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“It is my second home”

Community-Based Organizations: Meeting the Needs of Undocumented Community College and Transfer Students

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts

in Education

by

Trisha Mazumder

2019

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

"It is my second home"
Community-Based Organizations: Meeting the Needs of Undocumented Community College and Transfer Students

by

Trisha Mazumder

Master of Arts in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2019

Professor Robert T. Teranishi, Chair

By drawing on the lived experiences of eight undocumented community college students, this study demonstrates that Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) are a vital part of the post-secondary education process. These organizations not only recognize undocumented students' assets, but they use asset-based approaches to organize and mobilize these students' community cultural wealth (CCW) in order to create agents of change at the community-college level. The study yields three particular findings: CBOs (a) cultivate a safe, empowering space through the exchange of knowledge between students, (b) embrace cultural capital and generate wealth as a community, and (c) promote resources for undocumented student access and opportunity. The study also provides research, policy, and practical tools for researchers, educators, and

community members, so they can further advocate on behalf of the undocumented student population.

The thesis of Trisha Mazumder is approved.

Daniel G. Solórzano

Carola Suárez-Orozco

Robert T. Teranishi, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2019

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the students, staff, and members of the Aspiration Center that allowed me the privilege to share your lived experiences with the community at large. This thesis would not have been possible without your support. I extend my deepest gratitude. Thank you.

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CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

> It was tough navigating community college by myself at first then after I decided to join the Aspiration Center . . . I was looking forward to going to college . . . . I'm really proud of having joined that group because we're all in this together, we're in the same boat . . . I had people who I could relate to. I had resources I desperately needed . . . the Center actually valued my lived experiences which changed everything, everything! (Christina)

As more and more undocumented community college and transfer students learn to navigate their higher education institutions, they are turning to community-based organizations (CBOs) for additional support that higher education institutions typically do not offer. As Christina's quote above explains, CBOs provide support to undocumented students, value their lived experiences, and ease the complexities of challenges that often accompany undocumented statuses. Christina's experience, however, is just one of many that exist at the local community college level. There are countless other undocumented students who are facing extreme hardships. Yet, many of them are unaware of supplementary spaces of support, such as CBOs.

Currently, 10.5 million undocumented immigrants reside in the United States (Krogstad, Passel, & Cohn, 2019). As of 2017, at the state level, especially in California, there are two million immigrants (Pew Research Center, 2019). Nationwide, 98,000 students graduate out of high school each year and more specifically, 27,000 graduate from a high school in the state of California (Migration Policy Institute, 2019). According to Dow (as cited in UC Info Center, CSU Analytic Studies, CCCCO), reported that out of 86,000 students enrolled in institutions of higher education (e.g., community college, California State University, University of California), 50,000 to 70,000 attend a community college despite being accepted to prestigious institutions (Dow 2019; Jimenez, 2019). While community college has its advantages such as affordability, accessibility, and convenience, it also has a host of challenges such as unfriendly campus

climate, lack of specialized resources, as well as lack of opportunities that deter students from degree completion (Pérez Huber & Malagón, 2007; Teranishi, Suárez-Orozco, & Suárez-Orozco, 2011; Terriquez, 2015). Scholars such as Terriquez report that often, community colleges, especially those that are publicly funded, are not well-equipped to assist students with the necessary tools to succeed in higher education (p. 1304). Some of the institutions of higher education often provide the same generic support to undocumented students as their documented counterparts, without taking into consideration the complexities of challenges and their unique needs.

Only recently have community colleges begun to develop relationships with off campus CBOs as a supplementary learning space in order to create more student-centered support. Consequently, scant research documents the ways in which CBOs work with community colleges to provide a comprehensive support system for undocumented students. There is even less scholarly attention on the efforts of CBOs' to develop a wealth of support to a diverse undocumented student body in order to ease their struggles. Moreover, none of this literature examines the collaborative efforts between community colleges and CBOs and how this collaborative relationship yields an array of distinct resources. As a result, this study focuses on the work of CBOs and how these organizations create specialized support to assist a diverse undocumented student body. This study focuses on one particular CBO, located in close proximity to a community college, in the greater Los Angeles area. In order to better understand how this particular CBO, known as the Aspiration Center, fosters an empowering space, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What strategies does the Aspiration Center use to support undocumented students and their needs?

2. How does the Aspiration Center organize and mobilize the community cultural wealth of undocumented student?

Using Yosso's community cultural wealth (CCW) as this study's primary framework, this study examines the multiple ways that CBOs recognize student wealth to support their needs (Yosso, 2005). Utilizing the six capitals (aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, resistance, spiritual) of CCW developed by Yosso and additional scholars, this project further demonstrates the wealth of knowledge that students from communities of color bring with them to institutions of learning. This study also demonstrates how CBOs use these capitals to empower undocumented students to build capacity so that they continue to thrive throughout their post-secondary education.

Finally, this study recognizes and centers the lived experiences of undocumented students in community colleges. Ultimately, the present study illuminates not only the collaborative nature between the Aspiration Center and its respective community college institution, but also how this collaborative relationship yields transformative resources for undocumented students. Therefore, this study recommends that educators and community members take seriously the opportunity to develop similar collaborative relationships between CBOs and community college campuses. In doing so, not only will educators and their community members create a more specialized learning space, but they will also ensure a more successful pathway to the degree completion of undocumented community college and transfer students.

CHAPTER 2:

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Historically, social and cultural capitals exhibited by white and middle-class communities dominate valuable assets that communities of color have to offer (Yosso, 2005, p. 70). However, Tara J. Yosso's analysis of marginalized communities through CCW challenges the dominant ideologies and centralizes the assets communities of color bring into academic spaces (p. 77). This analysis can be further focused towards marginalized groups such as undocumented community college students and, in the case of the present study, on CBOs that support undocumented communities. In the midst of coping with adversities and adapting to higher education in elite institutions, undocumented students are often unaware of the valuable assets they bring to community colleges. However, CBOs recognize these assets and therefore organize and mobilize them to serve the broader undocumented community.

Dialogues around cultural capital were originated by French theorist Pierre Bourdieu (1986). Bourdieu describes "cultural capital [as] an accumulation of cultural knowledge, skills and abilities possessed and inherited by privileged groups in society" (Yosso, 2005, p. 76). Three distinct subsets of cultural capitals observed by Bourdieu include the embodied state, objectified state and the institutionalized state, all of which are used by individuals in the upper class to maintain social and academic status in society. Cultural capital in the form of embodied state "is linked to the body and presupposes embodiment . . . [it] is the best hidden form of hereditary transmission of capital" that one possesses by simply being a part of the culture (p. 246). Objectified state is defined as "material objects and media, such as writings, paintings, monuments, instruments" which identify an individual's cultural assets in society. Finally, institutional state is defined as the "academic qualifications" that provides an individual with

more “cultural competence” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 248). All of these collectively allow individuals in privileged groups to preserve their cultural capital and continue to climb up the socio-economic ladder.

While Bourdieu’s (1986) theory provides us with a glimpse of how cultural capital is maintained within the dominant class, he neglects, however, to mention the ways in which capitals are also innately present and preserved within communities of color. The conversations around a more inclusive cultural capital theory emerged through the branches of Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Yosso, 2005, p. 73). CRT “identifies various indicators of capital that have rarely been acknowledged as cultural and social assets in Communities of Color” (p. 82). Using CRT, Yosso builds on Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital in order to include people of color, recognize their knowledge, and acknowledge their unique assets. Yosso defines CCW “as an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression” (p. 77). She includes six forms of sub capitals to celebrate assets. These sub forms include: aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, and resistance capital. Additionally, this study will also include spiritual capital, an extension of Yosso’s theory build on by Lindsay Pérez Huber (Pérez Huber, 2009, p. 721). The listed capitals are known to be flexible, influencing and overlapping with each other in a fluid manner (p. 77).

According to Yosso (2005), aspirational wealth is the capacity to be optimistic in the face of adversity (p. 77). Linguistic capital refers to the ability to encompass multiple linguistic skills and abilities (p. 78). Familial capital is defined as the wisdom carried by individuals that are passed down from generation to generation (p. 79). Social capital is defined as the network or resources people of color use to navigate academic spaces (p. 79). Navigational capital is known

as the ability to thrive at institutions amidst endless challenges (p. 80). Resistance capital are the tools embedded in communities of color to combat the oppressions of society (p. 80). Finally, spiritual capital is the capacity to exercise a diverse worldview (Pérez Huber, 2009, p. 721).

In the context of undocumented students, CCW is especially important to value. Students in this community are not easily visible, are often dismissed because they do not fit the elite understanding of the four-year-institutions, and most importantly, normative structures tell these students that their knowledges are not valued. As a result, students often have a difficult time navigating institutions of higher learning because they do not recognize their own capacity. Yosso's (2005) framework especially aligns with my research because CBOs acknowledge the strengths of undocumented students, "document [their] cultural wealth," and empower them to continue "to utilize assets already abundant in their communities" (p. 82).

CHAPTER 3:

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following section provides an overview of the literature review. Using the following thematic approaches of (a) institutionalized advantages and challenges at community colleges, and (b) CBOs as supplementary learning spaces, I examine the ways in which my study bridges the gap in literature. Additionally, I address the current conversations of scholars in the field as it pertains to CBOs at the community college level. These conversations establish a foundation for me to further illustrate the need for CBOs to collaborate with undocumented community college and transfer students as federal and state policies continue to restrict their movement.

Institutionalized Advantages and Challenges at Community Colleges

Undoubtedly, community colleges have been a vehicle for creating structural pathways to higher education, vocational programs, and providing access to general education for students from diverse backgrounds (Pérez Huber, Huidor, Malagón, Sánchez, & Solórzano, 2006, p. 5). According to the Migration Policy Institute, data shows that 98,000 undocumented students complete high school each year (Zong & Batalova, 2019). In 2016 in California alone, moreover, 27,000 undocumented students graduated from high school (Migration Policy Institute, 2019). Based on the California Community College Chancellor's Office, data show that post high school, 50,000 to 70,000 students continue for an advanced education in their local community colleges (Jimenez, 2019). Particularly for undocumented students, many of whom are first-generation, from low socio-economic areas, and face multiple barriers, academic spaces like community colleges provide a more feasible route to degree attainment. Because of its affordability, accessibility, and convenience, make it the ideal choice for students to continue their academic journey at these institutions (Teranishi et al., 2011).

Suárez-Orozco et al. (2015) emphasize other "campus-level assets" such as campus climate, "safe space, peer networks, [as well as] supportive and understanding educators" (p. 433), that also make these institutions one that is appealing to many students. Using a mixed method study of 909 undocumented participants from a variety of post-secondary institution like community college and four-year-universities, this study recognizes factors such as the importance of undocufriendly campus climate and demonstrated that "56% of students at community colleges" affirm the importance of attending a college with an undocufriendly atmosphere (p. 445). The data reflects how safe spaces are important to many incoming students as it allows individuals to form communities of support (pp. 453–454). Other findings that emerged, affirm the importance of peer support in the form of friends and campus allies (p. 448). This is also consistent with scholars who draw on the role of institutional agents, such as staff or educators, who act as gatekeepers and provide the most updated financial services, employment opportunities, as well as serve as an advocate to close the achievement gap for many students (Contreras, 2009, p. 624; Pérez, Cortés, Ramos, & Coronado, 2010, p. 41). Connecting with peers from the same immigration background also makes community college a more collaborative place for students. Other notable authors, Pérez Huber, discuss the role of student organizations in assisting students with resources and support as they acclimate to the campus community (Pérez Huber & Malagón, 2007, p. 851). According to scholars like Pérez et al. (2010), campus support programs also provide a sense of belonging, empower students, and enable them to serve as advocates for their community (p. 43). Collectively, these assets make community colleges more inviting and draw in undocumented individuals from all communities.

