging self-expression. The administrative support empowered students as they felt their own values and beliefs were embraced through a familial structure. Karina shared her passion for community service with DLC staff; Lucy felt the staff was on her side; and Juana developed relationships with tutors who provided strong modeling. These reports exemplify the sense of belonging and support sources for bonding social capital accrued in the DLC.

The students developed an appreciation for the value of others and felt valued in return. They enjoyed the relationships with their instructors, the faculty, and one another. Freire (1970) advocated valuing students for who they are and honoring the knowledge they possess. I speculated that the wider base of commonalities, including similar ages, goals, and heritages, represented a range of shared life experiences and served as the basis from which participants fostered strong, close ties with their cohort peers. Consequently, the students' knowledge bank was a source of personal social capital rather than a source of the educational system's power, and it became the students' focus for investment in relationships and mutual respect.

As operationally defined in the methods section, social capital is the accrued knowledge, information, and resources of an individual or a group participating in a community comprised of

invested and recognized relationships. The interdependence students shared with peers, staff, and faculty members resulted in bonding social capital formed through closely-tied relationships. Students developed the capacity to form relationships with a similar population in their cohort, utilizing this capacity to interact with diverse populations in the big zone. As students ventured out into the big zone, they formed loosely-tied relationships resulting in bridging social capital. The value of closely-tied and loosely-tied relationships bore out in the bonding social capital and bridging social capital accrued by the students.

However, in spite of the opportunities given to students to connect with one another through the study lab and the classroom, I share a vignette depicting my observation of one student whose attempts to make contact with another student in the Fall semester were not as successful:

When his class was dismissed, a young man who I imagined could be a football player if given the opportunity stepped out of the back door of the bungalow serving as a classroom for the DLC. A minute or two later, he asked a question of another male student of comparable size and stature who held the hand of a female companion, "What did you get on the test, man?" The companioned male student mumbled something inaudible to me and continued out the door without pause. The solitary young man gazed at the bulletin boards full of collegiate opportunity messages. He hung in the back of the room for several minutes, stepped outside, came back and gazed, and departed shortly after a majority of students talking to the instructor left. [Field Note 4]

Student connections do not happen automatically. In fact, some students had to test the waters and make their way at their own pace. Peer influence impacts students' experiences and satisfaction levels in college and can help accelerate students' progress and success. (Astin,

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1975). Even though I observed that one student seemed to be ignored by his peers during the Fall semester, I recognized it was important for this student to try to reach out as he did. Not all students were always receptive to one another right away, and every student faced challenges.

Nonetheless, the familial setting of the study lab provided a safe place for students to face challenges. By witnessing the behaviors, thoughts, and beliefs of peers, staff, and faculty, the students were shown ways to cope. The interactions students had with one another modeled different skill levels to encourage students in their own abilities as they negotiated the higher education setting together. For example, recall the students who became tutors and provided academic support as well as modeling for other DLC students. Mentors and role models acting as extended family members play an important mediating role in persistence (Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Valdes, 1996; Vega, 1995). The supportive mentoring by tutors in the family-like setting of the DLC encouraged the students to invest in the tutoring relationships, as reported by Moises in the findings. Through experiential learning, Moises first observed and related to the tutors inside the study lab, then transferred this learning to meeting tutors in the big zone. The familial yet academic setting of the study lab provided a platform from which students learned how to cope with challenges by witnessing mentors who were trusted like family members.

The cooperative and communal modeling encouraged continued interdependence with peers, staff, and faculty members. Recall Bobby when he described the cold environment of the science lab in the big zone and contrasted it with the study lab of the DLC, "I'll go to [the study lab] and in [there], I would see [the director], the tutors, the rest of the people and I'll be like, "Oh man, these are *people* [emphasis added]." The support from staff, faculty, and peers made it more conceivable that the challenges of college life could be overcome.

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Agency

The program promoted unity in relationships, yet preserved not only the individuality of the students' personal voice, but the personal agency necessary to overcome conditions hindering persistence and transfer. Some socioeconomic conditions, such as working while enrolled, taking less than a full load, and being the first generation to attend college, were mediated by the program accommodations. For example, Student Academic Pathways (SAPs) were designed by the student in collaboration with the designated counselor and accounted for each individual's interests and needs.

In addition, several options for course enrollment and workshop attendance were offered. Further, the faculty and staff in the Community of Practice (CoP) (discussed in the methods section) met weekly to discuss and enhance realistic academic progress for the students. At one point, the CoP decided not to require full-time status of the students. More realistic expectations of the course load helped students' self-efficacy, resulting in persistence and continued membership while uniting with other DLC students in their pursuit of higher education.

Integration of Program Structure and Culture

Structurally, the supportive activities linked with coursework enabled students to readily apply what they learned in the DLC to the demands within the broader parameters of the big zone. Combined structural and cultural aspects of the program are discussed in this section with respect to bonding and bridging social capital. Bonding social capital accrued in the DLC contributed to students' personal network, which was extended into the big zone where students also accrued bridging social capital. Both structural and cultural programmatic mechanisms combined to help students amass social capital in their personal networks. This social capital

converted to academic and cultural capital as students met program requirements and expectations within the persist-and-transfer culture.

As revealed in the findings, some students maintained connections with DLC peers while others experienced greater distance. Connection to peers and to the institution occurred by virtue of the DLC's intervention. Further, the trends depicted in the descriptive statistics indicate successful transition into the big zone for the majority of students.

The unique support students received in the program helped them establish a social network that contributed to their personal network in the form of social capital. Students readily applied what they learned in the DLC to the parameters of the big zone by extending the accrued bonding social capital into the big zone where they accrued bridging social capital. They utilized the acquired skills and mimicked behaviors to help them persist, such as studying on campus, consulting with academic counselors, and seeking tutoring. My findings reveal students conceptualized the DLC as an analogue to their big zone experiences. Consequently, students converted social capital into academic and cultural capital. Additionally, the trends depicted in the descriptive statistics indicate successful transition into the big zone for the majority of DLC students. Continued connection to peers and to the institution suggests students accrued cultural capital, helping them persist.

