

University of Nevada, Reno

**Transition to Community College: The Journey of Adult Basic Education English Learners  
from Non-Credit to Credit Programs**

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning

By

Tünde Csepelyi

Dr. Margaret Ferrara/Dissertation Advisor

May 2012



University of Nevada, Reno  
Statewide • Worldwide

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

We recommend that the dissertation  
prepared under our supervision by

**TÜNDE CSEPELYI**

entitled

**Transition to Community College:  
The Journey of Adult Basic Education  
English Learners from Non-Credit to Credit Programs**

be accepted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

Margaret Ferrara, Ph.D., Advisor

Michael Robinson, Ph.D., Committee Member

Kim O'Reilly, Ph.D., Committee Member

Diane Barone, Ph.D., Committee Member

Eleni Oikonomidou, Ph.D., Graduate School Representative

Marsha H. Read, Ph. D., Associate Dean, Graduate School

May 2012

## **Abstract**

This phenomenological study examined the transition of a group of adult English language learners from an Adult Basic Education program to a community college. The purpose of the study was to gain a deeper understanding of the driving forces of Adult Basic Education English language learners who had successfully transitioned from a non-credit Adult Basic Education program to community college degree programs. The study was guided by an overall question: What is the experience like for ABE ESL students who transition to community college degree programs? Two sub-questions helped build the evidence of the study: (a) How do ABE ESL transfer students perceive differences and similarities in academic cultures between an ABE ESL program and a community college? and (b) What do ABE-ESL transfer students say about what kinds of support and which services contributed to their successful transition? The data collection for this study included focus group and in-depth individual interviews. The result of this study suggested that Adult Basic Education English language learners' transition to community college degree programs were more successful when the students felt a sense of caring through supporting services.

*Keywords:* transition, adult ESL students, Adult Basic Education, ethic of care

## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to adult English language learners who know precisely how difficult the journey is from ABE to Ph.D. It is hard, but not impossible.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank and acknowledge the following people for all they have done to support me along the way:

- To my husband and best friend, Csaba; every step of the way, you have encouraged and supported me to help see my study through to the end!
- To my daughter Lidia, who grew up with this dissertation. You knew that one day I would finish it. Thank you for believing in me!
- To my rabbits Fudge and Midnighty, whose soft fur I often petted therapeutically during these drama-filled years.
- To the participants of this study who willingly shared their experiences with me and for devoting time to making this study a valuable contribution to ABE transition research.
- To my friends who often heard me say, “No, I can’t. I have to work on the dissertation.”
- To the committee members, whose wisdom and tireless assistance helped me make this dissertation the best it can possibly be.
- Most importantly, to my dissertation chairperson, Dr. Margaret Ferrara. Thank you for your enduring support, patience, and foremost, for not giving up on me!

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	i
Dedication .....	ii
Acknowledgements .....	iii
Table of Contents .....	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
Purpose of Study .....	4
Context of Study .....	5
Significance of Study .....	8
Assumptions .....	9
Limitations .....	10
Delimitations .....	11
Definition of Terms .....	12
Concluding Statements .....	13
Chapter 2: Review of Literature .....	14
English as a Second Language (ESL) Students .....	15
Who are the Adult ESL Students? .....	15
Adult Second Language Acquisition .....	17
Trajectories in Adult ESL Education .....	20
Life trajectories: Job, family, transportation, time management. ....	22
Institutional trajectories: ABE ESL and college ESL .....	23
Elements that Lead to ABE ESL Transition .....	26
Institutional reports on transitioning .....	27

Key elements in transitioning: Financial aid and personal, emotional support .....	30
The Ethic of Care .....	33
Characteristics of Caring Schools .....	36
Caring in Adult ESL .....	37
Caring is Cross-Cultural .....	39
Caring is International.....	41
Implications of the Ethic of Care .....	42
International Aspects of Transitioning Immigrants into Society.....	44
Chapter 3: Method .....	47
Researcher’s Background: From ABE to Ph.D. ....	47
Community college.....	49
ABE ESL program: Non-credit for language learning .....	49
College ESL: For-credit for a degree.....	50
The transition class: CTC 101.....	53
Data Sources and Data Collection Procedures.....	55
Participants.....	55
Recruitment.....	55
Data Collection .....	56
Focus groups .....	57
In-depth individual interviews .....	59
Data Analysis Procedures .....	62
Concluding Remarks.....	63
Chapter 4: Results.....	64

Focus Group Findings.....	64
Differences and Similarities in Academic Cultures Between an ABE ESL Program and a Community College .....	65
Nature of Interactions between Teachers and Students .....	66
Nature of teachers in the ABE ESL program.....	67
Nature of teachers in a two-year institution.....	71
Nature of Interactions between Students in the ABE ESL and the Two-Year Institution....	74
Nature of interaction among ABE ESL students .....	74
Nature of interaction between ABE ESL and college students .....	75
Nature of School Work .....	76
Nature of school work in ABE ESL .....	76
Nature of school work in the two-year institution .....	78
Cost-Related Issues .....	80
Cost-related issues in ABE ESL .....	80
Cost-related issues in the two-year institution .....	80
Site-Related Issues .....	83
The site of ABE ESL .....	83
The site of the two-year institution .....	84
Kinds Of Support and Which Services Contributed To Their Successful Transition .....	85
Role of the Characteristics of the Students Themselves .....	86
Role of the Transition Class.....	88
Role of the Transition Class Teacher .....	91
Care and the relationship of teacher and students.....	92

Individual Interviews .....	94
Javier: He did not quit. He stopped.....	94
Gigi: “I believe I can graduate in 2010.” .....	97
Lili: B.S. in El Salvador, M.S. in Economics in the United States.....	100
Concluding Remarks.....	103
Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications for Practice, and Recommendations for Future Research .	105
Discussion of Results.....	106
Differences and similarities between ABE ESL and a two-year institution.....	106
Nature of interaction and adult second language students.....	106
Nature of school work and trajectories .....	108
Cost-Related Issues and Institutional and Life Trajectories .....	109
Site-Related Issues and Institutional and Life Trajectories .....	110
Kinds of support and services that contributed to their successful transition.....	111
Role of characteristics of students themselves and ESL Students.....	111
Role of transition class.....	112
Role of the transition class’s teacher .....	113
Individual Interviews .....	114
The Three Approaches to Transitioning .....	114
Javier.....	114
Gigi .....	115
Lili.....	116
The different perspectives.....	116
Implication .....	117

Practical Implications: Changing the Institutionalized Trajectories .....	117
Professionalization of the ABE ESL programs .....	118
Collaborating academic departments .....	119
Recommendations.....	121
Additional Ideas for Transitioning.....	121
Theoretical Framework: An Ethic of Care.....	122
International Research on Transitioning.....	124
Suggestions for Further Research .....	125
Concluding Remarks.....	126
References.....	128
APPENDIX A.....	145
APPENDIX B .....	149
APPENDIX C.....	150
APPENDIX D.....	151
APPENDIX E .....	153
APPENDIX F .....	154

**List of Tables**

Table 1: Institutional trajectories in ABE ESL and College ESL .....	26
Table 2. Differences between ABE ESL and college ESL programs.....	52
Table 3: Demographic Data of the Invited Students.....	56
Table 4: Themes and Conversational Turns in Regard to Research Sub-Question 1.....	66
Table 5: Themes and Conversational Turns in Regard to Research Sub-Question 2.....	86

Transition to Community College: The Journey of Adult Basic Education English Learners from  
Non-Credit to Credit Programs

**Chapter 1: Introduction**

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the United States government attempted to manage the flow of immigration to America through legislation (Kimer, 2005). The first major immigration law was the Nationality Act of 1952. Under this act, preference was given to immigrants with special technical training or exceptional abilities. As a result of this act, undocumented and unskilled immigrants, mainly from neighboring Mexico, were deported, leaving their children born in the United States behind (Freeman & Hill, 2006). To end this separation of the United States-born children of undocumented immigrants, the second major immigration law in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Naturalization Act, was passed in 1965. The focus thus shifted from admitting an educated workforce to emphasizing family reunification. The Naturalization Act resulted in many unskilled laborers coming to the United States with their families (Freeman & Hill, 2006), and as a result, various adult education services and programs were established (Amstutz & Sheared, 2000; Sparks, 2001).