Conversely, a growing body of literature also addresses the "campus level challenges" (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015, p. 432). Previous literature recognizes the cost of tuition can pose

as a major challenge for students. Abrego (2006), who dedicated her career to advocating for undocumented students, further adds that "undocumented students . . . struggle economically to attend community college or to obtain menial jobs. Even when admitted to selective universities, they rarely attend because, without financial assistance, their families cannot afford tuition" (p. 225). However, even at community college, out of pocket fees are excessively high for most students. In the 2015 study, Suárez-Orozco et al. agreed with Abrego and confirm that 95% of the students from community college, public four-year-institutions, and private universities, describe financial barriers as one of the most pressing issues in college (p. 444). Additionally, 90% of students mention difficulties in purchasing educational items such as book, college materials, and other essential academic supplies needed to push through in college. Findings also demonstrate that out of the 388 community college students surveyed, 55% of the students, reported even more difficulties financing their education because they are directly paying out of pocket. With the rising cost of tuition and college supplies, this is perhaps one of the biggest barriers that undocumented students face in academia.

Other barriers include campus climate, and unique forms of marginalization. According to scholars like Peter Bjorklund (2018), who reviewed 81 scholarships such as academic articles, policy reports, and books, report that numerous studies in his article highlight the unfriendly campus climate. Due to issues such as discrimination, lack of support and belonging, as well as other issues like "feeling isolated . . . and intimidated," make it difficult for students to engage in education (p. 648). Researchers such as Contreras (2009) also mention the feeling of isolation and internal difficulties faced by students on numerus occasions (p. 621). Contreras further adds that "the legal status of undocumented students has the potential to elevate levels of isolation and discouragement and incidents of discrimination by individuals who possess anti-immigrant

sentiments" (p. 621). Pérez et al. (2010) elaborate on Contreras's theme. In addition to shame, feeling of isolation, and dealing with stereotypes, students from Latinx communities also face "triple minority status: ethnic origin, lack of documentation, and economic disadvantages" (p. 39). In other words, these students are especially marginalized and endure extreme hardships as they advance forward in their education.

While community college is convenient for many, some institutions do not have adequate resources to cater to the unique needs of an undocumented student body (Terriquez, 2015, p. 1304). In their mixed method study, Veronica Terriquez explore the multiple factors faced by students which led them to "stop-out" of community college (p. 1313). The author also added "that community colleges (especially public colleges) lack the necessary resources and structures to ensure that students effectively integrate into the school, receive proper guidance and counselling, and obtain other academic support that they may need" (p. 1304). As a result, some students delay degree completing or "stop-out" entirely (p. 1313). The lack of institutional resources and recognition of systemic inequality further impacts their ability to navigate their pathway. "These beliefs translate to the institutional climate and affect the experiences of undocumented Latina/o college students when their needs are not met, support is not provided, and information is not allocated" (Pérez Huber & Malagón, 2007, p. 855). As a result, many students delay their academic goals and take time off from college or enter the employment field.

A primary obstacle community college face in supporting undocumented students is working with them using a deficit model. Community colleges often struggle and/or are ill equipped to recognize, value, and utilize the undocumented students' CCW to produce necessary resources (Pérez Huber, 2009; Terriquez, 2015; Yosso, 2005). While community college offer a variety of resources to support general populations, many times, these institutions do not meet

individual needs. However, students from undocumented communities who have collaborative ties with a CBO develop an additional support system. Previous scholars have illuminate the ways undocuscholars greatly benefit from CBOs (e.g., Gruber, 2004; Pérez et al., 2010; Seif, 2011; Valenzuela, Perez, Perez, Itzel Montiel, & Chaparro, 2015). Students who are undocumented, first-generation, and non-traditional, value these spaces in addition to their respective institutions. The following section demonstrates the ways in which CBOs assist students from marginalized communities offering a specialized model that engage students from resilient communities.

Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) as Supplementary Learning Spaces

CBOs serve as a valuable asset to the community. In a 2012 research practice brief developed to better understanding the roles of CBOs in the college going process, scholars like Coles (2012) define CBOs as "public or private, nonprofit organizations engaged in addressing the social and economic needs of individuals and groups in a defined geographic area, usually no larger than a county" (p. 2). The report further categorized the various types of CBOs into four groups: "direct service organizations," "youth development organizations," "integrated student services organizations," and "community mobilization coalitions" (p. 2). For the purposes of this study, I will be focusing on the direct service organizations and the ways in which these organizations "provide college information, advice, and application assistance to individual students and families; organize college awareness workshops, financial aid nights, and college fairs; and support students in high school through their college years" (p. 2).

This 2012 research brief further recognize the ways in which CBOs serve as a critical support system for numerous students during their post-secondary years (Coles, 2012, p. 1). Through an Insulated Education Pipeline, developed by the Forum for Youth Investment, further

illustrate a visual representation of the education pipeline and demonstrate how CBOs work to meet the unique needs of students (Coles, 2012; Yohalem, Ravindranath, Pittman, & Evennou, 2010, pp. 3–4).

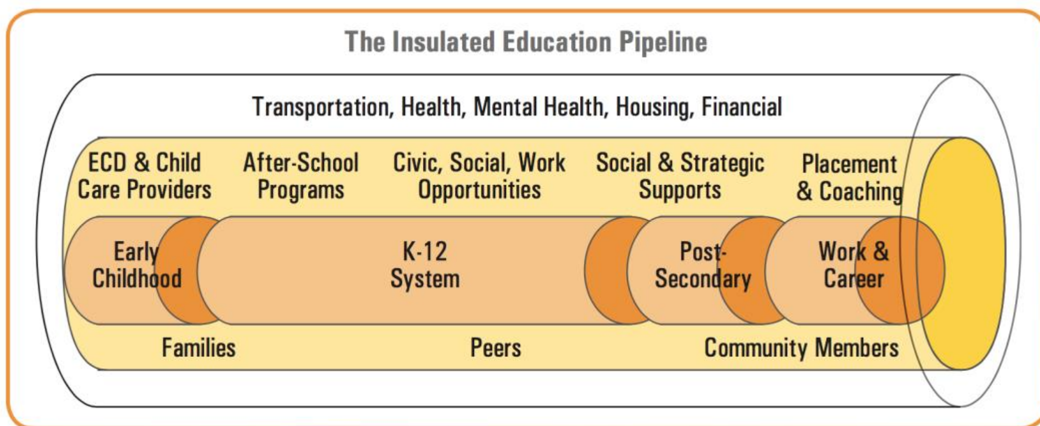

Figure 1: The Insulated Education Pipeline created by Forum for Youth Investment (2010).

Based on the figure, the "outer layer of the insulation" reveals the ways assets such as transportation, health, housing and financial aid allow students to navigate through the pipeline (Yohalem et al., 2010, p. 4). The "inner layer of the insulation" demonstrate the ways in which not only family but peers assist individuals during their early childhood to K-12 educational years (p. 4). The figure also demonstrates the ways in which community members play a vital role in assisting individuals through the post-secondary years and during their career development stages (p. 4). Furthermore, this layer depicts the support of care providers, such as after school programs, social and strategic opportunities, as well as placement and coaching efforts to assist individuals in their academic trajectory (p. 4). Finally, the breaks in the inner layer display the unequal distribution of support for many individuals from marginalized communities (p. 4).

These breaks in the education system, otherwise known as contributors of the achievement gaps, have been well-documented (Abrego, 2006; Contreras, 2009; Pérez Huber, 2009; Pérez Huber et al., 2006; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015; Teranishi et al., 2011; Terriquez, 2015; Yosso, 2005). Particularly for undocumented students, Supreme Court laws like *Plyler vs. Doe* are in place to protect them during K-12. However, post-graduation, gaps in the education pipeline along with the complexities of legal, financial, academic, psychological and social barriers prevent students from successfully pursuing a post-secondary education. Many undocumented students require specialized support as they continue in higher education. In a 2004 report by Gruber, the author argues that even those community colleges that are prepared with resources, "have difficulty effectively serving individuals who need additional support to succeed in a challenging and unfamiliar environment" (p. 4). Other scholars like Terriquez have also agreed that community colleges are not always well-equipped to meet student needs, particularly those who have an undocumented status (p. 1304).

As a result, CBOs often bridge the gap by providing access to resources, a supplementary learning community, and most importantly, allies who offer reliable information (Coles, 2012; Jayakumar, Vue, & Allen, 2013). In a 2004 research report that explores the multiple ways that community colleges and CBOs can build incredible partnerships suggest that CBOs have a unique advantage to work with people in need of additional support. Particularly, CBOs being interconnected with the community, enables these organizations to have an abundant "social service system, offering a full spectrum of services including counseling, case management, social support...and frequently education and training" (Gruber, 2004, p. 4). CBOs also offer support in the college going process especially for students who are first in their family to go to higher education (Coles, 2012, p. 2). Additionally, CBOs cultivate a supplementary

learning community for those who need extra support. In the 2012 research brief by Coles, the author further demonstrates how CBOs meet the needs of students, "supplement the learning that takes place during the school day by offering skill development activities that students want and need, but schools do not have time to provide" (p. 2). Finally, in a 2013 study, Jayakumar, Vue and Allen demonstrated how community programs have staff, peers, and other allies who aid students with the college going process (Jayakumar et al., 2013, p. 562). Having allies who are present to offer reliable information and are trustworthy, allows students to feel recognized especially those who are the first in their families to attend institutions of higher education (Coles, 2012, p. 2).

Furthermore, CBOs operate using an asset-based approach, a method that allows organizations to recognize the strength of individuals and collaborate with them on an equal footing, to meet the unique needs of individuals. Many researchers have acknowledged that students from communities of color bring a wealth of resources with them to academia (Pérez Huber, 2009; Yosso, 2005). However, in the context of undocumented students, research is very minimal. Due to limited research on the ways in which CBOs particularly use asset-based approaches to aid undocumented students from community colleges, I will be expanding the literature review to include a more holistic perspective of studies that include students in K-12 as well as graduate students, and document their experiences as an important stepping stone for my study. Valuing the unique student assets is also mentioned in an article by Jayakumar et al. (2013). Jayakumar et al. emphasize the importance of a "community-initiated college preparatory program [based] in Los Angeles" and the ways in which this program shaped the lived of Young Black Scholars (p. 551). Using the CCW model, the authors conducted semi-structured interviews of 25 high school students and the findings of this study confirm that

community organizations provide a welcoming space, cultivate as sense of identity, and value their lived experiences (p. 570). The program also "recognized and developed various forms of CCW and gave students a space that allowed them to see themselves differently, to see the world differently and to see the realm of possibilities differently" (p. 570).

A similar study by scholar Bloom in 2009 also agrees with Jayakumar et al. (2013) and acknowledges the ways in which CBOs assisted low-income mothers during their academic trajectory. This study examined the lives of "five student mothers," some in undergraduate, graduate, and post grad, and demonstrated how they were able to overcome systemic oppression as well as find support through CBOs (Bloom, 2009, pp. 494–496). Murillo, Quartz, and Del Razo (2017) also highlight the ways in which high school students benefited from interning at CBOs and the multiple ways that the community spaces valued their experiences (p. 250). Murillo et al. also expanded on the study by Jayakumar et al. and adds that if individuals are given the affirmations from various learning spaces (e.g., schools, community colleges, and CBOs), then it strengthens their internal assets and propels them forward (p. 250). Asset-based approaches incorporated by these organization not only value students CCW but also allows the Centers to collaborate with them as a team.