Student Empowerment

The program served as a supportive context in which participants could build meaningful relationships. Within this warm climate, messages consistent with a persist-and-transfer culture were routinely transmitted. Students created community through relationships in which they could test out their aspirations and practice the habits they were forming, such as getting homework done in the study lab with one another rather than postponing it. As presented in the

program structure finding, students learned how to work with one another and how to relate to the staff and faculty. Students not only progressed academically in the smaller niche of the DLC but were also awakened to their ability to create a community within the DLC space.

Further, the DLC provided a symbolic representation for the students to create community through relationships in the larger campus. The relationships differed according to appropriate norms of respectful interaction. The tone of the interactions depended upon boundaries, rules, and recursive function of the relationship, as illuminated in the various examples of peer to peer and student to staff or faculty relationships.

The roles students once played in the DLC also changed according to the new settings and new relationships established with non-DLC students, staff, and faculty. Ricky, Maria, and Camilla changed their perspectives as they encountered faculty who engaged them in the learning process. The various new settings changed the students' circumstances and became novel vehicles for students' progression as they experienced displacement from the DLC. Students like Ricky encountered faculty who altered students' generalized perceptions of faculty as a stock figure in the classroom to the image of a person with added dimension in new settings outside the classroom. The faculty who exhibited a cooperative and communal curriculum helped free students from the "hidden curriculum" that discourages deserving students from gaining knowledge and understanding of the academic world. The safe zone tended to be cooperative and communal while the big zone posed social, academic, and cultural challenges. The accrued social, academic, and cultural capital helped students to face those challenges and thrive.

Social capital transformed and empowered students who moved beyond struggling with a standard curriculum to exploring individual possibilities and life chances. These outcomes hold

tremendous possibility to benefit individuals and their communities. Operationally defined herein as benefits received by individuals for the well-being of the group without financial gain for the recipients or contributors, public good was practiced in an atmosphere of trust, trustworthiness, and respect amongst members.

Summary

The social capital students established and cultivated in the safe zone of their community of learning was the lynchpin for the accumulation of academic and cultural capital. I conclude that developmental learning communities, as mediators of social capital in community colleges, provide a platform upon which students can be transformed and empowered through the conversion of social capital. The evidence emerged through this study revealed an additional element, that is, the ability of students to convert social capital acquired through the DLC into a broader range of knowledge, information, and resource assets to apply in the larger college environment. The program helped students launch from the close ties they formed in the DLC to create loose ties to faculty, staff, and peers who occupied the campus at-large. While there may be many relational paths to greater social capital, the pathway of interactions in the DLC is one example of how nontraditional students of color gain agency through bonding and bridging social capital, academic capital, and cultural capital.

Chapter 8 – Conclusion and Implications

This concluding section of my dissertation offers an assessment of the significance of the findings, the study's unique contribution to the literature, implications for policy and practice, and recommendations for future research. The illuminating results from my findings heighten the significance of community college innovation in bolstering the success of Latina/o students, and nontraditional students of color in general.

Significance of Findings

This section addresses the significance of the findings as it pertains to assisting nontraditional students in community college. One of the most pressing needs in higher education concerns addressing retention for nontraditional students of color in community colleges. Through the study's findings, I have made the case that nontraditional students benefit substantially as they accrue and leverage bonding social capital and bridging social capital to persist-and-transfer. Clearly, this study shows the benefits of learning communities, which many nontraditional students need to make progress through their developmental education. The offering of precollegiate courses along with college credit courses is paramount to successful persistence of nontraditional students. As students acquire knowledge and skills in college, they accumulate social capital and apply the knowledge and skills to life.

Outreach and Belonging

One of the features of the DLC program included an outreach and summer bridge to increase access and success for students. Therefore, I examined the relevant data from SCCC's 2012 institutional research accountability reports (cited herein as a confidential document to obfuscate case detail (VandenBos, 2001) to review the overall effectiveness of outreach services as preliminary pathways to transfer. The SCCC 2010 Outreach Services Survey revealed 46% of

the students who answered the survey knew of the outreach services, 15% reported they used the services, and of those students who reported they used the services, 72% were satisfied with the outreach services (Parker, Radcliffe, & Liu, 2012). The goal of the outreach services is to increase access without ignoring the need to increase success once students enter community college.

SCCC houses approximately 50 programs designed to increase access and success for its students, such as academic counseling, learning communities, the English learners program, the math center, the transfer center, the tutoring center, and the writing center. Many of the special support programs involved developmental education, including the DLC (for the four years it was funded), the English and foreign language lab, the foundational skills office, the learning center, the math center, the orientation program, the outreach program, a learning community for adults returning to college, the ready-to-read program, supplemental instruction, the tutoring center, and the writing center. However, as demonstrated by the outreach statistics, many SCCC students were not aware of all these services.

Since outreach is often the only form of college counseling some high school students receive, efforts to inform students of the programs designed to help students succeed is vital. As reported by many of the participants in this study, students would not have known how to register for community colleges and enroll in coursework if they had not been the beneficiaries of the DLC's support. Nor would the students have connected with the concomitant services provided through the DLC. Further, as reported in the findings, the participants came to SCCC for the DLC program and aspired to transfer. In many cases, the DLC program was the reason the participants came to SCCC, and most of the participants had heard about the program from the outreach efforts made by DLC staff or subsequent word-of-mouth from peers. Outreach most

certainly affects nontraditional students' need to belong by approaching students right where they are and offering assistance to get them where they'd like to go next. Further, nontraditional students of color discover they are not alone in their pursuits as they witness other nontraditional students of color in their roles as outreach representatives (Villalpando & Solórzano, 2005).

Unique Contribution to Literature

The results and findings presented in this study contribute to the literature on community college intervention programs for nontraditional students of color. First, this study represents an examination as to how social capital is both disseminated and accrued within a first-year, community college-based developmental learning community, something which has not been documented to date. Furthermore, discovering how DLC-mediated social capital contributed to nontraditional students' success offers new pathways to understanding how historically marginalized students may be better supported through their critical first-year of community college. This scholarship uniquely combines existing research on social capital, the benefits of learning communities, the quest for equity, and the role of community college while documenting how these topics interact with one another. In this study, I found the DLC disbursed social capital through relationships in an intentional cultural milieu. This cultural milieu empowered students to persist and ultimately prepare for transfer. Findings generated from this qualitative study backed up the quantitative data compiled from a report of SCCC's institutional research team comparing milestone achievements of the DLC to non-DLC students. Exploration of these same milestone achievements in intervention programs at additional community colleges would provide further insight as to how social capital accrues as students make gradual entry into the larger campus.