“Immigration is not a phenomenon of the past” (Nieto, 1992, p. 333). In fact, in the 1990s, it is estimated that the number of speakers of English as a Second Language (ESL) increased by more than 50% (Nieto, 2009). Now, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, one in eight United States residents is an immigrant and their children constitute approximately 25% of all the children in the United States (Baum & Flores, 2011). As a result, ESL students have been the catalyst of reform in the educational system of the United States from elementary to higher education (Ullman, 2010).

Historically, immigrants' original languages quickly yielded to English, resulting in the occurrence that the grandchildren of immigrants hardly, if at all, spoke the language of their ancestors (Ellwood & Kane, 2000). Immigrants and their children often had to assimilate into American society with limited or no educational aid specifically aimed at language transition. However, the assimilation process had many consequences. Research findings show that abandoning of one's native language and culture may affect one's perception about his/her native language, culture, and family ties, and ultimately "the value of oneself" (Nieto, 2009, p. 61). As a consequence, values of the mainstream educational system and values of immigrant students—especially among Hispanic students—are mismatched, resulting in high school dropout rates and lower grades. High dropout rates and lower academic achievement are more persistent among minority students than among their mainstream counterparts. Researchers (e.g., Ellwood & Kane, 2000) have shown that parental education is a strong predictor of children's education attainment. It is especially pertinent among Mexican-origin children whose parents have more likely not graduated from a high school prior to immigration (Baum & Flores, 2011; Feliciano & Rumbaut, 2005). For that reason, educating adult immigrants not only benefits the adult students but also their families, and therefore, society as a whole.

One of the adult programs that serves native and non-native English speaking adult students who do not hold a high school diploma is Adult Basic Education (Amstutz & Sheared, 2000; Ullman, 2010). Immigrant adult education has its roots in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Chicago where settlement houses offered English education classes for immigrants mostly from Eastern Europe (Ullman, 2010). At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) assisted immigrants with English classes. After the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, the American Government pleaded for the Sedition Act, "making it illegal for people to

use language that could be construed as disloyal to the United States” (Ullman, 2010, p. 5). With the passing of this law, classes to teach English became popular. The classes aimed to teach immigrants the American way of life (McClymer, 1982), including “the American way of childcare, cooking vegetables, and even brushing teeth” (Ullman, 2010, p. 5). The Americanization programs were eventually terminated and a new law, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998, regulated and even today supports adult immigrants English as a Second Language education in federally funded Adult Basic Education programs.

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) was enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States in 1998. It contains four subparts: 1) Title I—Workforce Investment Systems; 2) Title II—Adult Education and Literacy; 3) Title III—Workforce Investment-Related Activities; and 4) TITLE IV—Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998. Title II regulates the federally funded adult education programs. The purposes of the federally funded adult education programs are threefold:

- (1) to assist adults to become literate and obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and self-sufficiency;
- (2) to assist adults who are parents to obtain the educational skills necessary to become full partners in the educational development of their children; and
- (3) to assist adults in the completion of a secondary school education (Workforce Investment Act of 1998).

Therefore, the goals of a federally funded adult education program focus on improving basic skills and providing an opportunity to obtain a general education degree (GED). Then, non-native English speaking adult students are typically placed in Adult Basic Education (ABE) English as a Second Language (ESL) classes with the foremost goal of improving their basic

English language skills (Kruideneir, 2002). Because the sole goal of these classes is to teach English, ABE ESL classes do not offer college credits; as a result, students cannot accumulate college credits for a certificate or a degree. Since the enacting of the Workforce Investment Act, whose final purpose is to aid adult students in obtaining their secondary general education degree, the WIA has not been re-authorized to serve adult students obtaining post-secondary degrees. Consequently, although adult basic education programs serve thousands of adult ESL students yearly, very few of these students transition from the non-credit ABE ESL classes to the college level, for-credit ESL courses, which serve as a foundation for entering college (Chisman & Crandall, 2007). In fact, as few as 10% of ABE ESL students transfer from non-credit to for-credit ESL classes, and “an even smaller percentage make transitions to college academic or vocational programs” (Chisman & Crandall, 2007, p.ii).

### **Purpose of Study**

While many reasons have been proposed for why most ABE ESL students do not transition to credit programs, little is known about the contributing circumstances for students who do make a successful transition. The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of ABE ESL students who have successfully transitioned from ABE ESL classes to community college degree programs.

The study was guided by an overall question: What are the perceptions of ABE ESL students about their transition experiences as they move from an ABE ESL program to a community college degree program? Two sub-questions helped build the evidence of the study: (a) How do ABE ESL transfer students perceive differences and similarities in academic cultures between an ABE ESL program and a community college? and (b) What do ABE ESL transfer

students say about the kinds of support and services that contributed to their successful transition?

The overall interest of this study was to gain a better understanding of adult immigrants' transition experiences from a non-credit adult basic education English as a second language program to a for-credit community college. This study focused on a group of adult ESL students who had taken non-credit adult basic education English classes and transitioned to for-credit college programs.

This was a phenomenological case study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Smith, Flowers, & Larking, 2009; Sokolowski, 2000). The researcher collected qualitative data through focus group discussions and individual interviews. The data were analyzed in order to understand how non-native English speaking students navigated the adult basic education system and transitioned from a non-credit ESL program to a for-credit academic program. The qualitative phenomenological study allowed the researcher to explore a group of ordinary people's interaction in particular events (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

### **Context of Study**

Researchers (e.g., Chisman & Crandall, 2007; Crandall & Sheppard, 2004; Prince & Jenkins, 2005) have studied why ABE ESL students do not transition from non-credit to credit programs. The reasons are manifold and include limited English proficiency; mismatches between adult education language preparation and college requirement; and lack of knowledge about the American educational system.

One prominent reason cited by these scholars is the lack of adequate English preparation (Harrington, 2000; Manton, 1998; McKay & Tom, 2006). Limited English proficiency is a particular problem among Spanish-speaking immigrants. In 2006, of the 54% of Spanish

speaking immigrants in California, only 26 % spoke English well and 21% spoke no English at all (Baum & Flores, 2011). Among other immigrant groups (e.g., Filipino and Hindi-speaking immigrants), only 1% and 5 % spoke no English, and their children's high school graduation rates are higher than those of their Spanish speaking counterparts (Baum & Flores, 2011). The researchers concluded that boosting adult immigrants' English proficiency is closely related to education level attainment.