In addition to providing an asset-based support, previous research on CBOs show that organizations that partner with institutions of higher education to provide a more comprehensive support for their members. Similar to the previous section, it is important to recognize that only a handful of studies highlight the partnerships between community colleges and CBOs. Therefore, this section will expand on the literature and provide a comprehensive review with CBOs that have worked with K-12 spaces as well as community colleges and four-year-institutions. In the 2004 research report, Gruber explores the relationships between community

colleges and CBOs through five case studies that in the following states: California, Illinois, and Texas. This report claims that there are several beneficial factors for CBOs and community colleges as they merge to form a partnership. First, community colleges can use CBOs as a site to advertise and bring in new students into their campuses. CBOs can also serve as a site for community colleges to expand their pedagogy, training or services. Second, CBOs can connect with the resources (e.g., employment opportunities, specialized programs, and "instructional capacity") offered at local colleges and use those resources to further enhance the opportunities for individuals in marginalized communities. This also enables individuals who are not enrolled in community colleges, to take advance of opportunities "in an accessible and unintimidated setting" (Gruber, 2004, p. 4). McRae (2012) also supports Gruber and adds that there is a well-developed reciprocity as well as relationship building that occurs to ensure a successful partnership between the two entities (p. 9).

However, the report also mentions that there is a limited number of partnerships that successfully provide support to higher education and beyond (Gruber, 2004, p. 4). According to Gruber, this is due to "scarce for outside resource" (p. 4). McRae's (2012) findings also demonstrate "resources or money was described as a vehicle for developing and maintaining the collaboration" (p. 9). Both CBOs and community colleges have limited number of resources which make it difficult to form a strong partnership. Also, these collaborations are "difficult to create [because] they require resources, staff time, and often the leadership and political will to overcome internal opposition from staff and faculty comfortable with the status quo" (p. 4). Finally, because "career pathway partnerships" are not a priority for donors, makes it even more difficult for CBOs and community colleges to form a collaborative space where they can support

individuals beyond academia. Collectively, these factors often prevent collaborations and effective practices to take place.

Bridging the Gap

The passages above demonstrate some of the reasons for which CBOs and community college partnerships are still a growing field of study. Previous research has demonstrated the ways in which students from community colleges, particularly undocumented students, have been overlooked. Furthermore, there has been little to no research that highlights how CBOs assist undocumented community college and transfer students. As a result, this study builds on the literature above while also contending with significant scholarly gaps. To address these gaps, this study will examine the relationship between CBOs and community colleges in an effort to shed light on successful partnerships as well as document how CBOs have used a CCW model to recognize, value, and celebrate undocumented students from diverse communities.

CHAPTER 4:

METHODS

This section provides an overview of the methodology used to explore this study in depth. Using a qualitative methodology, which "is a covering term for a variety of approaches to research that tend to focus on the *qualities* of things more than their *quantity*," provided me with the foundation to recognize the lived experiences of the participants in the study (Bazeley, 2013, p. 3). Furthermore, qualitative research allowed me to integrate Yosso's (2005) theoretical framework of CCW, in order to acknowledge, value, and document the participant's voice and lived experiences as valid and purposeful. My analysis also addresses an in-depth review of the research site, participants, data collection, data analysis, and the limitations of this study.

Research Site

This study took place at a CBO, located a few blocks from a local community college, in the greater Los Angeles area. For confidentiality purposes, I renamed the organization as the Aspiration Center, a name that resembles closely to their mission statement. The Center was created by Ana,[1] a New York native who had moved to Los Angeles, California, to work with people from immigrant communities. In the interview, Ana mentioned that she lived in New York for quite some time and worked at various nonprofits prior to moving to Los Angeles, where she was hired at a CBO to lead a women's group. While she was part of the women's group, she noticed that there were members who needed additional support that the women's group could not provide. As a result, she created a separate organization adjacent to the women's group, to further assist immigrant students, particularly those from the undocumented community.

[1] For the sake of confidentiality, all names in this text are pseudonyms.

Initially, the Aspiration Center members were from the women's group, and as Ana and others outreached to the nearby community college, they were able to successfully recruit other undocumented, first-generation, nontraditional students, who desperately needed an organization like this to navigate their way through community college. As more and more students started coming to the Center, they renamed it, brought other members, and created impactful resources like workshops, events, and informational meetings to support other students who were also facing the same challenges. Furthermore, the Center created a welcoming atmosphere, one that not only provided support but also recognized their member's diversities, lived experiences, and their unique CCW. Ana's efforts were successful in creating one of the few CBOs in Los Angeles that directly worked with community colleges in providing a supplementary learning space for the undocumented community.

Currently, the Centers goals are to aspire individuals as well as bring together undocumented students from diverse backgrounds in order to collaborate as a community. The Center works directly with community college students, high school students, community members, and other campus partners to make it a space that is accessible to everyone. The student demographics that attend the space are primarily from the Latinx communities. While there were a few other students from other communities, majority of them were allies, who already had documentation. Due to the Center's collaborative efforts with students, its asset-based approach, and most importantly, it's unique proximity to the community college, the Aspiration Center was an ideal setting for my study.

Participants

A total of eight participants were interviewed during the study. All of the participants were members of the Aspiration Center and visited the space on a regular basis. Two staff

members were interviewed along with six student members. The staff members were also first-generation, nontraditional individuals from an immigrant community. All of the student members were from Mexico who identified as a first-generation community college or transfer student, between the ages of 18 and 35, who entered the U.S. before the age of 16, and were currently undocumented. It is important to note that even though all the students are from Mexico, every participant's narrative has a different trajectory and a different focus. Additionally, the students majored in a variety of fields ranging from the social sciences to general sciences. Three out of the six students attended more than one community college due to financial issues. Two out of the six members recently transferred to a four-year-institution. All of the students, except one, self-identified as a non-Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) student. The rest of the participants were eligible for DACA. The majority of the students were employed, with the exception of two students who were still looking for a job outside of the college. The participant demographics are further detailed below.

Table 1: Participant Demographics Overview

<table>
<tr><th colspan="9">Participant Demographics</th></tr>
<tr><th>Participant</th><th>Country of Birth</th><th>First-Generation</th><th>Gender</th><th>Major</th><th>Number of Community Colleges Attended</th><th>Community College or Transfer Student</th><th>Has Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA)/Documented</th><th>Employed/Self Employed</th></tr>
<tr><td>Christina</td><td rowspan="6">Mexico</td><td rowspan="8">Yes</td><td>Female</td><td>Psychology</td><td>2</td><td>Community College</td><td>DACA</td><td>Yes</td></tr>
<tr><td>Maggie</td><td>Female</td><td>Early Childhood Development</td><td>1</td><td>Community College</td><td>DACA</td><td>Yes</td></tr>
<tr><td>Jose</td><td>Male</td><td>Business</td><td>2</td><td>Community College</td><td>Non DACA</td><td>Yes</td></tr>
<tr><td>Yazmin</td><td>Female</td><td>Science Major</td><td>1</td><td>Community College</td><td>DACA</td><td>No</td></tr>
<tr><td>Gisele</td><td>Female</td><td>Sociology</td><td>1</td><td>Transfer</td><td>DACA</td><td>No</td></tr>
<tr><td>Sally</td><td>Female</td><td>Political Science</td><td>2</td><td>Transfer</td><td>DACA</td><td>Yes</td></tr>
<tr><td>Ana</td><td>United States</td><td>Female</td><td>N/A</td><td>2</td><td>N/A</td><td>Documented</td><td>N/A</td></tr>
<tr><td>Brian</td><td>United States</td><td>Male</td><td>N/A</td><td>1</td><td>N/A</td><td>Documented</td><td>N/A</td></tr>
</table>

Data Collection

I employed the two specific methods in order to collect the data. First, I used field observations to explore this study in depth. These observations included taking part in meeting and events (e.g., financial aid workshops, internship workshops, career panels) held by the Aspiration Center on a monthly basis. Field observations enabled me to pay close attention to the location, student led activities, formal and informal discussions, and other factors that were significant part of this study (Merriam, 2009, pp. 120–121). Second, I used semi-structured interviews to get an in-depth understanding of their lived experiences. Each of the interviews ranged between the timeframe of 40 minutes to an hour. Because semi-structured interviews are "in the middle, between structured and unstructured [interviews] . . . [this strategy allowed] all of the questions [to be] more flexibly worded or the interviews [to be] . . . a mix of more or less structured questions" (p. 90). In other words, this type of interview methods allowed me the tools to obtain a "meaningful data" (p. 114). Collectively, both methods served as the foundation to document the individual and community legacies.

Data Analysis

Post data collection, the following techniques were used to analyze the data. First, I transcribed all eight interviews. In order to safeguard the data, I provided each participant with a pseudonym. I also followed the institutional review board (IRB) protocol and protected the identity of the members by removing any identifying information related to them. Next, I printed hard copies of all the interviews to begin the pre-coding process. This also led to a cycle of pre-coding techniques where I used several colors pens to underline and find the first few codes (Saldaña, 2009, p. 16). Using Microsoft Words comment feature, I reviewed all eight interviews a second time, in order to find codes that were missed in the first round.

According to Saldaña (2009), "a code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based visual data" (p. 3). In other words, a code is a single word or a short phrase, that later serves as a larger part of the theme. It is the "transitional process between the data collection and more extensive data analysis (p. 4). All of these codes were labeled with specific words (e.g., empowerment, knowledge, resources, etc.), which then generated the initial set of codes. Other coding methods that were used include descriptive coding, which "summarizes in a word or short phrase . . . the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data" (p. 70). Descriptive coding was useful in analyzing the field observations to quickly code for the setting or the types of activities in the Center. In-vivo coding, otherwise known as the "words or short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data," was also useful in utilizing the semi-structured interviews (p. 74).

All of the codes were then grouped into various categories. For instance, codes like empowerment, knowledge, and resources were categorized under the ways in which the Aspiration Center served their members. The categories that emerged multiple times throughout the study then became a part of the larger group called themes. The final themes that emerged from the study include: (a) Cultivating a Safe, Empowering Space Through the Exchange of Knowledge, (b) Embracing Cultural Capital and Generating Wealth as A Undocumented Community, and (c) Promoting Resources to Improve College Access and Opportunities. These themes then served to provide the basis and the narratives for the study.

Limitations

There were several limitations that prevented the study to reach its full potential. To begin, one of the Center advisor, Brian, was not particularly receptive to participating in the study. Even

though we had agreed to participate in an interview several weeks prior to the meeting, on the day of the meeting he was not open to a recorded interview. As a result, I improvised by typing notes and manually logging in the interactions instead. This greatly hindered the study as majority of my questions were geared towards how the staff operated the space. Additionally, there were not many undocumented Asian and Pacific Islanders (APIs) at the CBO. While the community college nearby had numerous students, who were part of the API community, during the time of the study, I did not see any APIs join the space or take advantage of the resources. There was also a lack of male participants in the space. The majority of the participants in my study were females with the exception of one male participant. The few male participants in the CBO, chose not to partake in the study for personal reasons. Finally, while the sample size is small, this neither diminishes the information gathered nor its rich insights.

CHAPTER 5:

FINDINGS

The following section highlights three recurring themes from the data. The first theme that emerged from the study is the role of Aspiration Center as a safe space where funds of knowledge are exchanged. Next, the Center not only celebrates the CCW of these students, but provides a space where students and Center staff collaborate to build better platforms to support incoming students from marginalized backgrounds. Finally, some of the valuable resources the Center offers to alleviate personal and educational barriers include academic, financial, social, and informational support. Collectively, these themes showcase how the Center operates from an asset-based approach to strengthen undocumented communities as a whole.

Cultivating a Safe, Empowering Space Through the Exchange of Knowledge

The first theme that emerged from the study is the role of Aspiration Center as a safe space where funds of knowledge are exchanged. Based on field observations and interviews, participants and the Center staff most commonly used methods like partaking in current events, informal student-led workshops, and communicating via email to share information and exchange knowledge. Most of the knowledge shared in the Center ranged from advice on legal services to recommendations on academic, entrepreneurships, to budgeting basics.