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I present my recommendations bearing in mind the recent Senate Bill 1456 which purposes to assist students attending California Community Colleges to realize their educational objectives. SB1456 recently brought about a timely revision of the Seymour-Campbell Matriculation Act of 1986. Consequently, the Seymour-Campbell Student Success Act of 2012 appropriates funding for community colleges that enter into an agreement to make substantial gains in student completion rates. Also known as the Student Success and Support Program (SSSP), the SSSP focuses on the development of student support services and interventions, which are to be equitably implemented. Orientation, assessment, counseling, planning services, and intervention programs are purposed to equally impact students of every socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender, or disability under the SSSP.

One DLC practice that was particularly successful in preparing recent high school graduates for entry into community college was outreach by ambassadors of the DLC as an intervention program. Outreach has powerful implications for nontraditional students of color who have not yet committed to attending college, and it ought to be followed with pre-college bridge programs that convey a sense of belonging. Outreach gathers students together and bridge programs give them immediate opportunities to expand their relationships as a cohort.

The cohort model reinforces relationships students begin in the bridge program as they also enroll in linked courses, such as math, English, student development, and social science. In particular for students in their zero-year, learning community programs ought to offer precollegiate courses for students to take together to reinforce a sense of belonging. Offering precollegiate courses with college-level coursework would improve persistence, as students would feel as though they were earning college credit. In addition to the coursework choices,

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cohort membership must also include requirements based on best practices for retention, such as library research workshops. The course choices need to be made with a consistent counselor assigned to the cohort. The courses also need to be enhanced with tutoring, particularly with tutors who can model successful behaviors after having journeyed through the same program.

As my findings revealed, sufficient staffing and consistency in community college personnel is invaluable to student persistence, and ultimately, transfer. Person-to-person contact with available personnel contributes greatly to satisfying the need to belong. California Community College institutional policies ought to consider the value of the innate need to belong with respect to student involvement. Personnel consistency not only helps meet students' need to belong, but also the personnel's need to belong in a professional setting.

The cooperative effort of leaders and practitioners who form communities of practice (CoPs) helps students make the gradual move from intimate cohorts into the more general community college population. As support staff exposes students to the services available on campus, more student needs will be met and the retention rate will improve. Further, the formation of a CoP creates a "buy-in" from the committed staff and faculty who invest well-spent time and energy into student success. Not only faculty and staff contribute to the CoP, but also students progressing in their academic pursuits add to the programs' purposes. Recruiting and engaging students into support services by virtue of their strengths, such as tutoring, encourages zero-year students and enhances all students' college identities and commitments. Once students step outside their cohort, involvement in clubs and social activities that paralleled their learning community involvement helps students get better acquainted with the institution.

Pedagogy and Curriculum

Open enrollment in community colleges provides access, but access does not speak as loudly as success. Success comes from the accrual of social, academic, and cultural capital. Pedagogy and services tailored to zero-year students' unique needs improves their capital gains. The DLC modeled how to develop and implement strategies to enhance social, academic, and cultural capital for students. In so doing, the DLC demonstrated how to warm up students rather than cool them out by upholding programmatic expectations for students to transfer. As revealed in this study, the DLC program took place in a stimulating and supportive environment. Consequently, high academic levels were expected from students, which improved zero-year student success. Paramount to success, the member requirements led to the accumulation of necessary capital to complete the DLC program. Perhaps programs similar to the DLC ought to implement mandatory requirements proven to encourage student success rather than wait for students to seek the services and courses themselves. As revealed in the findings, the majority of students are not aware of the available resources on the larger campus. Resources such as counseling, workshops, and tutoring exemplify some of the necessary support for student success. The lack of success, equivalent to the loss of social capital, is costly for the individual as well as for the institution.

The effectiveness of the DLC model points to course alignment strategies for zero-year students in the community college population. Based on the findings of the consistent use and reference to the Student Academic Pathway (SAP) in the Student Development course and in counseling visits, students followed a sequence of coursework to proceed toward their degrees. The plans for academic programs and services need to outline explicit connections between one course and another in sequence to prevent students from repeating courses, failing, or dropping

out (Tinto, 2012). Program planning also needs to include professional development to enable faculty and staff to adequately advise students and help close achievement gaps for nontraditional students of color. Perhaps course alignment goals could be reinforced with greater budget awards commensurate to program effectiveness, as planned through the SSSP. Further, program evaluations could inform individual program constituents of their program's effectiveness in matching institutional resources to the students' needs, with emphasis on persistence and retention.

Specific recommendations to augment persistence include precollegiate preparation, including opportunity for students to engage in intensive math and English review, as well as early exposure to institutional transfer centers. It would behoove community colleges, particularly those in alignment with the SSSP to improve their persistence/transfer rates, to consider assessing specific student developmental skills in addition to math and English course placement. After targeting these specific developmental areas of need, such as study skills, time management, and strengths assessment, the community college could offer modules of intensive review *before* [emphasis added] performing final assessment of students for math and English placement.

Community college students exercise the right to choose classes in which they deem themselves to be capable of success; however, when students underestimate the academic expectation of the courses they choose, it can sabotage their need for gradual entry into college-level coursework (Melguizo, Hagedorn, & Cypers, 2008). Shorter-term instruction and review might improve assessment levels of math and English and help decrease the time and expense associated with college-level coursework. Rather than taking precollegiate courses in their entirety, intensive review modules offered during shorter terms would reduce the length of time

students spend in their initial remedial course sequence. In this way, students make their way onto a transfer pathway more quickly and effectively.