Typically, adult immigrants attend adult basic education programs where curricula do not include college preparation. Commonly, adult language schools target communicative English, whereas academic English is required for students to be successful in post-secondary education (Cummins, 1979; Curry, 2004; Henle et al., 2005). Some obvious differences between the two types of English are the use of slang, idioms, and colloquial grammar (Cummins, 1979). For example, conversational English often includes contractions (e.g., don't or won't) whereas academic English prescribes the opposite. Another example is the use of idioms in everyday language. Adult basic education curricula often include lessons about the use of idioms whereas academic English classes exclude them from college papers. Not surprisingly, adult students who have not been exposed to proper English grammar tend to be less successful in academic classes (Baum & Flores, 2011).

A third hindrance is that ABE ESL students are not familiar with the American higher education system. The lack of adequate knowledge about the American higher education system often results in a fear of continuing on to credit-level classes (Adult Basic Education to Community College Transitions Symposium, 2007; Baum & Flores, 2011). For example, the American community college system is typically unheard of in any other country (e.g., Chisman & Crandall, 2007; Vernez & Abrahamse, 1996). In a community college, students can work

toward an associate degree as well as various vocational certificates; foreign universities strictly distinguish academic and vocational studies. Therefore, immigrants entering United States institutions may display college appropriate language skills, but may lack the appropriate knowledge to understand and navigate through the American higher education system (Curry, 2004; Estrada et al., 2005). Researchers (e.g., Curry, 2004; Weiner, 1998) have found that a typical ABE ESL student struggles with the appropriate use of language, academic culture, and ways of constructing knowledge; these represent a few barriers to integration into college life.

A fourth reason is financial barriers. First, immigrant adults very likely have no college fund savings (Baum & Flores, 2011). Second, many immigrants support their families back in their original country by sending their savings (known as remittances) to their relatives (Rumbaut & Komaie, 2010). Third, the complexity of applying for financial aid, a task that even American-born and raised parents find excruciatingly difficult, often discourages immigrants from completing the official procedure (Baum & Flores, 2011). Another equally important reason is that first generation immigrants do not usually choose financial aid as their option to pay for education. As a result, students with insufficient college finance tend to attend part time and are often associated with low persistence and attainment (Rumbaut & Komaie, 2010).

There are other reasons immigrants do not continue in post-secondary education beyond adult basic education programs. These include non-academic ones such as emotional and personal adjustment issues; for example, a critical emotional element is lack of self-esteem (Baum & Flores, 2011; Cardemil et al., 2005). Moreover, losing the frame of cultural reference, adapting to a new culture, and changing life-styles may take a toll on an immigrant's self-esteem. Personal issues such as lack of transportation or child care arrangements present everyday challenges. An additional complication, limited time for attending college, is a reality as

immigrants often work two jobs to support themselves and their families (Patthey-Chavez et al., 2005; Saari et al., 2006).

### **Significance of Study**

This study helped to support evidence that non-credit adult basic education programs and for-credit college programs foster the student persistence in college and help promote support for changes in higher education institutional practices. Despite the current institutional practices that hinder adult immigrants' transitions to post-secondary education, some adult immigrant students have made the leap from non-credit adult basic education programs to for-credit programs. Researchers (e.g., Baum & Flores, 2011; Crandall & Sheppard, 2004; Rumbaut & Komaie, 2010) have provided evidence that existing transition programs support adult English language students and assist them in moving to for-credit programs in higher education. However, these researchers' studies merely described transition programs; they did not interview participants in these programs. The researcher in this study included a design in which actual transitioned participants were interviewed to gain an understanding of strategies the students used to transition from Adult Basic Education English as Second Language non-credit classes to for-credit academic classes. The participants in this study had attended a college transition class, which was a new course in the adult basic education program. The purpose of the college transition class was to assist adult basic education students' transition to for-credit academic programs.

Undoubtedly, further research in this area is needed to provide insight into educating the new immigrants. A critical goal of future research is to guide the design of college admission, simplify financial aid, and establish additional student services.

## **Assumptions**

Several assumptions guided the work of this research. The researcher was an adult immigrant, a former adult basic education student, and a transitioned adult basic education student. Her personal and professional experience transitioning from the Adult Basic Education program to college may have influenced the findings of this study.

First, the researcher's personal experience as a student in the adult basic education program might have affected the non-verbal communication with the participants, which may have influenced in turn their answers. Second, the researcher's personal experience as an adult immigrant might have affected the answers of the participants. The participants might have not elaborated on their answers because they might have assumed that the researcher understood them without further explanation on their answer.

Another assumption held was that the researcher's professional experience as an instructor in the adult basic education program, in the college program, and in the transitioning class may have influenced the findings of the study. The researcher's knowledge, skills, and experiences as an instructor might have anticipated research outcomes.

A further assumption was that the participants would be willing to participate in this study and that the participants would openly answer the researcher's questions and not withhold important information. It was also expected that participants would candidly report specific differences between their non-credit and for-credit programs, which would affect the results of this study. Given these biases, an extending conceptualization of this assumption was that students' transition is a complex process involving many happenstances.

It is also important to recognize that a particular goal guided this study: the goal was to explore ways to establish future transitioning classes and services in adult basic education

programs based on information collected from actual transitioned adult basic education students. Given this bias, the researcher assumed that the transitioning experience of the participants could be generalized and adopted for changes in other adult basic education and community college programs.

A final assumption was that through the theoretical framework that guided the study—an ethic of care (Noddings, 1984) —, the researcher was able to explore the emotional and professional support the participants needed and wanted while transitioning from an adult basic education program to college programs.

### **Limitations**

This study took place in one community college with participants who had been the researcher's former students. Students' self-reported experiences with transitioning from non-credit ABE ESL to for-credit college classes might have been influenced by the instructor-student relationship. Furthermore, the time spent in the non-credit ABE ESL program prior to the for-credit college program varied among participants, which likely constrained their experiences with transitioning. Similarly, time spent in the for-credit college ESL program also likely affected their perceptions.

Additionally, the researcher's personal experience as a transitioning student from ABE ESL to college may have limited her study. While the researcher's and her students' transitioning experiences might have overlapped in many cases, the researcher also realized there were several differences. For example, the researcher's cultural background was white European and college educated upon arrival in the United States. On the other hand, her ESL students originate mainly from Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America and they may or may not hold a high school diploma or a college degree. Their former occupations ranged from farm worker to physician.

Finally, although the researcher is bilingual, she did not speak Spanish, which was spoken by the majority of the students in this study.

Furthermore, although the researcher collected data during focus group and in-depth interviews, the research did not study students' private lives or continue investigating the participants' college journey. Certainly, a richer picture of each participant's transitioning experiences would result in an in-depth consideration of the home and work environment rather than just what data were collected through the interviews.

Finally, a small sample of informants participated in this study, which might have yielded for oversimplification, exaggeration, bias, or generalization (Merriam, 2001).

### **Delimitations**

This phenomenological qualitative study focused on a group of adult English as a Second Language students and their transitioning experience from a non-credit adult basic education program to for-credit college programs at a community college in the western United States. Participants were selected from among a group of students who had taken a college transition class taught by the researcher, and had taken classes in both, a non-credit adult basic education program and in the for-credit college programs. The result of this study could be generalized to educators who teach adult English as a Second Language students in adult basic education settings and administrators who govern such programs. Moreover, the result of this study could also be generalized to educators and administrators who desire to establish college transition programs from adult basic education programs to college level education that help students move beyond learning basic language to pursue a college education.