Current Events

"Current events sessions" at the Center are held on a weekly basis. Furthermore, these gatherings are called "current event sessions" by both staff and students because it paved the way for students and Center staff to initiate open conversations with one another about contemporary politics that continue to impact them. For example, individuals at the Center were directly responsible for leading a meeting that started with a topic highlighted in class, a conversation

they discussed with their peers earlier in the day, or headlines in the social media. These types of interactions were intentionally set up because it allowed space for open dialogues. Open dialogues are especially important in the Center as incoming students often joined the space and were sometimes hesitant to start a conversation. These dialogues also allowed students build rapport with one another.

Christina, one of the senior students in the Center explained that, "many students bring in news or articles related to immigration policies and shares it with our group…They'll usually be like, 'Did y'all hear about the updated DACA news or did you read this about the new driving laws?' Christina's responses affirm how the Center operates on student knowledge and experiences. The "current event sessions" are just one example and site for these exchanges of knowledge. Because students are the ones directly facing obstacles on a daily basis, they are cognizant of the most updated policies, current events, and news updates. Christina also mentions that the current event activities "help folks in the Center stay connected with the updated laws and policies." All of the students in the Center that I have interviewed recognized that sharing tips allowed individuals at the Center to stay informed.

Students also said that these current events empowered the group to ease into more difficult and more personal conversations as well. Christina further explained that because of these current event discussions, her peers were more willing to share their personal experiences, and felt comfortable asking for help. She explains:

> The current events really help us talk about how the policies or real time events affected us or our family . . . after one of our current event topics on the recent policies . . . one of my friends shared how her family is going through a tough time because her dad was laid off of his job and is taken to the court . . . because of their status, they didn't have too many services for them . . . it was tough to hear their experiences . . . but I'm so glad she felt safe and comfortable being in the Center and talking to us . . . I got her a ton of resources and connected her with some of our staff and allies I personally knew so that her family can pull through the situation.

In the passage above, Christina expands on how policies directly impact the lives of individuals and their families. The friend Christina is referring to is Yazmin, a second-year student at the Center, who I had the opportunity to interview. Christina elaborates more on the multiple barriers that Yazmin's dad faced due to his work situation. Additionally, because of his undocumented status, made it difficult for Yazmin's dad to have access to legal services. Christina also shares that Yazmin felt "safe and comfortable" sharing these experiences with the members at the Center. Christina's efforts in connecting with allies at the Aspiration Center as well as other community organizations greatly impacted Yazmin and her father's case. As a result, these dialogues serve more than current event conversations. It allows individuals to connect as community, share valuable knowledge, and reliable resources.

Informal Student-led Workshops

In addition to current events, members also engage in informal student-led discourses on a bi-weekly basis. These informal discourses are typically held after the meeting and are often led by students from the nearby community college. This is one of the main ways in which students share their experiences, knowledge, and most up to date resources. During my field observations, I noticed numerous times that students are most likely to participate in these types of discussions because students had the autonomy to lead the group on a topic of their choice. Furthermore, these discourses are easy for members to relate to and "sharing these experiences help[ed] out everyone in the space," according to Maggie, a senior student in the Center.

Topics in the workshops range from academics to entrepreneurships to budgeting basics. Particularly for Maggie, she explained how she purposely chose to lead a workshop related to her academic journey. Maggie, like many of the students in the Center, is an undocumented, first-generation, nontraditional, commuter student. As a first-generation, nontraditional student, she

faced multiple barriers on her pathway to higher education. During the interview, she mentioned how difficult it is for her to work multiple jobs, commute, take care of her family, and balance a full workload of classes on a weekly basis. She said, "I'm so busy, I don't even have the chance to see my own parents . . . we all see each other in the morning and that's it . . . and I don't want my friends who come into community college to have jam-packed schedules." Based on her own student experiences, Maggie created a mini workshop series to highlight how to navigate community college as a nontraditional student. In the workshop, she added tips on "what classes to take, what professors to pick, what books to buy . . . how to create a study schedule, how to enhance time management skills, and how to succeed as a college student." In the quote above, Maggie elaborates on some of the common factors like the types of classes, professor and books to select, when navigating college as a first-generation, nontraditional student. She further mentions how these tips helped her manage her academics in community college and how she "wishes someone would share this valuable information with [her] when [she] enrolled as a college student." Many of the participants I interviewed in the Center struggled with time management and their study schedules. They mentioned how difficult it was to create a schedule that was flexible for a working commuter student. Despite these difficulties, together these students collaborated on imaging alternatives and strategies for balancing work, school, and family. Consequently, they developed their own "tool-kit" to make this balance a reality for themselves and future students.

Maggie's thoughts were also collectively shared by many of the students in the Center. Jose, one of the incoming students, also led a workshop highlighting his experiences as an undocumented non DACA entrepreneur. In his presentation, he focused on strategies for navigating college as a non DACA student because:

> sometimes students don't really share their experience . . . they think they're the only one so they feel alone . . . but I really wanted to make sure and let people know that I'm making it . . . I started working after high school, saved money, then I enrolled part time but now I'm here full time . . . I'm still working and I started a small catering business, and found small pockets of scholarships for people who are non DACA . . . it is doable, you just have to find the right communities of support on and off campus . . . I just wished I found it earlier.

Unlike many of the other participants, who had both AB540 and DACA, Jose did not have the opportunity to qualify for these aids. He struggled to make ends meet and worked as a dish washer at a restaurant to pay for his college tuition. Jose's experiences particularly sheds light on non DACA students who as he mentioned "feel alone" and isolated because their experiences are not visible. Furthermore, when compared to his DACAmented peers, those without DACA, have very few resources available for them as they continue their educational journey. As Jose reassures it in the passage, "it is doable, you just have to find the right communities of support on and off campus" and it is this type of transferable knowledge that is often shared in the space to inspire individuals. During his interview, Jose mentioned how he started his own business and shared his knowledge as an entrepreneur with the group. He shared tips and techniques of finding distinctive ways to navigate as a non DACA, first-generation, nontraditional student.

Aside from sharing knowledge on academic and entrepreneurships, one of the unique forms of knowledge sharing transpires though budgeting basics. Many of the individuals in the Center are incoming high school students who are not aware of the fundamentals of budgeting or how to save money as a college student. Many of the senior members who have also been part of the community organization are also unfamiliar to this topic. As a result, the Center staff often held workshops to bring more awareness to this issue.

Bi-weekly workshops also consist of topics such as managing expenses as an incoming college student, couponing basics, and other tips that really help individuals make the most of

their assets. For instance, Sally, one of the undocumented transfer students mentioned, “at first I’d watch my friends do these budgeting workshops but I never really understood the importance . . . but then I learned the basics and ever since then, I loved hosting these workshops.” Sally often attended workshops on budgeting with her friends and observing her contribute in these workshops inspired her to lead them for the group. In her interview, Sally mentioned, “I’ve always been super cautious with money . . . my family and I are not doing so well financially so it’s always been a struggle to make sure I’m making the most of the money I do have . . . $5 can go a long way.”

During our conversation, Sally described that she has always been careful as to how she spends her money. Especially because her family is going through financial difficulties, she has to make sure to work with the finances she has at the time. She also mentioned how she saved money as a college student and made the most of what she had:

> When I first came to the community college, I was struggling to make ends meet...but with my friends help, I quickly learned that the financial aid office had a worksheet of the budget I spend on a monthly basis. I practically used that sheet to map out the monthly expense. I saved money on books by using old versions, borrowing or buying them online via amazon prime so I get discounts . . . with food, I’d bring my own food from home or go off campus because it was cheaper compared to on campus . . . and I was always eligible to receive student discounts . . . . Online apps also helped me get coupons and I’d save money that way…with school supplies, I’d always go to the counseling Centers and that’d give our free pens, pencils, notebooks, and scantrons at the beginning of the semester so I’d stock up on those . . . but no one really tells you these hacks . . . you have to figure it out . . . and I really want to share that aspect with the folks in the Center because again, even if you have one or two dollars, that can go a long way.

Sally’s experience of struggling to find resources is one that is relatable to many of her peers. In the case of this participant, she was quickly able to learn about the resources offered to her as a student because of her peers.

Compared to Sally, however, many of her undocumented peers do not figure out these hacks until close to the time of transferring out. As a result, the knowledge that they possess are

not passed on to their peers. Many of the tips Sally mentioned, like creating a monthly budge sheet, saving money on books, food, and school supplies are present on campus. Yet for student who come from undocumented, first-generation, nontraditional students, are not aware of these resources. They have to personally seek out these resources. Sally also mentioned that "no one really tells you these hacks." This response has been consistent among many of the participants throughout the study. The lack of sharing these resources prevents students from getting the most out of their college experiences. However, individuals at the Center are intentional about making sure these funds of knowledge are well documented and passed down from one group to another.

Virtual Communication – Email

Another type of knowledge exchange occurs via email. The Center staff usually kept a sign-in sheet for individuals that attend the meetings. Individuals that signed up were often notified of the current events, the weekly workshops and other events via email. This form of communication made it more accessible for those who could not attend the meetings on a weekly basis. It also made it easier to gather and exchange resources from students, their families and nearby organizations. Most importantly, this form of information exchange was private in comparison to social media sharing that usually occur nowadays. Thus, these email exchange demonstrate how knowledge is being exchanged on a local, regional level, in addition to the more intimate and interpersonal exchanges discussed above.

Typically, agendas, updates and notes are emailed to all current members, their families, alums and partner organizations. According to Brian, another Center staff who was directly responsible for sending emails expanded more on his experience. "We usually kept our agendas really simple but we had tons of academic, financial updates, and notes that we always

documented and sent out to the student community. That way, even if you're not here in person, you can still stay updated." Documenting the information and resources were essential to the space because the staff and members wanted to make sure the conversations and workshops were easily accessible for everyone. Similarly, Christina, one of the student participants, also mentioned that "sometimes I'm not able to attend the meeting because I cannot commute that day or I have an exam so it really helps to have electronic versions of these resources." Especially for commuter students like Christina, who often commuted for over two hours via public transportation to come to the Center, it was more convenient to view the emails rather than visiting in person.

Emails in the form of newsletters, event flyers, or any policy updates are other types of information were also sent out. These types of resources allowed students and their parents to stay informed on the activities that were taken place for that semester. Based on my field observation, I noticed that if the Center created an event to bring more resources to undocumented families, these email notifications were one of the ways to reach out to them. Additionally, if there were any new policy updates or changes to existing policies, all of those updates would be sent out to the members directly via email. Alternatively, students, their family members, and organizations nearby, directly emailed the Center and updated them about current policies, so the community as a whole can stay informed. It also allowed students and other members to take initiative and add reliable resources like news updates or community gathering that was relevant to the Center.

Collectively, this type of exchange allowed individuals at the Center to stay connected and have resources readily available. Also, emails are rather safer than social media platforms where there is a chance of being outed as an undocumented individual. Emails are a more

private, restricted, and a more traditional form of exchange. During the field observations, it became apparent that the Center staff generally knows who the emails are being sent to. More importantly, emails were not generally shared on a bigger scale and the Center staff only shared it with a few people as opposed to opening it up to everyone on the web. Email communication has less public access as well as a less possibility of being seen or shared publicly without consent or knowledge, making it a more reliable source of knowledge exchange.

Embracing Cultural Capital and Generating Wealth as a Community

The second theme that emerged from the study is the ways in which the Center celebrates the cultural capital of its members. The Center makes an intentional effort to use an asset-based approach to ensure the members in the space are acknowledged, appreciated, and valued. Furthermore, the staff and members work collaboratively as a team to build better platforms that support incoming students from marginalized backgrounds. The following section illustrates the various ways the Center identifies CCW of aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, resistance, and spiritual to develop and enhance their value.