Extending the Duration of Program Participation

Clearly, the data in this study demonstrates the value of the DLC program. Worthy of long-term support from academic departments and student services, I questioned how the assets of the program might be shared and extended. Since the DLC program budgeted for the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) to be taken by the DLC student cohorts in addition to the general student population at SCCC for comparison, these data may be utilized. Quantitative data illustrative of the DLC program's success in retention and student satisfaction from the CCSSE database may be used for future program promotion. However, faculty and staff need to hear the experiences of students in the program from a qualitative viewpoint as well. It would be useful to host workshops and lunches in which both quantitative and qualitative data are presented and discussed. This would certainly serve to reinforce school-wide goals and encourage all parties across the institution to buy into a community college-wide "persist-and-transfer" school culture.

Beyond the Zero-Year

Students, like the participants of this study, may not accumulate enough credits to qualify as sophomores in their second year as they complete the courses to accomplish a degree. However, the social, academic, and cultural capital accrued in the zero-year may be invested in the next year. In fact, the chances of the student's capital compounding are enhanced by institutional efforts to follow through on the student's initial year in the DLC. In this study, DLC students who sought academic counseling once they entered into the big zone talked about having to start over with a new counselor versus being known by the designated counselor and

picking up where they left off last time they met. A learning community program to assist students' transition from the zero-year to the subsequent year would be most desirable strategically. A supplemental bridge program between the zero and next year would capture students who struggled in the zero-year by providing issue-specific campus resources for students. For example, a student on academic probation would meet with a specialist to review the student's SAP and explore a strategy to remedy the probation status.

Another variation to prevent dropout concerns outreach at the end of the zero-year. Capitalizing on the impactful role of peer interaction and mentorship, my findings suggest student mentors following through with second-year students during the summer and into the Fall semester would help students persist. Student mentors can follow-up with non-returning students and students who fall into academic probation. In this win-win situation, student mentors could train for this outreach, earn community service credit, and reinforce their academic commitment while the mentees learn of services and strategies shared by the student mentor. Further, faculty mentors recruited from the larger campus could regularly meet with student mentees in their second year for short periods of time to provide encouragement and help mentees hone their navigational skills. To reinforce a college-going mentality, mentors and mentees could attend campus activities together, such as recitals, luncheons, and graduation. Outreach at the end of the zero-year can help to maintain student engagement and prevent dropout.

Implications for Future Research

This study provides insights into a DLC that targets nontraditional Latina/o students enrolled at a community college. While this study focuses on the success of one DLC at one Southern California institution, the lessons generated from this initial work could inform how

other types of institutional interventions may boost persistence and transfer rates. Understanding how the value and accrual of social capital sustains students' progress through the crucial first-year and beyond speaks to the importance of relationship building to students' overall success. Future research should investigate the similarities and differences between these DLC findings and the wide variety of other programmatic interventions found at community colleges, particularly those located at HSIs.

My study focused on student experiences and the role of the DLC in the transfer of social capital between the program and students. Future research should not only focus on student experiences, but also on the institution's role in providing the context for students' successful persistence and transfer. Research that examines institutional efforts intended to meet persistence and transfer goals is needed to encourage success through institutional change. When the focus of research continues to investigate the needs of the students whom higher educational institutions serve, inequities can be challenged.

Future research should also focus on first year and beyond for nontraditional students of color. Many community college students fall through the cracks of a porous transfer pipeline due to a lack of focus on the campus climate and the nature of relationships students foster with peers, staff, and faculty. Further study on successful programming, as demonstrated within the DLC, may highlight how community colleges could intervene more effectively as institutions serving nontraditional students. More powerful conclusions may be drawn from institutional reform efforts beyond that of the impact of intervention programs.

More broadly, this research attributes the success of the DLC to the value associated with fostering relationships to accrue social capital. As discussed in my literature review, social capital has been applied to the study of higher education in a number of different ways. This

study once again demonstrates the power relational ties have on the educational successes of students, and more importantly, students of color. It is incumbent upon community college scholars to appropriate social theory from across the disciplines to help inform how and why social capital supports positive educational outcomes.

Relational theories, such as socio-anthropological theory, provide new and conceptually innovative approaches to furthering our understanding of the value of belonging. In particular, the Relational Models Theory provides a structure upon which researchers could investigate how and why individuals coordinate their interactions with one another (Fiske, 1991, 2004; Haslam, 2004). Greater understanding of emotional and cognitive processes in the sharing and exchange of information, knowledge, and resources between individuals would shed light on theory and practice in higher education.

These recommendations and implications follow from having analyzed and interpreted the data of this case study performed in a community college with nontraditional students of color. Facilitated accrual of social capital, which is also converted into academic and cultural capital, helps students persist in community college and increases their chances of transferring. Findings from this research study provide college and university administrators, faculty, and scholars with a better understanding of the role community colleges play in encouraging the academic success of nontraditional students of color.

Closing

In this dissertation study, I have demonstrated the ways DLC students accrued social capital within a climate supporting and sustaining strong, intimate ties and where relationships with peers, staff, and faculty members were strongly encouraged. Students established relationships in the context of the space provided. The DLC structure imposed academic expectations from

membership requirements, and offered available assistance from the presence of tutors, a counselor, faculty, and staff. The DLC culture conveyed implicit and explicit messages of belonging through its constituents and the environment that evolved. The overarching lesson from this study is the following: To experience a sense of belonging, one needs to have the opportunity to participate. Meeting in a space conducive to forming relationships is essential. The physical space allocated for the DLC provided the means through which DLC members established relationships by spending time and energy with one another through shared social and academic interactions. Communication among the members began at the summer orientation and ongoing interactions were encouraged throughout the two semesters for each year's cohort.

This cohort experience, and the largely supportive relationships fostered between members, provided a basis for identifying with college life. Normative behaviors and beliefs reinforced by academic expectations in the program helped build a culture of success, i.e., a persist-and-transfer culture. In turn, greater peer inter-reliance created a warm climate of belonging, thereby helping students meet the program's academic expectations. Greater peer inter-reliance and frequent contact with tutors, a counselor, faculty, and staff created a trusting, warm climate.

By comparing the DLC to the warmth and feel of a close-knit family, students embraced their roles in the program and helped one another. As closely-tied relationships were fostered within the DLC, students ventured out from the safe zone into the various zones, such as DLC satellite areas, where workshops were specifically designed for the students. Next, students attended tethered classes and other assorted mainstream workshops where students participated with students from the general population, to ultimately explore the big zone untethered from the

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DLC. Along the pathways to the big zone, students established loose ties to the larger campus and the staff, faculty, and peers therein.