### Definition of Terms

The following terms were used in this study:

*ABE ESL*. The Adult Basic Education English as a Second Language program in this study is a federally funded program, which is housed at the local community college.

*ACCUPLACER*. A comprehensive college placement test, which comprises of assessments in mathematics and English. (<https://www.acuplacer.org>)

*CASAS*. Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems is a nationwide implemented standardized placement and assessment system in adult basic education programs. CASAS has two basic curricula: life skills and employability skills curricula. (<https://www.casas.org>)

*Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS)*. Social language skills that are needed in societal situations such as everyday communication (Cummins, 1979).

*Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP)*. Formal academic learning that includes skills such as synthesizing, evaluating, and inferring, which are typically used in educational settings such as post secondary education.

*Community college*. A two-year post-secondary institution where students typically pursue certificates and associate's degrees.

*Conversational turns*. Participants' verbal contribution during the focus groups. Whenever a participant spoke, an incremental number was assigned to the event on the transcript.

*English Language Learners (ELL)*. Individuals whose first language is other than English and who are learning English.

*English as a Second Language (ESL)*. A language program for individuals whose first language is other than English and who live in an English-speaking country.

*For-credit ESL.* English as Second Language classes taught within the community college's academic program, which typically offer three academic credits that can be transferred toward a degree.

*Lexical knowledge.* Lexical knowledge refers to world-knowledge of a second language learner. Lexical knowledge is categorized into two subgroups: passive or receptive vocabulary, and active or productive vocabulary (Nation, 2001). Passive vocabulary refers to the recognition of a word in context without being able to automatically produce it, while active vocabulary is fully understood such as actively spoken and written by the second language learner.

*Non-credit ESL.* English as a Second Language classes taught within the ABE program without conferring academic credits toward a degree or certificate.

*Trajectories.* External and/or internal obstacles faced by adult learners while pursuing a degree or a certificate.

*Transition class.* A bridge class between the ABE ESL and the college programs. Its main purpose is to help students move from non-credit ESL classes to for-credit classes. In this study, the transition class is named College Transition Class 101 (CTC 101).

For the purposes of this study, the terms ESL, ELL, and second language speakers are synonymous.

### **Concluding Statements**

The next chapter provides a set of relevant literature that captures theoretical support for the research design in Chapter 3, the findings in Chapter 4, and conclusions and recommendations in Chapter 5.

## **Chapter 2: Review of Literature**

In this chapter, the related literature of this study and the overarching theoretical framework are discussed. The overall question of this study was: What are the perceptions of ABE ESL students about their transition experiences as they move from an ABE ESL program to a community college degree program? The two sub-questions also guided the review of the related literature: (a) How do ABE ESL transfer students perceive differences and similarities in academic cultures between an ABE ESL program and a community college? and (b) What do ABE ESL transfer students say about the kinds of support and services that contributed to their successful transition?

The first part of this chapter contains a review of the relevant literature on adult English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. The researcher presents an analysis of studies from four areas: (a) adult ESL students; (b) adult second language acquisition; (c) trajectories in adult ESL education; and (d) elements that lead to ABE ESL transition. These four areas provide a general background about ABE ESL students and their difficulties in the American higher education system. The chapter provides an analysis of the different transitioning programs in the United States as well as an analysis of existing transitioning programs as a contextualization for the importance of this study.

The second part of this chapter contains a discussion of the ethic of care from three perspectives: 1) reviews of research studies on an ethic of care; 2) how these studies are typified in classroom; and 3) how these studies are typified in classroom practices. The ethic of care derives from Noddings (1984), whose theory aligns with the idea that teaching vocabulary and grammar to adults is secondary in importance to paying attention to their well-being, exploring their social milieu, and incorporating their lived experiences into the curriculum. A secondary

precept, according to Noddings, is that the ethic of care accelerates adult ESL students' language learning. The ethic of care, practiced in educational settings, focuses on students' individual needs in education. Accordingly, this study focuses on the transitioning experience of a group of ESL students who have successfully made the transition from ABE ESL classes to community college degree programs with a focus on what care, support, and services helped contribute to their transition. The last portion of the second part of Chapter 2 includes a review on international trends in transitioning.

### **English as a Second Language (ESL) Students**

“Questions of who the students are and what they want to become is the basis for learning” (Ferguson, 1998, p. 5). Ferguson and others (Lambert, 2008; McKay & Tom, 2006; Vandrick, 1998) report that it is essential for ESL instructors and administrators to know the adult ESL students sitting in their ESL classrooms. However, this is not an easy accomplishment. Crandall and Sheppard (2004) state that there is no typical adult ESL student. ABE programs serve a wide variety of adult students who come to these programs with a broad range of literacy, life experiences, and educational goals (Kruidenier, 2002; Mathews-Aydinli, 2006; MckKay & Tom, 2006).

#### **Who are the Adult ESL Students?**

Feliciano (2005) compared 32 immigrant groups residing in the United States to groups who remained in the sending society. Clearly, characteristics of immigrants, for example, their education, wealth, and skills, affect the level of integration into the society of the United States. The more education immigrants bring with them, the increased likelihood for integration. Feliciano's research question focused on how immigrants' educational attainments compare to those of non-immigrants in their home countries. The researcher gathered data on adult

immigrants of the top countries sending immigrants to the United States who were at least 22 years old when they immigrated. She hypothesized that they had already completed their education. She found that immigrants from all major sending countries (except Puerto Rico) tended to be more educated than the general populations in their home countries. She also found that immigrants from Asia tended to be more educated than those from Latin America or the Caribbean. Among other findings, she pointed out that females are less likely to migrate for their own job opportunities; rather, they immigrate to accompany highly skilled husbands. Feliciano theorized that female psychological factors in second language acquisition might be compromised by involuntary movement to the United States. She recommended more research as to whether patterns of immigrant selection are an important component for understanding differences in the socioeconomic outcomes of immigrants and their children in the United States. Furthermore, the researcher suggested that immigrants with more education integrate into the mainstream society more smoothly than immigrants with less education.

Skilton-Sylvester (2002) investigated the participation of four Cambodian female students in adult ESL programs. The research question that guided this case study was how social contexts, multiple identities, and classroom contexts shaped these four Cambodian women's participation in an adult education program. Researchers found that ESL classrooms fulfill more than the goals of teaching language skills and that ESL classrooms are a place where "the multiple selves of learners are central to teaching, learning, and program development" (p. 22). Skilton-Sylvester also found that cultural background is inseparable from class participation: the more the students relate to the classroom contexts, the more they participate. Consequently, the researchers concluded that the curriculum should embrace learners' identities and that "actual

lived experiences of students need to be a key element of curriculum development and pedagogy” (p. 24).