Aspirational Capital

"Aspirational capital refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). It is the capacity to advance forward regardless of personal and academic obstacles. The ability to remain hopeful has emerged multiple times throughout the study. For instance, during one of the field observations at the organization, Christina and I had a conversation about the adversities she faces on a daily basis. During the conversation, she mentioned that regardless of the barriers, she still chooses to continue her journey because she has "high hopes for [herself] and the undocumented community." She continues, "I've always been really hopeful ever since I found

out I was undocumented . . . and even on the days I'm going through a lot, I'm hopeful that it'll be ok." Her positivity towards her lived experiences was shared across the room as other students nodded and supported her in solidarity.

Other students walked in the room and quietly sat down next to us. It was one of the few times I was privileged enough to share space with all of the interviewees at once. Watching Christina allowed other students to share their experiences as well. Yazmin mentioned that seeing her parents work hard gives them the positive outlook to continue her journey. She said:

> I see how they struggle . . . my dad has to wake up at 3am to go to work. He's not happy about that but he has no choice. Same with my mom…I know they don't have choices like I have . . . they don't have all of these choices. So I think they want to see the best version of me and I wanted to see the best version of me.

Yazmin also supports Christina's thoughts and further elaborates on how her parents serve as her motivational goals. In the interview, she elaborates that both of her parents work multiple jobs because of their financial challenges. Unlike Yazmin, they did not have a choice to enroll in a school let alone pursue a higher education. Yazmin mentions how she aspires to be the best version of herself not just for herself but also for her parents.

Following the meeting, the Center staff also shared their experiences on this topic. Brian, one of the Center staff said, "students in the space really demonstrate elevated levels of aspirations and motivational values." His remarks aligned with the other Center staff Ana. During the interview, Ana also mentioned how many of the members in the Center are highly "motivated and driven" and the ways in which the Center encourages these students to continue to keep an optimistic outlook. She said:

> Undocumented folks that I have interacted with here at the Center are so resilient and optimistic . . . they keep going regardless of the challenges . . . most of these kids got into four-year-universities, they know how to navigate, they know how to make the most with what they have . . . and they chose to come to community college because this is the one of the ways to get to where they want to go . . . and our goals are to create an empowering

> space so they can persevere through their challenges . . . they're going through a lot . . . the least we can do is to hold space . . . let them know they're valued and remind them of their potential.

Ana's remarks demonstrate that individuals in the Center are aspiring scholars pursuing their educational journey despite of the obstacles in their pathway. She further adds that many of the students in the Center are high achieving individuals who have been accepted to four-year-institutions of their choice.

Due to financial and other complexities tied to their legal status, however, many chose to attend a community college instead. She says, "they know how to navigate, they know how to make the most with what they have" and in other words, students innately possess capitals as they enter higher education. But they also need empowering community space, mentors, peers who can "let them know they're valued and remind them of their potential." In other words, even though the students innately possess the aspirational capital, the Center also helps them maintain their aspirational capitals through a relational model. The Center "hold space" for students, creates opportunities like individual one-on-one affirmation check-ins as well as bigger group meetings to remind students of their values and abilities to succeed as scholars. All of the students in the study have affirmed that this type of nurturing uplifts them and makes them feel valued as individuals.

Linguistic Capital

Linguistic capital "includes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style" (Yosso, 2005, p. 78). This is the capital that enables students in immigrant communities to think from a diverse perspective and communicate in a more holistic manner. Linguistic capitals also emerged multiple times throughout the study. All of the students in the Center were bilingual and were able to speak and

write fluently in Spanish. Sally, one of the students in the Center, mentioned that speaking a second language helps her feel connected to her family and community. She elaborated, "speaking in Spanish really helps me talk to my family and community . . . some of the elders in the community also doesn't speak English and I just feel connected to them when talking in my own language . . . I really value that." In this example, Sally is referring to her unique linguistic capital and the ability to connect with others using her assets. She is also indicating her appreciation for the language and the ways that she can cultivate relations with her relatives.

A few students were also multilingual and spoke a third language in addition to English. Gisele, another student in the Center, mentioned that she can speak Italian fluently because she gained the skills through a language course at her high school. Similar to Sally, she also mentioned that knowing multiple languages helped her communicate with her relatives, her community and most importantly, advance in the professional setting. She added, "You know, knowing more than one language really helped me get a job . . . I worked so many jobs as a translator and that really helped me gain my confidence." Like many of the students in the study, Gisele struggled with writing and reading in English but in this example, she demonstrates how she was able to utilize her assets to gain employment. Her linguistic skills enabled her to be a translator and that in turn contributed to her confidence.

Students in the Center also demonstrated examples of how their linguistic capitals were harnessed at the Center. Sally, one of the student participants mentioned that "the Center encouraged us to speak in Spanish and if someone didn't know Spanish, we'd translate or take turns teaching them a few words here and there during the meeting." This is an example of how the Center staff especially encouraged students and other members to speak in their native languages. Members who attended the Center and did not speak Spanish, were assisted by other

students to either translate the conversations or teach them words to better understand the conversations. Even though all of the students in this study were from Mexico and spoke Spanish, there were a few other students from other communities who did not speak in Spanish, yet were also encouraged to speak in their native languages as well.

Another example is of how the Center encourages students to utilize their linguistic capitals is demonstrated by Jose. During the interview, I asked him to share his favorite memory of the Center and he said the following:

> A few months back, I went to present at a high school and there was a student with his aunt . . . I don't recall what grade he was in but he didn't come with his parents. His aunt was with him and she didn't speak English but she was very supportive . . . and was interested in him getting the DACA . . . but because of the language gap, they had a difficult time talking to the school officials . . . I talked to the family, translated the information, and helped them file for the DACA . . . . So knowing that people can come to us or Center staff, ask us for help, and someone from our team will explain everything in their own language meant everything to me. Knowing that they can ask us any questions, without fee charge, free, that was the best.

This example demonstrates how individuals like Jose use linguistic capital to assist members of his community. The presentation he is referring to is a workshop that the Center creates and implements at local high schools. Many times, parents or guardians of high school students attend these events to learn more information on the ways that they can help their families. This is an example where a relative, the aunt, did not speak English. However, she was eager to help her nephew. Because the school staff was unable to assist her due to the language barrier, students like Jose, came forward to assist her. Not only did he serve as a translator by providing information and helping the student file for DACA, Jose also served as a reliable source of support because of his experiences and linguistic skills. Furthermore, Jose explains that speaking in a language that is meaningful for him made this experience one that is memorable.

Familial Capital

Familial capital "refers to those cultural knowledges nurtured among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition" (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). It is the capital that enables communities of color to draw from inherited ancestral wisdom that is innately present within them. Many of the participants in the study attributed to familial capital, especially their mom, as a primary means of support during community college. In the passage below, Maggie explains how her mom is the "biggest support system" and mentor who support her educational journey:

> my mom works two jobs and babysits kids from the neighborhood during her free time . . . those kids she babysits sees her more than me (laughing) . . . but when she had time off of work, she'd make sure to ask me about my classes . . . on weekends, she'd would attend financial aid workshops at the Center . . . my mom is my biggest support system. She's so smart, she would be aware of things like financial aid even before I knew about it . . . and ask me questions like, "Oh, this is the cost or this would happen," she knew that after community college, a four-year-university would be hard to pay for but she always told me, "Don't worry, if we need to work our asses off to get you there, we will do it! We will do whatever it takes!"

Maggie noted that her mom works multiple jobs and rarely has time to see her. She even jokes about it and mentions that the neighbor's kids see her more than her own family. However, Maggie also mentions that her mom is the central figure in the family that checks in with her about her classes, attends essential meetings with her, and asks knowledgeable questions to ensure that she is moving towards a transfer pathway. In the interview, I asked Maggie as to how her mom is so knowledgeable, let alone so well informed about navigating a foreign institution. Maggie smiled and replied by saying, "she just is, she's so smart and I don't know how, but she knows a little bit about everything . . . sometimes she learns it on her own and other times she just knows it." This is the intergenerational knowledge and the types of assets that immigrant communities intrinsically carry with them. These are the knowledges that are passed

down from generation to generation. Even though Maggie's mom is unaware of the multiple ways to navigate institutional systems, she still servers as a resource by relying on her assets and internal instincts to guide her daughter through post-secondary education.

Maggie's passage further illuminates on how the Center not only values their members who are primarily students, but also families, which is the core unit of the community. By supporting their families through workshops, community gatherings, and actively listening to the wisdom they bring in, the Center helps to harness the community capitals. Maggie further adds that "it is really nice that the Center offers these free workshops or sometimes events for us especially on the weekends . . . it helps my family have a space too." Christina also noted that the Center provides her family with a space "to hangout, attend events or just share their experiences." Both students expressed the importance for their families to have a space to belong as much as themselves.

While the Center's goals are to primarily assist students, occasionally, they will also host workshops and events for families so they can build community. Gisele also mentioned:

> I brought my mom and she also engaged with other parents who had undocumented students so that communication and not necessarily networking but that communication made it different than the undocumented student club on campus. Because at the undocumented student club, it was specifically students…more students based as opposed to the Aspiration Center where we got to engage in the community with our family.

Gisele describes the engagement, interactions, and community building that occurs when families are invited to the Center. This is another way the Center harnesses linguistic capital as well. Furthermore, Gisele adds that while the undocumented student club on campus focuses on students, the Aspiration Center on the other hand, takes their services one step further to create meaningful interactions with their families as well. This is one of the main ways that they incorporate the off campus community into the space. By incorporating the experiences of

families, relatives, and other community members, the Center not only adds to the cultural knowledge but also incorporates value to the community legacy.

Social Capital

Social Capital "can be understood as networks of people and community resources. These peer and other social contacts can provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society's institutions" (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). Many of the undocumented students in the study mentioned that in addition to their families, they also had a community or a social network team off campus that supported them with their college journey. Jose mentioned that he had "a few friends outside of high school that went to four-year universities that helped me select the best community college according to my major." Because Jose did not have his DACA, it was difficult for him to pay for his tuition out of pocket and needed to find a community college that would offer the right courses for him to quickly finish and graduate. His peers who had already had the advantage of successfully navigating the universities, served as an asset to him during his college selection process.

Similar to Jose, Sally also mentioned that she had several community members who also assisted her during her first semester at the community college. Like most of the students in the study, Sally was accepted to a four-year-university directly from high school. However, due to economic barriers, she attended a local community college nearby. Throughout the interview she mentioned that she resented her community college experience in the beginning because she was the only one out of her peer group that went to a community college. All of her friends were already accepted and enrolled at a four-year-institution in another state. Having an undocumented status with extreme financial challenges, Sally did not have the same privileges as her documented peers. She says the following:

> I saw community college as a stigma . . . so I was like "omg I don't want to go there" and also all of my friends were going to four-year school . . . so I thought well they're leaving, I was pretty much the only one who stayed local . . . my best friend went all the way to Boston and everyone went up north and then I was like, "I don't want to stay here . . . I want to go to a four-year-school," not necessarily because I want to stay at home but I had worked hard for it so I was like why couldn't I go either? So I hated my first semester there . . . I went to class and went home and went to class and went home but then I met some undocumented students who were part of the Dream Center at the college and they also were members of the Aspiration Center. As I started talking to them more and more often, I realized that it's not true that all the people who don't work hard, or people who don't get good grades and people who are never going to get an education go to community college . . . there are other people who go to community college because it's their only option, people like me, and I felt so grateful to be connected with some of the members . . . they really helped me with resources and so many opportunities . . . and eventually helped me transfer out to a four-year-institution that I've always dreamed of attending.

Sally elaborated on a theme that emerged a few times in the study. Undocumented students who were high achieving, top of their high school class, and successful in the academia, initially devalued the community college route. Like many of their documented peers, they were also accepted to prestigious universities but couldn't attend due to tuition or out of state fees. As a result, they watched their peers fulfil their dreams of attending higher education while they stayed back home.