To summarize, I discovered that the student was pedagogically central in the program structure and culture and in the gradual introduction to the big zone. Placing the student in the center of a program like the DLC demonstrates the need to focus on a culture of continuous improvement for student success. In so doing, community colleges can create a soft place to land for all students, especially nontraditional students of color whose needs differ according to their varying levels of college preparation received in high school.

SCCC's DLC was designed to assist students with unique needs. However, **most** [emphasis added] community college students have unique needs, as community college populations in Southern California are predominantly comprised of nontraditional students of color. As qualitatively demonstrated by the findings of this case study and statistically demonstrated by the comparative data, DLC students benefited greatly by the program's intention to meet the needs of Latina/o students. The evidence presented through this dissertation study suggests college leaders, stakeholders, administration, faculty, staff, and students work jointly to eliminate achievement gaps for all community college students, as modeled in the DLC program. The DLC program espoused a persist-and-transfer culture and provided space for students to foster all-important relationships with peers, faculty and staff. The DLC instituted requirements to promote gradual entry into the big zone. Overall, the structural and cultural components of the DLC program intervened for nontraditional students of color to acquire the necessary capital to succeed in college.

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Appendix A

Key Terms

The following key terms offer a clear definition of terms used frequently throughout

this manuscript:

<u>Academic Capital</u> – Academic experiences and formal educational gains transmitted through

family members, peers, tutors, faculty, and staff in order to navigate the higher education

system and leverage additional gains such as property, workforce, and social position.

<u>Community College</u> – "Any institution regionally accredited to award the associate in arts or

the associate in science as its highest degree" (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). In California, a two-

year college established within the California Master Plan to serve 64% of the state's

population.

<u>Community of Practice (CoP)</u> – practitioners and leaders sharing common concerns and

addressing common issues while developing staff capabilities in a culture of collaboration and

cross functioning (Hildreth & Kimble, 2002).

<u>Cultural Capital</u> – values, beliefs, and meanings as social assets and cultural knowledge that

confers power and status and promotes social mobility beyond economic means within a

system of exchange.

<u>Cultural Contexts</u> – Refers to the social circulation of values, beliefs, and meanings, and the

structure resulting from the blend of cultures which becomes inextricably connected with the

social order within which it circulates (Fiske, 1991). For this study, the blend of Latina/o

member's cultures was inextricably connected with the social order of the DLC.

<u>Developmental Education</u> – Curriculum and advising providing precollegiate and college level

academic instruction together as well as support and strategies for developing a variety of

noncognitive skills and characteristics, including, but not limited to attitudes, behaviors, competence, autonomy, sense of belonging, and ability to seek help.

Developmental Learning Community (DLC) – a type of learning community comprised as a cohort oriented toward developmental coursework and the furthering of basic skills useful for success in the college environment.

Environment – The physical surroundings affecting particular conditions and influences befitting the common purposes and functions of individuals in the aggregate.

Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) – Designation from the U.S. Federal government for higher education institutions comprised of a minimum of 25% of Latina/o students within the total population.

Institutional Agents – Adapted from Stanton-Salazar's (2001) description of school agents such as counselors and teachers who transmitted support and social capital to Mexican youth in K-12 settings. In the context of this study, institutional agents may be community college faculty members or staff who provide support for and information about navigating the program, campus, or academic career choices.

Latina/o – I am referring to the citizens and residents in the U.S. Latina/o population as represented by Mexican Americans, Central Americans, South Americans, Cubans, Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, and multiracial Latina/os who self-identify as two or more races.

Learning Community – An academically and socially supportive cohort of students taking similar coursework together.

Nontraditional – Students largely underrepresented in four-year institutions and overly represented in community colleges who exhibit any number of characteristics not present in the traditional four-year student, such as financial need, working more than 20 hours per week, and

lives and commutes from home.

Persist-and-Transfer Culture – a college-wide system of beliefs, expectations, and practices aimed at encouraging student success by way of persistence, and ultimately, transfer to a four-year institution.

Precollegiate – I employ this term as a strengths-based orientation to remediation.

Social Capital – the accrued knowledge, information, and resources of an individual or group participating in a community comprised of invested and recognized relationships.

Bonding Social Capital – social capital from closely-tied relationships of high intensity with respect to trust, intimacy, and emotionally-close levels amassed in tightly-knit circles, such as friends and family groups.

Bridging Social Capital – social capital accrued from loosely-tied relationships of low intensity between individuals.

Success – Milestone achievements indicated by rates modeled after Achieving the Dream standards (http://www.achievingthedream.org/goal) recognizing community college students often take several years to earn degrees or certificates. The standards include:

1. Developmental instruction completion and advancement to credit-bearing courses

2. Enrollment and completion of college-level courses, such as math and English

3. Course completion with 2.0 GPA or better

4. Persistence from one term to the next

5. Credential attainment

Zero-year – The entry year in a public two-year institution in which students are enrolled in precollegiate coursework and have not completed more than 15 hours of college credit work.

Appendix B

Pilot Study

Using a sub-sample of the Latino/a DLC population, my pilot study found the DLC study lab to be a locus for participant community building as well as for the formation of essential academic connections with faculty, staff, and peers. In additional to an examination of relational ties, this pilot study explored goal development among Latina/o community college students by investigating how Latina/o students formed academic goals and consequently made meaning of their community college experiences.

The research questions, in combination with the conceptual framework I used to guide this pilot project, centered on four key attributes of the DLC: faculty and peer interaction, curricular challenges, collaboration in coursework, and supportive services. From my initial analysis of the data, I developed the following sets of findings as they pertained to the role of the DLC in supporting and sustaining its Latino/a participants: 1) The study lounge was pivotal to DLC students' examination of goals, 2) The study lounge provided conditions for building community and collegial connection, 3) Building community through peers began and persisted through the study lounge and extended into DLC classrooms, 4) Connections to the collegial world of the institution were constituted through agentive staff who were readily available in the study lounge and through fulfillment of DLC membership requirements, and 5) Workshop requirements operated as structured opportunities for shared exploration beyond the DLC milieu by DLC participants. Through the activity structured through the study lounge (referred to later as the study lab), the participants in this pilot study developed skills for entering into the larger college community and preparing for transfer.