Buttaro (2004) described eight adult female Hispanic students who attended ESL programs in an urban institution. Through observation in formal (e.g., classroom) and informal (the participants’ homes) settings, formal and informal interviews, participants’ essay submissions, and questionnaires, the researchers obtained data regarding what educational, cultural, and linguistic factors contributed to the students’ English language learning. All eight participants reported the importance of learning English, and they used several strategies that contributed to their language acquisition: library usage to get books in English; television viewing in English; newspaper reading in English; and assisting their children with homework. However, the key component to their language acquisition success also lay in the impact of their instructors made on them: supportive and considerate instructors significantly affected the participants’ English performance. As Buttaro stated, “It is essential that teachers get involved in their students’ learning by providing appropriate books and learning materials, checking homework, answering questions, and providing an emotional environment” (p. 36). Buttaro concluded that ESL instructors must go beyond language instruction and encourage students in times of academic difficulty, as their motivation “may carry the student throughout his or her lifetime of learning” (p. 37). The perception and awareness of ESL instructors who work directly with ESL students seem to be key elements in language acquisition and educational attainment by their students.

### **Adult Second Language Acquisition**

Adult immigrants are individuals who were born in a foreign country and arrive in the United States after the age of 18, speaking a first language other than English. These adult

language learners do not acquire English as their first language as children but rather “learn foreign languages consciously, with obvious deficits and great variation” (Lenneberg, 1967, p. 176). Early research studies compared first language acquisition in childhood and second language acquisition in adulthood while more recent research studies contrasted child and adult language acquisition as “quantitative and not qualitative, a gradient continuum rather than a precipitous break” (Bley-Vroman, 1990, p. 5). Ample research has compared children’s second language acquisition to adults’ and shown a correlation between the age of arrival in the United States and the ability to achieve native-like pronunciation (Asher & Garcia, 1982; Flege, 1987; Piske, MacKay & Fledge, 2001; Scovel, 1988). The earlier the language learner started learning the language, the more native-like his or her pronunciation became. However, the critical aspects in adult English learning are not native-like pronunciation, but rather learner motivation, vocabulary development, and meaningful learning (Bello, 2000, De la Fuente, 2002; Ellis 1999; Herschensohn, 2009; Krashen, 2003).

Motivation is “why people decide to do something, how long they are willing to sustain the activity, [and] how hard they are going to pursue it” (Dörnyei, 2002, p. 8). Adult students vary considerably in their language learning motivation (McKay & Tom, 2006). For example, some may want to communicate in everyday situations such as shopping or going to doctor’s appointments. Some adult learners want to use their second language in professional situations such as obtaining higher status jobs. The former, integrative motivation, is the inspiration of learning a second language to integrate into the new society; the latter, instrumental motivation, is the inspiration to realize goals (Gardner, 1985). Once their initial language needs are met, adult learners might perceive little use of furthering their language skills.

A specific language knowledge and vocabulary have been found crucial for an adult ESL student to becoming a competent second language speaker (Coxhead, 2006; Diamond & Gutlohn, 2006; Horst et al., 2005; Lee & Munice, 2006). “In learning the English language, lexis or vocabulary is recognized as a vital factor for ESL ... literary development” (Mokhtar et al, 2010, p. 72). The quality of listening, speaking, reading, and writing performances may depend on the second language learner’s lexical knowledge. Lexical knowledge is categorized into two subgroups: passive or receptive vocabulary, and active or productive vocabulary (Nation, 2001). Passive vocabulary refers to the recognition of a word in context without being able to automatically produce it, while active vocabulary is fully understood such as actively spoken and written by the second language learner. Thus, knowing a word in a second language involves not only familiarity with its meaning but also being able to appropriately produce it as well (Cook, 2001).

Goal-driven and meaningful learning are another set of crucial components in adult learning principles (Knowles, 1990). Adult language learners are goal-oriented. They want to know why they are learning something, and they are ready to learn when a specific learning need arises (Larotta, 2007). In Larotta’s study (2007), 17 adults participated in an intermediate literacy class. The research question guiding the research was “What happens in an adult ESL literacy class when we implement inquiry cycles?” (p. 26) The researcher collected data through interviews, anecdotal records, the researcher’s log, and student posters and written reports. She found that students in the study were highly motivated, attended 85% of the time, and “... learn[ed] to make decisions about their learning and ask[ed] relevant questions” (p. 28). Furthermore, the student-driven activities were “meaningful and authentic” (p. 28), and created a sense of community in the classroom. As Larotta concluded:

Inquiry-based literacy projects allow teachers and students to negotiate the curriculum and to transfer what students learn in the lesson to their real lives. Human beings are inquisitive by nature; adult educators should exploit this human characteristic to make their classes more student-centered and create independent literacy learners. (p. 28)

Consequently, adult language learning classrooms must look at adult learners as whole persons. Adult language learners bring to ESL classrooms their confidence, motivation, expectations, background knowledge, first language, learning styles, and personal circumstances (Lincoln & Rademacher, 2006; Norton & Toohey, 2002; Smoke, 1998). The complexity of an adult classroom encourages adult language educators to approach language teaching from a holistic perspective; instead of teaching isolated pieces such as vocabulary or grammar points, language should be taught in context (Mckay & Tom, 2006; Schwarzer, 2009).

### **Trajectories in Adult ESL Education**

Numerous studies have examined trajectories in adult ESL education (e.g., Buttaro, 2004; Menard-Warwick, 2005; Mirowsky & Ross, 2007; Reder, 1999). “Trajectory describes a path of development, often through a variety of social contexts, in which each step (or learning event) builds on the previous ones, though sometimes in unpredictable ways” (Menard-Warwick, 2005, p. 169). The researchers found that the general trajectories, for example, cost, lack of time, or personal issues, predict that language minority populations represent a growing body in college classes and urge adult programs to provide effective education that leads to the students’ real life expectations. A number of social and behavioral studies recognize the importance of a sense of personal control over one’s own life (e.g., Avison & Cairney, 2003; Ricento, 2005). The importance of personal control lies in achieving desired social status, employment, and

education. Thus, losing personal control may result in losing authority and influence over oneself (Kearney, Draper, & Barón, 2005).

Post-secondary education poses challenges for all students. Even among the 27% (n=3.4 million in 2002) traditional, full-time students of the total undergraduate population (n=12.7 million), only 54 percent (n=1.8 million) obtain a bachelor's degree within five years of enrollment (Choy, 2002). Nontraditional students are less likely to reach their educational goal. For example, among General Educational Development (GED) diploma graduates (n=81,000) in a study by Tyler (2003), merely 0.5 to 3% of the students (n=405 to 2430) acquired an associate's degree. There are even more factors that impact the learning trajectories of immigrant students pursuing postsecondary education. Students' language learning pathways are strongly affected by social factors: costs and lack of time, home and job responsibilities, and lack of appropriate courses are a few examples of barriers to participating in adult ESL classes (e.g., Buttaro, 2004).

Mirowsky and Ross (2007) looked at the correlation between adulthood trajectories and accumulated years of education. In the study, 907 subjects participated over a six-year period (between 1998 and 2001). The researchers measured (a) the sense of control; (b) the participants' age by questions, for example "In what year were you born?"; and (c) education by questions, for example, "What is the highest grade or year of school you have completed?" The researchers found that adults with more education showed positive associations with the sense of control. The researchers also found that the sense of personal control may be increased through a nurturing environment. They added, "Schools and schooling may create a context that nurtures a sense of control" (p. 1342). This phenomenon may be observed in immigrants who, upon immigration, lose their sense of personal control in the new society due to the lack of language

and cultural knowledge. One way, the researcher concluded, to change these trajectories is through education.