Many students like Sally resented their journey in the beginning until she met undocumented peers from undocu-networks who connected her with the Undocumented Student Center on campus called the Dream Center, as well as the off campus site known as the Aspiration Center. Sally mentioned that the members in both of these Centers provided her with resources and notified her about numerus opportunities that not only helped her succeed in community college but also transfer out to a prestigious university. These support groups were essential in creating a smooth transition for students like Sally during her time in community college.

Gisele, another transfer student, specifically mentioned how the Center acknowledged her assets as a community college student and connected her with transfer students to provide her with a strong sense of community off campus. Gisele elaborated more on her experience:

> I was part of numerous extracurricular activities, support groups, and peer groups at the community college . . . but I didn't know anyone at the four-year-universities and the Center staff helped me connect with students outside of the community college . . . and that really helped me form a good connection with people that were already making it . . . and empowered me to keep moving forward.

While students come in the Center with strong social capital, there are a few ways that the Center enhance those capitals to enrich their experiences. For instance, students like Gisele who are already well adjusted to the college needed assistance in making off campus relations. As a result, the Center introduced her to transfer students from the local universities. Not only did that enable Gisele to form connections with another student population but also, empowered her to continue her education.

Other ways the Center harnessed social capital included hosting networking sessions with transfer representatives from local universities during the meetings. Students in the interview mentioned that meeting other undocumented transfer students who have successfully transferred to a four-year-university allowed them to visualize and fulfill their transfer journey. Maggie mentioned, "seeing and talking to these undocumented, first-generation, transfer students really helped me see myself transfer to a local four-year-university one day and they offered so much valuable information that I never even imaged of having." Furthermore, she added that the resources they offered her were unimaginable. As an undocumented, first-generation student herself, she valued meeting people who were also on a similar journey, but just a few years ahead. The transfer students influenced her in actualizing her dreams into reality.

Navigational Capital

Navigational Capital "refers to skills of maneuvering through social institutions. Historically, this infers the ability to maneuver through institutions not created with Communities of Color in mind" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). Navigational capital is one of the key themes that emerged from the study. All of the participants mentioned that it was extremely challenging navigating through community college when they initially started. For instance, Christina noted that she was unaware that she had to take a placement exam prior to enrollment:

> Nobody told me about the placement test. I didn't know I had to study before so I ended up in the lowest classes but that didn't stop me because my first step was to sign up and second step was to take the placement test, and I'm like, I'm already here. I'm going to do it…so I went back to the admissions office and found out that I could retake the tests. I also had a mentor that went through the same thing so I talked to him…I found sample tests online, studied from the samples, and retook the test. I did much better next time.

Like many of the undocumented participants in the study, she initially came to the community college to sign up for classes and to pay for the admissions fees. However, she was uninformed and unprepared to take a standard math as well as an English placement test. As a result, she was placed in the remedial courses. Christina later figured out that she could retake these exams with the help of her mentor. Not only did she figure out that she had mentors, preparatory resources to help her better prepare for it, but also, she performed better next time around. Students like Christina, are often unaware of the strengths that they bring with them to community colleges but once they learn to navigate from their strengths, they become even more empowered individuals.

Aside from placement exams, students have also mentioned other challenges in navigating community college. Maggie also mentioned that they had a difficult time with time management:

> In college, time management was big issue. My first semester, I'd take five classes and I was coming to school Monday through Friday. Sometimes, I commuted in traffic for hours and waking up early…I had no idea how to manage my time . . . guess all of that it brought me down . . . I also didn't have anyone to guide me so I had to think strategically about how to make my schedule and everything . . . after that first semester, I took only 2 classes and I focused in those 2 classes. The first year, I wasn't working but then I got involved with classes, clubs, some other orgs . . . and I learned how to manage my time . . . it took a while for me to learn but I hustled until I figured it out.

Time management is one of the main themes that emerged in the study. Maggie, like most first-generation, undocumented, commuter student, took classes every single day because that she thought this was the norm. Since she was used to the Monday–Friday schedule in high school, she applied the same strategies when selecting courses in community college. Waking up early, commuting back and forth for miles, in heavy traffic five days a week, enabled her to experience the frustration of going to campus every day. She also didn't have a mentor or peers guiding her which made her journey even more challenging. However, she quickly learned to tap into her navigational strengths in order to prioritize her courses, create a plan of action, and manage her time efficiently.

During the meetings, I observed that some of the senior students like Christina and Maggie openly shared their experiences of navigating the community college with other members at the Center. They also put forth tremendous efforts to create and implement time management, resource sharing, and other informal, student-led workshops at the Center to advise their peers on how to navigate the institution as an undocumented, first-generation, commuter student. Yazmin, one of the new incoming students, mentioned how helpful it is to hear other students lived experiences, join in during workshops, and have readily available resources all in one place. She reflected, "events and workshops put on by the Center helped me out a lot . . . especially because I didn't have to run around to find everything everywhere, it was all in one place." In other words, not only were the workshops informative but also, all of the resources

that she would normally come across after visiting multiple offices in the college, were located in the Center, "in one place". These resources were either brought by students or dropped off by staff or faculty from the community college so that all the incoming students were well-informed. This form of reciprocity has been effective in helping students navigate the institution. The Center also offers stationary items (e.g., pens, pencils, scantrons, and calculators), free printing, and a tutoring service that has been well received among students. Collectively, all of these services enhance the social and navigational capitals of all the participants and allowed them to have a smooth transition to the community college.

Resistance Capital

Resistant capital "refers [to] knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). This is the capacity to combat the oppressive structures in society. Participants in the study demonstrated resistance capital in multiple ways. For instance, Jose mentioned that the college officials did not provide enough funding for the undocumented student club on campus to host their annual events. As a result, he organized a meeting with his peers along with other campus allies to schedule a meeting with the funding directors. His efforts were successful in creating more advocacy and generating more funding for the club. In the passage below, Jose describes his advocacy efforts in detail:

> the undocumented student club on campus has been inactive for a few semesters now . . . recently that we've picked it up and made it successful, we don't have enough funding…I met with . . . [the] people in charge and they gave us money to host more events . . . sometimes it feels like only students care about these clubs and not too much effort is being given from the staff . . . but our members are resilient and we will continue to advocate on behalf of this club so that it can grow successfully and help other students.

Jose's frustration with the campus officials has been consistent with other students as well. Many of the participants also noted that due to inconsistencies with a campus advisor overseeing the club, funding issues, and lack of members, the club has been inactive for several semesters.

As Jose describes in the passage above, only recently has it been active again. As more and more students are joining the club, members like Jose have been actively creating events to encourage members to join the space.

Due to funding issues, the club has been decreasing their efforts in hosting events, workshops, and other activities. Jose, along with his many of the campus allies, were successful in creating a meeting with the funding directors and advocating on behalf of the club members. His efforts were not only effective in acquiring more funding but also, the directors provided a meeting space as well as other resources for the members to meet on a regular basis. Jose and many of the participants in the study in many ways exemplify the definition of resistance. Not only does he push for advocacy efforts for his community but also, by utilizing his resistance capital, Jose propels forward to be an agent of change.

Due to the inconsistencies with the on campus student club, many students will attend the Aspiration Center instead. According to Christina, she prefers meeting at the off campus Aspiration Center instead because it is a fixed location that is always open for students. She said, “even though the Center is a few blocks away, I don’t really mind walking here because it’s a consistent meeting space . . . you don’t have to fight for a meeting room or resources.” In this example, she clarifies that the Aspiration Center is more accessible for students and that many of the members do not have to constantly struggle for resources, funding, or an advisor to keep it actively moving forward. The ease of walking over along with the abundant resources, make the Aspiration Center a viable location for students.

Furthermore, there are numerous ways that the Aspiration Center harnesses resistance capital for their members. First, the Center encourages members, especially those who feel comfortable, to take initiative and create events to advocate on behalf of the immigrant

community. In addition to creating events, they are also encouraged to take part in existing events nearby. For instance, during the May Day Rally, the members at the Center collaborated with the college officials as well as other community organizations nearby to plan rides and participate in the marches. Jose added in his interview that events like these "bring people together from different parts of campus and other locations nearby…and reminds us that we're all in this together." In this example, Jose demonstrates the collaboration that takes place because of immigration events or activism efforts influenced by the Center, building a connection with both community members and campus partners as a whole. By hosting or actively partaking in these events, not only empowers students but also, allows them to recognize their strengths and capacity as transformative change agents.

Also, the Center offers informal student led workshops for individuals like students, family members, or local community members, who do not feel comfortable attending marches. These workshops are also a way for members to practice their advocacy in without being in the forefront of the movement. During the field observations, many of the Center members did not feel comfortable going to marches. As a result, they stayed at the Center and silently protested along with other members on behalf of the community.

Lastly, the Center collaborates with partner organizations in other states to provide internships for their members so they can practice their advocacy off campus. For instance, Gisele shared her experience as she was awarded with a paid internship to visit Washington DC along with a few members of the Aspiration Center. She emphasized, "if it weren't for the Center, it wouldn't happen. The staff helped me with every aspect of the internships . . . they prepared me for the story, mock interview, the presentation and everything." Gisele felt that the Center staff greatly impacted her advocacy efforts. Not only did they notify her of the

internship, but because of their efforts in guiding her through every step of the internship procedures, she was accepted to the program. This internship empowered her to acknowledge her resistance capital and utilize her assets as an undocumented student to combat systemic oppression in society. Similarly, the Center also provides other opportunities for their members to take part in advocacy efforts so they too can resist systems of oppression and become agents of change in their community.

Spiritual Capital

Spiritual capital is another theme that emerged from the study. While Yosso (2005), did not specifically include this capital in her original theory, scholars like Pérez Huber builds on the theory by expanding on this capital (Pérez Huber, 2009). Pérez Huber notes that spiritual capital "can be understood as a set of resources and skills rooted in a spiritual connection to a reality greater than oneself" (p. 721). It is the capital that allows individuals to draw from their "ancestral beliefs and practices learned from one's family, community, and inner self . . . spirituality in its many forms can provide a sense of hope and faith" (p. 721). Especially in research and literature, this form of capital or the spiritual narratives of the immigrant communities are an unacknowledged and undervalued asset. This capital is one that builds on ancestral wisdom, experience, and tradition, that allows individuals to draw from a greater purpose or a greater good like "higher power guiding the journey," according to Christina. Christina refers to higher power as a foundational grounding that there is something else beyond herself and her own personal success that is "guiding [her] journey." She further added that, "I'm going to do whatever it takes to push forward in life because I have the support from my parents you know, I'm going to hope and pray something is going to happen." She believes in the core values that allows her to "push forward" and perceive life in an optimistic way. While

the Aspiration Center staff does not harness specific spiritual practice or identity, the staff does recognize the value of inclusive spiritual worldview practices in solidarity for their members.

Generating Wealth as A Community

With the right affirmations, recognition, and encouragement from the Aspiration Center, urges individuals from undocumented communities to further develop their resilience and internal capacity. The Center makes a conscious effort to also remind students that they have the wisdom, power, and autonomy of their ancestors. Collaboratively, these internal assets then propel students forward to generate wealth as a community. For instance, some of the ways that the Center encourages their members to generate wealth is through collaboration with the nearby community college as well as local high schools. Especially for incoming community college students, the Center staff and members create events and implements better platforms (i.e., events, workshops, and open discussion spaces) that enable them to have a smooth transition to the university. Sally, elaborated more on her experience from engaging in one of these events:

> I love interacting with them . . . and telling the incoming students about my experiences, and the great things I'm doing . . . it is really empowering to see that I was once in their shoes and with the help of the Center, I'm moving forward . . . I am not ashamed of my status and instead I'm recognizing that I have the power within me to do anything I want...and since working with these students . . . I really want them to know that they have what it takes to do anything they want . . . they shouldn't let a piece of paper define them. This is one of the main things that I talk about in events or any of the workshop . . . just for people to know that they also have what it takes.