These initial findings and subsequent conclusions steered me toward exploration of relational theories, particularly those of relevance to the nontraditional student experience, to further understand the significance of the DLC experience in supporting participants' pursuit of a four-year degree. My use of the term "developmental learning community" (DLC), therefore, refers to a particular type of cohort-based learning community specifically oriented toward developmental coursework and the furthering of basic skills useful for success in the college environment.

I was able to gain access to DLC participants through my thirteen-year affiliation with SCCC, as an adjunct instructor within the DLC program, and by way of service on various school-wide committees in which DLC students and staff were also participants. While I no longer taught in the DLC program at the time of the pilot and subsequent dissertation study, I was well-acquainted with the director and faculty of DLC. This case study focused on a DLC targeting Latina/o students at SCCC. Serving a widely diverse population of whom 25% were full-time equivalent students, SCCC, the college site, was designated a Hispanic-serving institution (HSI). The DLC's Latina/o students, who comprise an average of 78% of the DLC cohorts, recently entered from high school and were preparing for transfer to four-year universities. The types of data collected were observations of DLC students, faculty, and staff members in classrooms and labs, and semi-structured individual and group interviews of DLC students.

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

1. How are you doing in school now?
2. Take me back to the DLC study lab. How often did you go there?
3. How did you feel walking into the DLC study lab room? What were the reasons you went to the DLC study lab?
4. What would you have done if the DLC study lab didn't supply for these reasons?
5. How would that absence have affected your experiences in the DLC study lab?
6. Describe a typical visit to the DLC study lab. How did the activity there affect you?
7. How did you feel walking out of the DLC study lab?
8. Did you feel you belonged? Why or why not?
9. Tell me about your time spent with peers.
10. What was it like for you to be among the majority of DLC students who were Latina/o?
11. Was there something that made you feel you could relate to other Latina/o members when you entered into the DLC study lab?
12. What is it like now to be in classes that have less Latina/o members than the DLC classes?
13. Do you have a new place to go to that is anything at all like the DLC? What does that place have in common with your DLC study lab experiences?
14. Tell me about your counseling experiences.
15. Describe times you interacted with faculty members? Staff?
16. What was it like to go to workshops? Did you participate in extra workshops or take advantage of other resources outside the DLC?
17. What was it like to go outside the DLC area onto campus? Did you feel you belonged at SCCC?
18. Do you still see your DLC peers? What are your relationships with others like outside the DLC program?
19. Do you feel you belong at SCCC at this point? Why or why not?
20. Are there any questions you would ask if you were the researcher? Any particular questions for me?

Appendix D

Focus Interview Protocol

1. How would you say life changed for you since high school?

2. What kinds of things would you say you needed to negotiate while you were a student in the DLC?

3. Describe the differences you have experienced between high school and the community college? Similarities?

4. How has your role in your family changed? How is it the same?

5. How has your viewpoint of your community changed? How is it the same?

6. Tell me about who you are today. Picture yourself five years from now. How would you advise yourself in your situation today?

7. What kinds of support have you received during your membership in the DLC?

8. Identify three essential areas of support you needed during your college career this past year.

9. How did you get to where you are now? What is life like after your experience in the DLC?

10. Picture and describe yourself at the time you receive your degree. What do you think life will be like?

11. What kinds of experiences do you anticipate having in the future?

12. If you were performing this focus group, what would you ask that I haven't? Do you have any questions for me?

Appendix E

Discontinuing Student Interview Protocol

1. What were your reasons for enrolling in community college? What are you involved in now?

2. What courses did you complete at this community college? In which semesters?

3. What caught your interest about the DLC that made you want to become a part of that learning community? What were your goals in entering into the DLC? What are they now?

4. What types of academic challenges had you faced as a learning community member? How did you manage the challenges? Who helped you? How?

5. Tell me about when you felt most supported in progressing toward your goals in the past year. Least supported?

6. What types of services had you used in the DLC? How would you describe your experiences in utilizing those services?

7. What types of services had you used outside the DLC in the community college? How would you describe your experiences in utilizing those services?

8. Describe a time when you were interacting with other students. Where were you? What were the purposes?

9. Tell me about your interactions with learning community staff members. What kinds of contact have you had inside of the study lounge with these staff members? Outside?

10. Tell me about your interactions with professors. (Peers). What kinds of contact have you had outside of the classroom with these professor(s)? Peers?

11. Describe any unexpected surprises you may have encountered during your DLC membership. How may those surprises have played a part in your original reasons for enrolling in the community college? In your DLC membership?

12. What kinds of college experiences do you anticipate having in the future? How do you

envision your academic path? [Imagine yourself on an academic pathway. Where does it lead?]

13. How would you say your DLC experience contributed to where you are now? How would

you say your DLC experience contributed to your future pathway? Would you consider

membership in a learning community again? Why?

14. If you were performing this study, what would you ask that I haven't? Do you have any

questions for me?

Appendix F

Noting the Exceptions

An overarching theme of my findings is the student-centeredness of the program structure and culture. The environment, conducive to the accrual of bonding and bridging social capital, allowed for the conversion of social capital into academic capital and cultural capital. The safe zone of the DLC was a microcosm of the big zone, allowing for individuality while encouraging mutuality (see Figure 7). As a whole, each finding told the compelling story of how the DLC program helped students accrue social capital and convert it to the academic and cultural capital that would help them persist. However, individual cases demonstrated exceptions, putting a twist on my conclusions while still lining up with the notion of social capital accrual.

The purpose of including some of the DLC students as outliers is to present a more nuanced understanding of the safe zone in contrast to the satellite, tethered, and untethered zones leading into the big zone. Although students reported some unexpected experiences, the exceptional choices and circumstances still yielded greater self-efficacy, agency, and sense of belonging.

For example, as neither a panacea nor utopia for all, the DLC program structure and culture was not straight-forward for students. In fact, students' varying experiences compelled some to adapt to exceptional circumstances. Camilla talked about the pros and cons of the DLC culture, from her perspective:

> The plus side to walking into a [DLC] room is that it's small, you see a friendly teacher, it feels like a community, all the students interact with each other. There was just no doubt about that. We all knew each other. However, that might have been a problem too, because at the time of learning, it was also very distracting seeing us make conversations.