**Life trajectories: Job, family, transportation, time management.** Menard-Warwick (2005) discussed the life trajectories of two adult learners in an ESL family literacy program. Through class observation and in-depth interviews, she revealed external factors, such as job and ESL classroom schedules, that highly affected the participation in ESL programs. Menard-Warwick also found that both participants faced social constraints beyond their control. One student was undocumented, which prevented her from applying for post-secondary education. The other subject could not continue learning English due to her temporary employment in a factory, which did not support her schooling. The researcher concluded that (a) the analysis of societal circumstances of ESL students is necessary to offer the corresponding amount and kind of teaching the students need, and (b) problem-posing activities, for instance, raising a bilingual child, should be incorporated in curricula. She also argued that without a critical analysis of trajectories of language learners, ESL programs will not adequately serve their participants.

Rumbaut's longitudinal study (2005) identified three major socio-economic trajectories in first and second generation immigrants in their early adulthood: educational attainment, incarceration (for men), and early childbearing (for women). Rumbaut argued that post-secondary education is critical in order to promote social mobility and derail cumulative social disadvantage. Early childbearing and incarceration are more likely to occur among less educated youngsters than their more educated counterparts. Thus, a clear suggestion of this study is to retain children and their parents in school in order to further work-related goals and social mobility.

While the studies above have identified important reasons why adult ESL students do not pursue higher education, they lack any exploration of why certain students do persist in their pursuit of higher education. Clearly, empirical research on ESL students' educational advancement is needed to advance explanations for adult ESL successes in colleges.

**Institutional trajectories: ABE ESL and college ESL.** There are many institutionalized differences between ABE ESL and college ESL programs. For example, offering a high-quality education to ABE ESL students is a challenge across the United States (Harper & de Jong, 2009; Lundien, 2009). Often, ABE ESL curricula focus on life skills and/or employability skills. One example is the nationwide implemented standardized placement and assessment system, Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS). CASAS (2012) has two basic curricula: life skills and employability skills curricula. The life skills curriculum typically targets life in the United States: housing, banking, and shopping. The employability skills curriculum is directed at job skills: to fill out job applications, work etiquette, and resume writing. Although both curricula serve ABE ESL students' basic or survival English vocabulary needs, the curriculum designs do not incorporate transitioning skills or college preparatory reading and writing skills that are necessary for ABE ESL students in order to succeed in for-credit classes (Strawn, 2007). These two curricula are not designed to encourage students to move beyond language learning and pursue post-secondary education.

In contrast, a typical college ESL curriculum differs vastly from ABE ESL curriculum. A college ESL curriculum focuses exclusively on academic reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills that prepare students for college work. College ESL curriculum comprised of sophisticated vocabulary, advanced grammar, and different writing genres and writing styles, for instance, Modern Language Association (MLA) or American Psychological Association (APA).

Characteristically, books used in a for-credit ESL class are not used in a non-credit ESL class; neither are college teaching methods such as lecturing, note taking, or essay writing.

The intake placement procedure in most ABE ESL programs contains a reading test, for example, CASAS's life skills or employability tests, and a verbal interview. The reading test questions are multiple choice and not computerized but paper and pencil based. The oral interview comprises of questions such as "What is your name?", "What did you eat for breakfast?", or "How long have you been living in the United States?" Mathematics is not addressed during the intake procedure or in ABE ESL curricula. On the other hand, many colleges use ACCUPLACER ([www.accuplacer.org](http://www.accuplacer.org)), a comprehensive college placement test. ACCUPLACER includes assessments in mathematics, English (sentence structure and writing), and reading. The English component consists of sentence skills (sentence correction and re-construction), multiple choice questions, reading comprehension including multiple choice questions regarding the main idea of a paragraph and sentence relationship, and essay writing. The mathematics section contains questions about arithmetic, elementary algebra, and college-level mathematics. ACCUPLACER is a computer-based assessment that requires that the test-takers have basic computer skills.

Johnson and Parrish (2010) surveyed college developmental education instructors (mathematics, ESL, reading, English) who worked with ESL students at the college level and ABE instructors. The purpose of the study was to pinpoint areas where ABE instructors lacked necessary skills to "prepare students for academic contexts" (p. 619). Johnson and Parrish identified four categories where college instructors and ABE instructors' expectations diverged; a) critical thinking, b) technology, c) note-taking for reading and listening, and d) presentation skills. These four areas were "extremely important" for college instructors whereas ABE ESL

teachers “rarely or only sometimes” taught these skills (p. 626). The researchers concluded that in order to close the gap between college and ABE programs, ABE ESL teachers need to explore ways how to align their teaching with their college counterparts.

Strawn (2007) also found that lack of alignment between adult education and post-secondary education was one of the reasons why ABE students felt challenged when moving to post-secondary settings. Strawn claimed that post-secondary institutes should provide adequate services for lower-skilled adults. For example, they could tie workforce needs to education services. She also pointed out that ABE curricula do not prepare students for careers of post-secondary education or training. Furthermore, ABE programs “devote virtually no funding to counseling” (p. 16), which may result in limiting ABE students’ post-secondary goals. Finally, “there is no substitute for the postsecondary and adult education systems working together to customize remediation to various career and education pathways” (p. 16). She concluded that helping more adults enter post-secondary education requires many policy changes in adult education and post-secondary education.

Table 1 depicts four institutional trajectories that adult ESL learners typically face when transitioning from ABE ESL programs to college programs.

Table 1

*Institutional Trajectories: ABE ESL and College ESL*

Institutional Trajectories	ABE ESL	College ESL
Curriculum	Basic survival vocabulary and skills	Academic vocabulary and skills
Delivery	Student-centered	Lecture
Test-intake	Paper-pencil based reading based on CASAS	Computerized English and mathematics based on ACCUPLACER
Expectations from students	At least some literacy skills in first language	Critical thinking, technology, note-taking, presentations skills

Abolishing these institutionalized trajectories—closing the gap between non-credit and credit programs, revisiting the different assessments, and working together in the ABE and college programs—is critical in transitioning ABE ESL students to post-secondary settings.

#### **Elements that Lead to ABE ESL Transition**

Only a few empirical studies are to be found about ABE ESL students' transitioning experiences (Crandall & Sheppard, 2004). There are many reasons why it is problematic to collect data from adults in ABE settings. First, the existing data represent less than 10% of the population (Quigley, 2000); therefore, the findings do not accurately represent adult learners. Second, the dropout rate can be as high as 74% in ABE programs, which makes any research problematic due to participants' mortality (Quigley, 2000). Third, transitioning research is a new field within adult education (Crandall & Sheppard, 2004). Many program descriptions have been published (e. g., Prince & Jenkins, 2005; Saari, Storla, & Turtola, 2006; Spurling, Seymour, & Chisman, 2008), but only a few empirical studies have been conducted (e. g., Estrada et al.,

2005; Harrington, 2000). The next section provides a review of institutional reports on transitioning, and then a discussion of the few available empirical studies on transitioning.

**Institutional reports on transitioning.** As more community colleges recognize the need to establish transitioning programs, then program developers are turning to the structures and reports from well-established programs at other colleges (Alamprese, 2005; Csepelyi, 2008). Numerous non-empirical studies can be found in the work of researchers such as Crandall and Sheppard (2004), Saari, Storla, and Turtola (2006), and Prince and Jenkins (2005).