Sally's remarks not only describe her enthusiasm towards her personal experiences but also demonstrates her need to share her experience and knowledge with other students. She further elaborates on how she sees herself growing over the years, becoming more empowered, and continuing to push forward regardless of her barriers. She also adds that she is no longer ashamed of her legal status yet she is learning to utilize her broad base of strengths within her to lift her up. She concludes her thoughts by mentioning that incoming students must recognize

their assets and operate from a place of strength. Furthermore, one of the main ways that she generates community wealth is by having these conversations with students to constantly remind them that they do not come from a deficit background. Instead, they come from communities of strength which is not often discussed in academia.

Promoting Resources for Student Access and Opportunity

The third theme that emerged from the study is promoting resources for students access and opportunity. During the field observations and conversations with individuals at the Center, four types of distinctive resources emerged from the data: (a) academic resources, including learning services, and college access at the community college and high school level; (b) financial resources; (c) social resources; and (d) informational resources, emerged from the data. Both staff and students at the Center confirmed these were most sought after and utilized by the members. While resources similar to these are also being offered at the community college nearby, students reported that the services at the Center are more accessible, open to the community, and free to use. Each of the services are described below in greater detail.

Academic Resources

Academic resources are one of the core services that the Center offers to their members. These resources are provided in two distinct ways. First, the Center provides learning resources in the form of a quiet, physical place to study, computers for coursework, free printing, and occasionally, tutoring for those who seek additional guidance. Second, the Center serves as a hub for demystifying the college going process. Some of the ways that the Center provides college access support is by taking college trips, creating college preparatory workshops (e.g., application process, personal statement, funding, etc.), providing letter of recommendations, and cultivating a networking support group with the nearby community college to ensure that

students have a smooth transition to a four-year-university of their choice. The following paragraphs will demonstrate the two distinct ways these resources serve the broader undocumented student community.

Learning services. The learning resources such as a study space, computers, printers, tutoring services provided by the Center has been well received by all of the members in the study. While these services are also offered at the community college, it is often challenging for the participants to take full advantage of them. For instance, Jose mentioned, “the college has a library . . . but getting a room is difficult . . . there’s a limit on how long you can stay . . . I just want to have all my work and supplies in one place and the Center really has everything in one place.” According to Jose, the library at the community college is overcrowded and has limited reservation hours.

Throughout the interview Jose mentioned the discomfort of being “kicked out of places because he stayed there for too long.” Other participants in the study have also affirmed that it is difficult to find a study spot on campus especially because it is overcrowded or has a time restraint. Jose also mentions that he prefers having a physical space, one that is stable, where he can not only focus but also keep his academic materials all in one place. Especially because all of the members are undocumented and faced numerous obstacles in their academic journey, having a literal physical space, provides an additional layer of support for many individuals.

In addition to a physical space, students have also mentioned that they prefer coming to the Aspiration Center to use the computer and take advantage of the printing services. Christina said, “it’s a bit of walking but I rather come to the Center because I don’t have to wait in long lines to use the computer . . . on campus, I can only print five free copies, whereas here, I have access to unlimited copies.” Similar to Jose, Christina also shares why she comes to the Center

for additional supplies like computer and printers. Because of the long lines and the limited printing policies, the members prefer walking over to the Center instead. Also, the unlimited computer usage time as well as free printing, make it convenient for them to use these resources in comparison to the campus services. Tutoring services are also provided at the Center. During the field observations, participants like Christina and many others noted that they have benefited from these tutoring services. Even though the tutor is present only a few days a week, the Center staff have confirmed that most, if not all of the students, come to take advantage of the coaching services at the Center.

College access at the community college level. The Center also serves as a catalyst to provide college access and transfer pathway to demystify the college going process for their members as well as high school students. To further assist their current members, some of the services provided by the Center include college trips, transfer preparatory workshops (e.g., demystifying application process, personal statement, funding, and more), and assistance with recommendation letters. Furthermore, the Center also cultivates a networking support group with the adjacent community to promote a college going culture. This is one the main ways the CBO and some of the members of the community college collaborate to show support for the undocumented community. The Center also extends this type of collaboration to local high schools in an effort to bridge the educational gap in higher education.

One of the ways that the Center assists with the college going process is by connecting with allies at local four-year-universities to host college trips. College trips were planned based on preferences of the group as a whole. For instance, if there was a batch of students that wanted to visit four-year-universities, the Center staff would collaborate with students and the universities they wanted to visit, to create a campus visit specifically for these students. Because

the Center staff were familiar with allies in various campuses, once a campus visit was requested with a local four-year-university, the university would then reach out to their specific undocumented student groups to create a more inclusive visit for the members. Jose for instance mentioned that, "if we wanted to go to a specific university, Ana or Brian would talk people from that university and make it happen . . . but we had the freedom to choose where we wanted to go and what we did there." Jose describes an example of how the members in the Center had the autonomy in planning an effective college visit while the staff served as guides through the process. Jose also added that either Ana or Brian would personally drive the members to a nearby location if they were not offered any transportation support. He also noted that while the community college nearby offers a similar trip, they however are competitive and "you would have to be enrolled in certain programs that would take you to these trips . . . you couldn't choose where you wanted to go." Further affirming that the Center value their autonomy and provide resources to assist them with their post-secondary success.

Aside from campus tours, the Center also created and implemented several successful transfer preparatory workshops on the application process, personal statement goals, and the funding process. Even though all of the members in the center are first-generation students from low income areas, these students however are high achieving students and many of them were accepted to a four-year-university directly after high school. Financial barriers along with their legal status prevented them from accepting the offers. The Center however, acknowledge that these individuals were not from disadvantaged backgrounds, rather a diverse group of individuals, with various forms of CCW. As a result, through asset-based pedagogies, the Center harnessed their unique assets. For instance, the staff often invited individuals from other four-

year-universities to lead a personal statement or funding workshop. Gisele, one of the transfer students elaborated more on how these workshops assisted her with the transfer process:

> The personal statement workshops really helped . . . and having that community really helped in developing my first draft of my personal statement and doing all those little steps that they did to help me transfer out, yeah it was amazing . . . and it gave me [the] tools that I needed to transfer out.

She noted that not only were these workshops helpful but also they provided a community of people that read through her first few drafts of the personal statement. Because of their efforts in guiding her though the revision process, truly helped her develop a successful draft of her statement, that eventually led her to be accepted to a prestigious university. She also mentioned that these workshops provided her with the tools to successfully transfer out of the community college. Furthermore, throughout these workshops, the Center members would not only participate in the planning process, but they also utilized their linguistic capitals by translating it in Spanish for their parents and other community members. During the field observations as well as through personal accounts, students have affirmed that these services have helped to ease their fears about transferring to a four-year-university.

Furthermore, the staff would also provide letter of recommendations for those that volunteered at the center or served in their community for a certain number of hours. Both Ana and Brian served as guides to many of these students and assisted them throughout their post-secondary education. Both of the staff were well aware that their members needed letter of recommendations when applying to four-year-universities. As a result, along with the college preparatory workshops, letter of recommendation workshops was also implemented. During these workshops, the staff shared their experiences on how to ask for letter of recommendations, when to request it, who to request it from, and if requested in advanced, they also served as letter writers. According to Sally, another student who successfully transferred to a four-year-

universities said, “Ana helped me out by writing a letter of recommendation that I desperately needed . . . and because she knew me on a personal level, helped me even more.” Sally depicts a memory that is seen too often with students in the undocumented community. Because many of the students work and take classes part time, they are not able to form meaningful connections with their faculties at the community college. However, because the center staff recognizes their unique strengths, appreciates them on a personal level, and can write these letters in a more meaningful way.

Finally, the Center develops a partnership with the nearby community college by actively working with some of their staff and faculty to create networking events as well as ally trainings. Networking events are occasionally hosted by the Aspiration Center to introduce the staff and faculty to the members at the space. The staff put forth great efforts to ensure that the community college team members are well aware of the undocumented students at the Center. This type of partnership was particularly observed prior to the college application season. For instance, a few campus partners volunteered their time during weekends to review personal statements and have one-on-one session with students. The personal statement revisions enabled students to build genuine relationships with other staff and faculty members. While some read personal statements, others spent one-on-one time with students to discuss their career goals, reviewed resumes, and connect on an interpersonal level to so that students can successfully transfer out. Students like Gisele, one of the students who have transferred out, mentioned that, “one of the professors from the Sociology department read my personal statement and gave me really good comments that helped me so much . . . he really made me feel like I can get in.” Gisele noted that not only do the professors genuinely care for students but also make them feel validated, which in turn aspires them to continue their academic journey.

Aside from providing feedback, these staff and faculty members often serve as liaisons for the CBO and the community college in advocating on behalf of the undocumented student community. For instance, Ana and Brian often trained staff and faculty members, on the various ways they can serve as allies. As a result, those who were connected with the CBO, were able to expand their knowledge of students in the undocumented community and advocate on behalf of the students. Furthermore, if the community college held a college night, transfer workshops, or other faculty training, the members and center staff were invited to take part in these events. This reciprocity was also observed at the center. When the center creates their own version of transfer workshops or other events, these staff and faculty would also join to assist the students and the community. This collaboration greatly impacted the community efforts to create solid partnerships with the community college.

College access at the high school level. The Aspiration Center also created a similar college access pathway for high school students. Current members in the center created workshops, trips to the community college, and formed discussion groups for those who needed support prior to application season. For instance, in the interview, Maggie mentioned that she volunteered her time to visit local high schools near the college. Many of these high schools are identified by current members or other community organizers to ensure that these high schools were welcoming for the undocumented students to visit. From the field observations, it was apparent that in order to reserve a spot to host a workshop or an event, the center members would first communicate with a representative at the school, like a teacher or an advisor for the Undocumented Student Program, prior to visiting the site in person. Some of the workshops employed by students include topics such as applying to college directly from high school, demystifying the financial aid process, and navigating college as a first-generation student. All

of the participants in this study shared via interview that were enthusiastic about sharing their experiences, knowledge, and expertise with these high school students.

Financial Resources

In addition to academic resources, the Center also provides financial resources. Because many of the participants in the study were in financial need, the Center created a few scholarship opportunities to help alleviate their economic barriers. While the community college also offered scholarships, many of those scholarships were competitive, open to a large pool of applicants, and occasionally had citizenship requirements. As a result, the Center created scholarship opportunities that were open to all students from immigrant backgrounds, who are in financial need, who have completed a certain number of volunteer hours, and/or those who assisted in creating and implementing workshops with the organization. For instance, Christina mentioned that she volunteered numerous hours at the Center, created and implemented workshops, as well as become a lead mentor for the space which made her a competitive applicant to receive an award. She describes her experiences below:

> The Aspiration Center, they would help you out so much. You'd apply for a scholarship that they would give out. It was a $500 scholarship…they'd give it out every summer but you'd have to complete certain number of volunteer hours. So, obviously I'm doing what I love, helping out people as many ways I can help out, and to be able to get a scholarship for that service was great . . . I was fortunate enough to get it for 2 years.

Christina describes one of the many ways the Center assisted students with financial support. The Center specifically saved $500 for students who volunteered their time and distributed the award towards summer semester. As Christina and many others in the study affirmed, they loved volunteering for the Center, supporting the community, and were very passionate about giving back. As a result, they did not view it as an inconvenient checklist of items that needed to be completed in order to be eligible a scholarship. Similarly, the Center also provided smaller

scholarships to those students who created and implemented workshops at the local community college or high school. Yazmin for instance mentioned, "if a community group needed a workshop or to host an event, we would create the events and make sure everything goes well . . . . Little side jobs, also helped me become eligible to receive scholarships." Yazmin noted other ways of becoming eligible for scholarships which include creating workshops and ensuring it is successfully implemented. These type of tasks would also make her eligible for scholarships in order to fund her education. These services provided an alternative pathway for students to receive financial aid which assisted them with tuition, fees, and other academic expenses.