Well, there wasn't a feeling of "do better." As I walked into [a DLC] class, I felt welcomed, but at the same time, I felt also that there was a lot of slackers. I felt that there was also an atmosphere of what we're going to do tomorrow or tonight instead of let's do our homework . . . in lessons it also helped me because it reminded me that I was there just last semester and it was kind of like a mirror . . . it also gave me an opportunity to get closer to one teacher specifically.

Camilla described her dilemma in recognizing the students she observed to be less committed to high academic standards. Camilla made a decision to learn from her own experience of not taking her academics seriously the first semester and apply herself the second semester. She also reported a gain in drawing closer to a teacher for academic support as a result of her efforts. Camilla abstained from accruing bonding social capital with DLC students and chose to build on bridging social capital with her professors instead.

Maria described her aversion to students who were using her to copy her homework or not taking their classes seriously. She made a decision to avoid these students and optimize class time to study and finish homework more efficiently at home rather than in the study lab.

"No, I like to focus." I always go to the front of the class and it's just me, the professor, and the lecture and that's all I'm going to focus on because I don't have time to go home, review the lecture. Like I really have to understand it at the moment because once I go home, I have let's say an hour or two hours to do my homework for all my classes, so by that time I have to really know what I'm doing and what he talked about.

Maria talked about prioritizing her time and energy to meet the academic expectations of the DLC program. In Maria's estimation, she was better off to keep her focus on her coursework responsibilities than to interact with her DLC friends. Maria describes the DLC students as

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friends, but limits the type of interaction she has with them. Maria decided the conditions of these friendships would have been detrimental to her academic progress. Instead of accruing bonding social capital with these friends, Maria chose to build on bridging social capital with her professors by sitting in front of the class and focusing on the topic at hand.

At the other end of the spectrum, some students reported they'd felt isolated and separated from their DLC peers once they entered into the wider campus. Jorge stated he experienced changes in the friendships he'd established. Nino expressed similar sentiments, saying, "I ran into some [DLC peers], like I see them walking sometimes, but we never really stop to talk. It's kind of like everyone's kind of isolated again, I don't know." Jesus talked about his sense of isolation as he began his science studies post-year-long DLC commitment.

> Jesus: [My DLC friends] have similar schedules so they tend to have more time spending together. When I go with them and they show me all their active lifestyle, "Oh we were talking to this person and we . . . our professor took us to this field trip. We went this place, we went to that place. Oh you should have gone." I feel left out. I feel like they're living and here I am. All I could tell this is, "Well, I was reacting this chemical, this other chemical. We're dissecting a squid." That's recent . . . I feel kind of bad. Most of the time, I don't want to approach them. I'm just gonna end up feeling like, "Where am I going to, why am I struggling to suffering through Chemistry so I could be a Biologist?" I really love Biology, it's just the Chemistry part or the environment that just...the professor's really cool. The Chemistry professor's really cool.

Jesus recognized the trade-off in making the decision to persist in the field of science. The findings support the notion students like Jorge, Nino, and Jesus missed the closer ties they had with DLC students. On one hand, Jesus struggled with being alone in his science pursuits; on

the other, Jesus connected with the professor, as did Maria. While most students fared well with a balanced experience of bonding social capital and bridging social capital, some students seemed imbalanced. Further research on the role of bonding social capital and the trade-offs to gain bridging social capital would shed more light on the contrasting views and experiences of students.

Nino, Jesus, Camilla and Maria approached relationships differently from the majority of students, yielding individualistic ways to accrue social capital. As an additional exception, Jacobo took a unique stance with respect to attending mandatory workshops. Jacobo expressed an opinion contrary to the majority response to the effects of the persist-and-transfer culture regarding the DLC membership requirements.

Yeah, I only took one workshop but it's a whole different way of learning about the school, I guess. Because I haven't been to many workshops, I'd have to learn stuff on my own like, 'Oh I got to go here during this time and I got to do this on my own.' It just feels better doing it on your own because you know how to do it again and again. This way you teach yourself and you grow more. There's probably not that many restrictions on you.

Rather than sharing academic and institutional information in the DLC, Jacobo expressed his preference to learn on his own. Jacobo expressed a preference to step out and develop skills without potential restriction that he perceived may come from the parameters of the DLC membership requirements.

In addition, the study lab's limited space of approximately 30 chairs would never accommodate all of the students in the cohort all of the time. In spite of these limitations, however, all students referred to their interactions in the study lab as pivotal to their sense of

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belonging. I attributed this sense of belonging, in part, to the majority of interactions stemming from either the requirements for membership (represented as extrinsically motivational criteria assisting intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985) such as coursework and workshops within the DLC or course and workshop related support services.

The next example provides insight into the DLC's Community of Practice (CoP) flexibility with certain cases students presented. As established earlier in my study, the requirements for DLC membership were customarily designed to help students become transfer-ready. In some cases, the requirements for DLC membership were overridden and exceptions were made. Alejandro described how the exception made for him led to more connections outside the DLC.

> Alejandro: During my first year in [the DLC], I took a soccer class which we had to ask permission to because we were supposed to take an Economics class during that time slot. I had to ask for permission to take the soccer class and not take the Economics class. The way I met more people was through soccer and going to guys' soccer practice and [another] class in the afternoons. So it was just an ever-growing experience where you meet more people.

Alejandro learned how to negotiate in order to stay qualified for the DLC and while simultaneously benefiting from the connections he made outside the DLC. As a result of receiving permission from the DLC program director to exchange one course for another, Alejandro fostered new relationships with people outside the DLC, and those people introduced him to more people.

Based on my findings, the CoP was egalitarian in their decision-making and prioritized the student's interests as much as possible. At the same time, evidence revealed the

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acknowledgement of lack of societal equality on the part of the CoP. For example, the cartoon on the study lab wall wherein Native Americans looking out at the incoming Mayflower exclaim, "They don't look documented to me!" depicts an interesting juxtaposition of individuals deemed undocumented in our society. The socio-cultural and political construction of U.S. citizenship brings to question how the documentation process came to fruition. Native Americans, including the Latino population, inhabited American land before the Mayflower landing, as depicted in the satirical cartoon. Acknowledging the tension between the powerful and the oppressed and the lack of social equality, the CoP was intentional with the politicized signage.