One well-established transitioning program is offered at the City College of San Francisco (Office of Institutional Research, 1998). This transitioning program was among the first in the United States, and has served as a model for other community colleges. Their self-evaluation study employed program reviews, student focus groups, and interviews with instructors, staff, and administrators to draw a holistic picture of the program. Two basic findings were: (a) there are few, if any, organized models for establishing transitioning programs; and (b) there has been “very little systematic research on the impact of [transitioning] programs upon students” (p. 3). The study recommended using student focus groups, class questionnaires and enrollment data to determine which students are successful in transitioning, and why.

Ten years after this program description, City College published the results of its longitudinal study (Spurling, Seymour, & Chisman, 2008). Researchers looked at the data of 38,095 students from 1998-2000 and from 2007. The overall finding was that those students who took full advantage of the ESL services—non-credit and credit—and persisted, successfully transitioned to academic classes. Specifically, 8% (n=3050) of those students who were in non-credit ESL programs in 1998-2000 made the transition to academic programs within seven years. Of the 3050 students, the majority were from an Asian background (59%, n=1800). Even though

Hispanics were the largest ethnic group in the total study, only 20% (n=610) transitioned to any credit courses. Students who were between 16 and 19 years old in 1998-2000 were more likely to transfer (17%, n=518) than students over 50 (3%, n=91). The study did not investigate gender issues, family background, and socioeconomic status of participants due to the lack of adequately collected data. The enrollment procedure did not require students to provide such information.

The authors concluded:

Unless and until colleges come to see significantly more non-credit students as potential credit students, devise programs that will more closely integrate the two services, and hold ESL departments and others accountable for increasing transitions, it is unlikely that transition rates will increase. (p. 118)

The researchers claimed that their findings can be generalized and can serve as a model for other community college ESL programs. They also encourage other programs to perform longitudinal research to highlight who their students are and what those programs should know in order to establish appropriate services for their students.

Assessments from program participants were missing from the first comprehensive report on transitioning adults to college that was published in 2006 by Zafft, Kallenbach, and Spohn, sponsored by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy. The report began with the following statement: “Information on specific transition models for adult learners is scarce” (p. 7), although numerous foundations (e.g., Nellie Mai Education Foundation, Lumina Foundation for Education) and research centers (e.g., Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy and Center for Adult English Language Acquisition) were investigating program access and persistence at the time. The driving questions of Zafft and his colleagues were whether ABE-to-college transition programs fall into discrete models and, if so, what the features of the models

were. The researchers looked at existing programs which were non-profit, part of an ABE ESL program, or required no tuition. These programs were surveyed for their demographic information on participants, key transition points for participants, staff qualifications, characteristics of the organization, and relationships with other agencies. Based on the information gathered, five models were identified: (a) Advising, (b) GED-Plus, (c) English of Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), (d) Career Pathways, and (e) College Preparatory. The Advising model provides individualized and customized counseling to students; GED-Plus model integrates additional academic content, such as critical thinking skills and algebraic concepts, into the GED curriculum to prepare students for transitioning. The ESOL model aligns its curriculum with credit-based ESL programs or introductory composition courses. Career Pathways provide access to college-level occupational training for students who are not academically prepared for college-level courses, for example, these programs may offer a health career class to prepare ABE students who intend to pursue a health related certificate with health related vocabulary. The College Preparatory model provides direct instruction to build academic skills, e.g., algebra, reading, and critical thinking (see Appendix A for a more complete description of the models). They concluded their report with five recommendations addressing “state- and national decision-makers” (p. 46).

The first recommendation referred to assessment: the researchers urged a well-defined framework regarding students’ college readiness, which could help ABE ESL teachers prepare their students to transition and could help the students with more effective college placement. The second recommendation addressed funding. Effective transitioning programs are costly; approximately \$6,000 per student per year is spent in a program where 84% of students transition and obtain associate degrees. The third recommendation concentrates on professional

development for ABE ESL instructors and counselors. Professional development workshops are invaluable for changing institutional practices from traditional ABE setting to transitioning programs. The fourth recommendation focuses on forging partnerships between adult postsecondary education and the community. Finally, the researchers recommended more research on instruction, assessment, and counseling, concluding “research that focuses on discrete components and strategies might be more useful” (p. 49).

Prince and Jenkins’s study (2005) involved 34 colleges with transition programs in a sample (n=34,956) that included first-time adult students age 25 and older, with or without a high school diploma. Of the sample, nearly one-third (30%, n=10,387) enrolled in ESL programs. The study examined the students’ educational paths and their annual earnings five years after they started classes. Of the ESL students, 13% (n=1364) went beyond basic English skills and earned some college credits. Within five years, 68 students earned 45 or more college credits, a certificate, or a degree. The researchers concluded that those students who received financial aid, expected to attend college for at least a year, registered in developmental classes, and had a plan prior to enrollment were more likely to succeed in college-level courses. In the case of ESL students, 313 of them transitioned, received financial aid, enrolled in developmental classes, and had clear educational plans.

**Key elements in transitioning: Financial aid and personal, emotional support**

Saari, Storla, and Turtola (2006) described one community college’s transitioning program, which focused on ESL students in a nursing program. The students were enrolled in a nursing program taught by nursing instructors while they attended an ESL-instructor taught support class. The ESL instructor also attended the nursing classes for two reasons: (a) to provide support during those nursing classes; and (b) to determine any additional help needed, which was

then discussed in the support class. As a result, all 10 nursing students completed the first year and went on to the second year. The researchers found that students who received financial aid were more likely to remain in a program than those who did not receive financial aid. Those students who were financially invested in education stayed focused throughout their post-secondary education, and also stayed highly motivated to finish their programs. They perceived their education as an investment, which would be reimbursed once they started working in their new career.

Another equally crucial element for retention is a sense of ongoing care toward immigrant students. According to Saari, Storla, and Turtole (2006), the presence of a caring advisor or counselor throughout the transitioning program increases retention. Furthermore, instructors in transition programs also have a key role: the instructors' motivation, knowledge, and personal traits serve as support for transitioning students who often contact their caring personnel in college with their personal and academic troubles. The cared-for attachment is one of the most crucial elements of successful transition.

Harrington (2000) described a three-year transition program which helped native and non-native English speaking students advance from various ABE programs to college programs in one community college in a southern state. First, based on administrators' and students' self-reports, Harrington identified several challenges that transitional programs faced. The challenges included issues with recruiting and retaining students and determining eligibility for transitional programs. Second, the report also identified barriers which prevented students from transitioning. Barriers included low self-esteem and low sense of self-worth; no clear educational goals; feeling alienated from the dominant culture; lack of experience in time-task management; no support network; peer pressure against putting time and effort into learning; and lack of

understanding about the higher education system. Based on these barriers, the program director established several supporting and caring services. In the second year of the study, 396 students received transitioning support, which included scholarships and personal counseling. Of the 396, 90% (n=354) registered for academic classes in the second year. After the first semester of that year, 13.5% (n=48) of the students dropped out or withdrew, which was “significantly lower than the 24% who did not complete their classes last year” (p. 19). Harrington concluded that academic advising, tutoring, career and personal counseling, educational and personal goal-setting, finding and applying for financial assistance and scholarships, and instructional aid are essential components of a successful transitioning program. (p. 20)

In another study, Estrada and colleagues (2005) focused on personal-emotional adjustments in college transitioning for ESL students. The researchers explored which predictive factors helped college life adjustment for 123 ESL students who were either freshmen or sophomores in degree programs. Most of the students were Hispanic (80%) and almost half of the total participants (47%) “reported that they were first in their family to go to college” (p. 560). Data procedures included questionnaires that collected information regarding personal-emotional adjustment as well as background information on the participants. The researchers found that being first in the family to attend college and a high sense of stress, not necessarily directly related to academic challenges, made personal-emotional adjustment more difficult. The researchers also found that developing coping skills and being able to control life circumstances as well as having strong, long-term friendships at college positively affected personal-emotional adjustment. The researchers concluded that successful personal-emotional adjustment is a precondition for integration of ESL students into college life. They advocated for an “atmosphere of stability, reassurance, and transitional support” to ensure success (p. 565).