Social Resources

The Center also makes an effort to provide resources to help students form communities. Several students have expressed their gratitude for having a physical location in close proximity to the community college. Due to their undocumented status, many of the participants in the study moved homes and institutions several times. Because these students move so often, they are constantly living in a state of limbo as they do not fit in the academic space or their home environments. This is one of the reasons that the participants appreciate having a space that is consistent, with reliable staff members as well as allies, who provide consistent support. For instance, Maggie elaborated on this topic and mentioned the following:

> I moved so much that it was really hard to find a community . . . and I'm so grateful for the Center . . . it is my second home . . . a place that I can always come back to not only for academic stuff but I will always find people who care about me . . . a place where I'm not judged but I'm treated with respect and my journey is valued."

Being an undocumented, first-generation, nontraditional, commuter student creates multiple challenges for Maggie and one of them include finding a community of support. In the passage above, Maggie demonstrates her frustration in finding a community. She then adds that she is

appreciative of the Center, which she describes as her "second home". She continues to elaborate and emphasizes that the Center is not just for academics, it is also a space for building community, networking, and interacting with people who will value her lived experiences.

Informational Resources

Informational resources are also another form of support provided by the Center. These resources include information on DACA, legal aid, or any other financial aid related issues. During the field observations, majority of the informational resources shared in the space were DACA related. The Center staff made an effort to bring in attorneys and other reliable community members who updated students and their families on the updated policies. Also, working closely with staff and faculty from the community college, the Center created a list of organizations that students could visit, if they had additional questions that needed to be addressed. Finally, the Center worked closely with their members to identify financial aid support in the form of scholarships that could be offered to students from a diverse immigrant community.

CHAPTER 6:

DISCUSSION

This study explores how CBOs like the Aspiration Center assist a diverse undocumented community and provide transformative resources. To do so, this study addresses two pressing research questions: 1) What strategies does the Aspiration Center use to support undocumented students and their needs? 2) How does the Aspiration Center organize and mobilize the community cultural wealth of undocumented student? Based on my findings, I argue that: (a) The Aspiration Center cultivates a safe, empowering space through the exchange of knowledge; (b) the Center embraces cultural capital and generates wealth as a community; and (c) the Center promotes resources for student access and opportunity. The discussions section below provides an in-depth review of the outcomes of this study. This section concludes by extending on the research questions in order to support this study.

The first finding that emerged from the study is the ways in which the Aspiration Center cultivates a safe, empowering space through the exchange of knowledge. The Center achieves this by (a) a literal, physical, stable space, where students come to work, rest, and build community and (b) offering a physical place where students can safely engage in their own place-based knowledge production. Three primary ways that knowledge is exchanged is through dialogues during current events prior to the meeting, informal student led discussions, and via email. Through this exchange, the Center staff and members are able to share resources with one another and keep each other informed. Scholars like Yosso (2005) and many others in the field have also demonstrated the ways in which funds of knowledge is exchanged to uplift communities as a unit. This study is one that affirms previous research and demonstrates how the Aspiration Center, a distinct site that is in proximity with a community college, can also be a

supplementary space for knowledge production. Therefore, the Center demonstrates that non-traditional spaces can produce knowledge that contributes to the post-secondary success of undocumented students.

Another finding that emerged from the study is how the Aspiration Center embrace the cultural capital of their members, collaborate as a team, and generate wealth as a community. The findings for this section is also consistent with the work of scholars such as Pérez Huber (2009), Valenzuela et al. (2015), and Pérez et al. (2010). As previously mentioned, Yosso's (2005) brief also aligned with the study. According to Yosso, individuals from marginalized communities are often viewed from a deficit perspective. Often, their CCW are undervalued, unrecognized, and unappreciated. Especially in the context of undocumented students, because they are not easily visible and their CCW is not easily identified, make it easier for students in this community to be easily dismissed because they do not fit the elite understanding of the four-year-university. As a result, the Center deliberately makes an effort to understand the complexities of their challenges. The Center directly responds to their disadvantages (e.g., invisibility, fear, shame, and more) by cultivating CCW model to counter these barriers and enact a different way of reality for its target population. One of the ways that the Center caters to the unique needs of their members is through the CCW model. By recognizing various capitals such as aspiration, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, resistance, and spiritual capital, the Center values their lived experiences. Collectively, these approaches not only allow the Center to draw strength from their members but also utilize their assets to generate wealth as a community.

The last finding that emerged from the study is the way the Aspiration Center provides distinct learning resources, support with college access for community colleges as well as high

school students, and collaborates with the nearby community college to advocate for student access and opportunity. Aside from providing learning resources like computers, printing, and tutoring services, the Center also serves as a resource for those who need help with the transfer process. This is particularly important because traditionally, the transfer sending culture (i.e., a tradition that has been associated with counselors, faculty, and staff members who officially assist students transfer out) has only been associated with institutions of higher education. However, based on the finding of this study, it is clear that the transfer sending culture has been extended to include CBOs. Based on the student accounts, the Aspiration Center assisted two students to successfully transfer out, and the Center is actively working with their members so they too can continue their education at a four-year-institution. Next, the Center also collaborates with the nearby community college. This form of reciprocity is one that allows the Center to build alliances with the community college as well as promote unique services that complement the needs of their members. This is another way that my research fills in the gaps and add to the literature. CBOs like the Aspiration Center are a valid and necessary partner in this conversation. To the institutions, they bring value and assets to the communities that are not acknowledged or understood. This collaboration not only creates a partnership but also benefits students and other individuals in the community at large. Participants have mentioned how successful certain events or workshops were when they collaborated with the community college and in turn how that has affected their membership in the center. The findings of this study also affirm previous literature by scholars like Gruber (2004) and build on the literature by demonstrating what successful partnerships look like and the necessity for this type of partnerships in education.

Expanding On the Research Questions to Support This Study

In order to answer the first research question, what strategies does the Aspiration Center use to support undocumented students and their needs, it is one that is derived from the CCW model. The Center staff is cognizant of the fact that students in the undocumented community already occupy an abundant form of wealth and resources (Yosso 2005). All of the students in Center have a wealth of abilities that they have not recognized. As a result, the staff operates from an asset-based approach using the various forms of CCW such as aspiration, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, resistance, and spiritual capital, to remind the students of their value. They not only affirm these capitals, but they also uplift individuals to strengthen on their CCW. The Center teaches individuals to not only advocate for themselves but for their communities. Furthermore, the staff and the members work through a reciprocity effort to generate transformative resources to assist other high school, community college, and community members who are in need of assistance. This form of reciprocity empowers students to be agents of change within their communities and the institution at large.

To answer the second research question, it is important to note that the Center staff organize and mobilize CCW of undocumented students by recognizing their members as human beings with capacities as much as anyone else. The Aspiration Center makes an effort to take a capacity based approach instead of a deficit based approach when interacting with their members. In doing so, they not only harness these capitals but further empowers them to be transformative agents of society.

As a result, CBOs like the Aspiration Center, organize CCW by first recognizing, valuing, and acknowledging undocumented students. Furthermore, the Center staff make an effort to actively listen to students' experiences, identify daily challenges, and monitor their needs on an

ongoing basis. These are essential first steps for this organization to build a strong membership. From daily check-ins to one-on-one meetings as well as group check-ins, the staff is always responsive to the ongoing needs of the community. This type of engagement allows the members to build trust not only with the staff but also with their peers. Organization strategies also entail harnessing students' individual capitals, and doing so with affirmations and encouragements. In turn, this strategy validates students' internal assets, and consequently uplifts students and propels them toward success.

The Center also mobilizes these students toward a shared vision for transformative change at the community college through workshops, events, and general meeting spaces. For instance, in these spaces the staff collaborates with students and encourages them to proactively apply their CCW for self or community advocacy. Whether it is during a workshop where students are continuously encouraged to translate or during a social event in which they are requested to take lead as a mentor, the staff encourages their members to use their CCW on a regular basis. The Center also harnesses the students CCW by cultivating an empowering space, encouraging personal and educational capitals to be shared, as well as collaborating as a team to generate more wealth for the community.

CHAPTER 7:

IMPLICATIONS & CONCLUSION

The implications of this study are organized according to three distinct audiences who may benefit from my findings and conclusions. These three audiences are: 1) researchers and scholars, 2) law and policy makers, and 3) higher education practitioners, such as staff, administrators, and faculty members.

Research

This study centers and prioritizes the voices and perspectives of undocumented community college students to fully understand and examine the role of CBOs in their community college experiences. In doing so, this study finds that CBOs serve as a supplementary space of support at the community college level to further assist students with academic, financial, social, and informational needs. In light of this research, future academic studies would benefit from conducting more research on the role of CBOs in other parts of the nation that cater to regionally specific immigrant communities and their distinct desires and needs. When examining CBOs, however, regardless of location, it is absolutely vital that undocumented students' voices and perspectives are collected and taken seriously in the analysis. Indeed, I argue that an analysis of CBOs cannot and is not complete unless the voices and perspectives of undocumented students are centered in the analysis. Moreover, distinct CBOs nationwide have and continue to document how they advocate on behalf of their immigrant communities; yet scholars continue to overlook these rich data sources. Therefore, future projects that build on these sources, such as comparative studies that analyze multiple CBOs alongside one another, are long overdue. Additionally, it would be beneficial for local community colleges and four-year-universities to recognize CBOs as a supplementary learning

space that is equally beneficial in assisting communities of color with access to post-secondary education systems. This partnership would positively impact individuals and communities of color who urgently need support and direct services.

Policy

Furthermore, with the new wave of undocumented individuals without institutional protection (non AB540 or without DACA) enrolling into community colleges, it is essential to have CBOs like the Aspiration Center to help them navigate their distinct needs. In order to serve the unique student needs, though, CBOs require additional funding. Previous literature on CBOs demonstrate that they are often underfunded and unable to allocate funds for the populations they continue to serve (Steinberg & Almeida, 2015). Therefore, there is much urgency for California state policymakers to consider and draft bills that directly support CBOs at both the community college level as well as at four-year institutions. In other words, while institutional support at the college or university level can indeed support undocumented students, this type of broad funding does not support the distinct and specific needs of this population; therefore, state and federal funding must be directed to the CBOs. Moreover, because institutions of higher education are often battling with low funds, they are unable to meaningfully fund and collaborate with CBOs. In summary, these kinds of relationships would benefit from distinct funds that are allocated to CBOs rather than institutions at large.

Practice

Finally, practitioners need to recognize the various CCW assets, skills, and knowledge that undocumented students already possess. It is critical for staff, administrators, and faculty members to nurture these CCW. There are rich and transformative opportunities for practitioners to go about this kind of work by building relationships with their local CBOs or advocating for

CBOs to come to campus. Furthermore, direct service providers must learn to operate from an asset-based approach instead of a deficit based approach. Educators and community members should also work together to create spaces that allow undocumented students to explore and utilize their CCW and create community values together. Not only will that empower students to engage in capacity building, but also enable CCW to be generated and harnessed as a community.

To conclude, this study emphasizes the urgency of CBOs as a supplementary learning space particularly for undocumented students. CBOs like the Aspiration Center are especially important because this is where creative and critical thinkers can meet and imagine possibilities for the undocumented community. Furthermore, CBOs are extremely important because it is a space where undocumented students can share intergenerational knowledge. This is a space where individuals build a chosen family, empower each other, advocate for themselves as well as their communities, and most importantly, share funds of knowledge that build internal and community capacity. These spaces are more than resource-sharing spaces. Rather, they offer the tools and community to build undocumented student capacity and, perhaps most importantly, a space where these students create a world that operates according to the insights and values of CCW.

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