Referring back to the term "developmental learning community," I reflected on the developmental process of an individual moving from magical thinking to naiveté. When a student develops an awareness of his or her position in society, the student becomes more conscious. Freire (1970) refers to this movement as *conscientização*. The participants of my study appeared to be on the threshold of transformative awareness at the time of the interviews. The pedagogy of the DLC was designed to capture students in at this threshold of time and place as the participants became conscious of their unique positions on campus and in society.

As demonstrated in the findings, students referred to class and race issues at times throughout the interviews. In one example, Bobby talked about the cold climate of the science lab. In the same context, he also made reference to the types, quality, and cost of equipment some students had in his photography class, which he could not afford. In reference to a group-work situation in the big zone, Daniel talked about the frustration he had with students speaking languages he did not understand rather than communicating in a common, shared language. All of these examples demonstrated ways in which students became informed about where they might fit into college and into society.

Yet another example of increased awareness relates back to students awakened to undocumented students' limited choices for education and work. Many undocumented students are not aware of their AB540 status until they explore college choice options. As my findings reveal, the zero-year served as a pivotal point of conscious awareness and development for DLC students, including the status of undocumented students. As Aricela acknowledged in the findings, she could not take citizenship and its benefits for granted once she learned about the struggles of AB540 students. The literature points to the first year in college as a window of opportunity to increase awareness of the plight of undocumented students (Gonzales, 2009). My evidence reveals the safe zone provided critical space for some students to develop conscious awareness of the implications of documentation.

Faculty also created opportunities for students to make sense of the world in which they live inside and outside the classroom. By allowing students to express themselves and to come to their own conclusions, instructors exhibited an egalitarian ideology. Many students described faculty as effective authorities without being authoritarian or dictatorial in their delivery or process. The pedagogy of the DLC program was intentionally egalitarian; faculty valued the knowledge students brought into the DLC. In this way, the faculty and staff advocated for nontraditional students of color to establish relationships with one another while discovering their place in college and society.

Given the reality in which we live, it is not surprising that students also reported some negative modeling and deterrents to their bridging social capital accrual. Negative encounters were exceptions to most big zone encounters DLC students reported; however, these examples are symbolic representations of what occurs in many areas of life. These reports support the notion that bonding social capital helps sustain students in spite of the bridging social capital

deterrents. Enrique shared a negative experience with a course instructor in the untethered part of the big zone.

> . . . the notes were confused, the lectures were confused. It was almost like her saying, "Okay, here's how it's going to go: I don't know what and I'm NOT going to tell you, so you're going to have to figure it out on your own," and we're all just sitting there like, 'EEK!' . . sharing the same air of confusion and disdain . . . [the instructor's absences and tardiness] took away a lot of time we had in class and kind of prevented us from progressing . . . we didn't get [feedback] until it was already too late and we couldn't prosper from it . . . so all the prospering we had to do, we had to find ourselves."

Enrique described the intimidation he perceived he and his peers experienced as they felt left on their own to figure out the requirements and resources to succeed in the course. Enrique reported writing as his forte, yet he failed the class and retook the same class with a different instructor. In spite of being untethered from the DLC, Enrique overcame the disappointment of this experience in a course without the support he needed and continued to persevere. It appears bonding social capital and bridging social capital help sustain students through the difficult challenges they face in the big zone.

The safe zone of the DLC was student centered and, as a microcosm of the big zone, was safe due to the consistent program structure and culture in which personnel and faculty sustained a sense of safety and belonging for the participants. Most students availed themselves of the bonding social capital available through the safe zone to carry them into the big zone. Some of the outliers revealed herein honored individuality without forcing mutuality. In other words, some students took leeway within the structure and culture of the DLC to meet their individual needs and goals. The important message students received in these outlier reports was to make

decisions that best supported their ultimate goal to persist and transfer. In this manner, students chose to utilize their social capital accordingly.

Considering the outliers helps practitioners recognize the importance of autonomy along with building up a sense of belonging for students. Researchers can better understand the differences in responses as examples showing the varying independent needs of students as individuals. The leeway given to the DLC students to make choices and receive advice addressing their unique needs helps students gain greater self-efficacy, agency, and sense of belonging – even when the student's path differs from the expected path.

Consider some of the adjustments the DLC program underwent to accommodate the reality of many students' lifestyles. Strictly designed for developmental education, the DLC compromised its full-time credit/non-credit criterion for membership after the first cohort on a case-by-case basis when many DLC students could not maintain 12 units. Analogous to the general community college population, a lot of DLC students also had many obligations outside college life prohibiting full-time enrollment. As defined, the nontraditional student often has familial and work obligations outside college. Therefore, the part-time compromise is not surprising. By the same token, perhaps the DLC symbolically represented the reality of the general student population taking classes for credit; of the total number of credit students at SCCC, approximately 1/3 represented full-time students, while the other 2/3 represented part-time credit students at the time of this study. Reflecting the credit student enrollment trends, the percentage of first-time students with a minimum of six units earned in Fall 2009 who enrolled anywhere in the California Community College system in Fall 2010 was the standard measurement for the persistence rate. Yet, the transfer rate to any senior (four-year) university from community college was an average of 50 percent for credit students. Subsidized, low-cost

trips to visit senior universities, including UCs and CSUs, were offered to SCCC students

through the Transfer Center. Some students availed themselves of the transfer agreement

guarantees for students after having fulfilled the coursework and GPA requirements delineated in

the corresponding agreement.

Although programs assisting students in basic skills and precollegiate instruction were

more prevalent, offerings for academically accomplished students existed as well. For example,

a particular type of learning community for academically accomplished students at SCCC had

priority consideration for admission to UCLA and other privileges at additional senior

universities. However, SCCC clearly upholds a reputation for providing developmental

education, as demonstrated by the DLC in this study. Thereby, I construed the DLC program as

a symbolic representation of the big zone, albeit more intentionally structured and supportive.

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