In the studies by Buttaro (2004) and Harrington (2000), the researchers emphasized the importance of emotional support. Buttaro urged adult ESL teachers to care for their students; Harrington described how support services promoted a sense of belonging among students, which resulted in successful integration to college life. What the studies did not emphasize was which theoretical framework could guide college support systems to help students transition. After reviewing the relevant literature, the researcher drew four major conclusions. First, participants in the quantitative study described in this literature review (Harrington, 2000) who had been guided by a caring person, either an ESL teacher or an academic counselor, advanced in their college careers. Second, these studies concurred that there is a need for some sort of transition class. Third, participants (the transitioning students) were not systematically asked to share their own personal experiences in transitioning from ABE to college. Finally, in making a case for the importance of effective transitioning programs, the conclusion made in this literature review is that there is not a substantial amount of research to make a judgment about what critical elements support students' transition from non-credit language learning programs to for-credit programs. Thus, a critical area of research on transitioning adult English as a Second Language learners to for-credit programs is missing.

### **The Ethic of Care**

The ethic of care (e.g., Collier, 2005; Goldstein, 1998; Owens, 2005) derives from Noddings (1984, 2006, 2007, 2010) who distinguishes natural and ethical caring. According to Noddings, natural caring arises from human existence: for example, mothers naturally care for their children. Mothers and children maintain a close relationship in which time, commitment, and effort naturally translate into caring. On the other hand, when natural caring does not arise,

when the relationship is looser than the mother-child bond, then an effort must be made in order to care. Noddings (1984) calls this effort an “ethical caring” (p. 16).

There are two crucial elements that characterize Noddings’s caring: (a) “apprehending the other’s reality” (p. 16); and (b) “make[ing] a commitment to act” (p. 16). These are the values, Noddings argues, that should enter into the classroom along with the curriculum, teaching practices, and assessments, and should persist throughout teachers’ personal and professional lives. In Noddings’s terminology, the teacher is the *one-caring* and the student is the *cared-for*. Their mutual-caring relationship is based on the recognition of the cared-for’s realness and the one-caring “being committed to caring action on the other’s behalf” (Cassidy & Bates, 2005, p. 68).

Noddings’s caring, according to Goldstein (1998), is “not something you are, but rather something you engage in, something you do... In a caring encounter, the one-caring meets the cared-for with engrossment. The one-caring opens herself to the cared-for with full attention, and with receptivity to his perspective and situation” (p. 3). Thus, this relationship is not driven solely by the sympathy of the one-caring. It is more than sympathy; it is an action taken by the one-caring on behalf of the cared-for, whose needs are being discerned (Goldstein, 1998). For example, teachers should modify their proposed curriculum according to their students’ needs. The modification of the curriculum is the necessary action that an ethic of care assumes.

According to Owens (2005), three key features characterize an ethic of care in education: teachers (a) acknowledge their students’ life experiences, (b) constantly seek ways to improve their teaching, and (c) are empathetic toward their students and their perceptions. Caring teachers also keep an open dialogue with their students in order to advance interactions between teachers and students. Through interactions, teachers can learn about their students, which can help

teachers acknowledge students' life experiences, alter the curriculum accordingly, and understand their students' perceptions. Caring teachers also respect their students, hold high expectations, and "model academic, social, personal, and moral behaviors" (Gay, 2000, p. 46). Caring, combined with pedagogical competence, can become a powerful instrument for teaching diverse students across ages and curricula (Gay, 2000). Thus, an ethic of care manifests in actions taken on behalf of students and in dialogues between students and teachers. A concrete example of an ethic of care act from the field of adult ESL classrooms may include a teacher exploring scholarships for her or his ABE ESL students who are in need of financial help in order to register for academic classes. As a teacher's job description generally includes maintaining the curriculum and academic standards, finding scholarships exceeds the job requirements; therefore, it is an action that illustrates care for students. How teachers know about, for example, the need for scholarships presupposes an open dialogue between teachers and students: the teacher is approachable, displays respect toward students, and is available for students outside the classroom. Approachability, respect, and availability are what most adult ESL students crave from their teachers (Vandrick, 1998).

An ethic of care is not limited to any specific educational setting (Goldstein, 2002; Powell & Takayoshi, 2003; Vandrick, 1998): from the elementary level to higher education, caring plays an important role in learning and teaching. Gregory (2000) recommends that the ethic of care be incorporated into everyday teaching along with daily school routines, such as taking role or grading. For example, in an adult ESL class, displaying sensitivity toward students' foreign names by spelling and pronouncing them properly shows caring. Jorge from Mexico should not become George in a classroom because the teacher is unwilling to properly learn the pronunciation of the student's name. Gregory further posits that in a democratic

educational setting, the “complex virtues and behavioral dispositions” (p. 450) found in an ethic of care should be used along with the elements of critical pedagogy, learning communities, and multiculturalism (Marri, 2005; Paquette, 2005; Roseboro, O’Malley, & Hunt, 2006).

### **Characteristics of Caring Schools**

Tarlow’s (1996) research described characteristics of caring schools. The 84 participants were snowball-sampled. Snowball-sampling is a technique to identify subjects recommended by other research subjects. In Tarlow’s study, families, schools, and voluntary agencies previously described by school administrators as caring were selected. The total sample included 40 men and 44 women. Through interviews, the participants shared their perceptions regarding care. Tarlow distinguished eight characteristics of a caring school: 1) faculty and staff spending time with students; 2) the physical presence of the teacher among students; 3) conversation between teachers and students; 4) empathy toward students; 5) teachers’ mentoring support; 6) positive feelings toward students and paying attention to individual students’ physical and mental learning environments; 7) acting positively on behalf of students as a result of constant assessment of the class’ learning atmosphere; and 8) reciprocated caring, which presumes and entails mutual responsibility on the part of both teachers and students. This later element is the most crucial constituent of caring: the basic assumption is that the person cared for must accept the caring process. If acceptance fails, caring is no longer intact. Tarlow concluded that caring must be an ongoing process with a “past, present, and future” (p. 80) and that the eight distinguished characteristics can be learned by anyone who wants to understand and begin care.

Another study, Doyle and Doyle (2003), reported that “[a] caring community has an ‘ethic of care’ that works to develop students who will become empathetic adults and transport a caring mission beyond the wall of the school into their communities” (p. 259). The researchers

further suggested that such caring environments foster equal relationships among school members, including students, teachers, and administrators. Inclusion empowers the individual members to coalesce into a community, where that community is established on the mutuality of the ethic of care. Moreover, care proposes additional elements beyond equality: caring in classrooms, caring for students, and caring by students. It is important to note that the ethic of care does not deny power differences between teachers and students (Goldstein, 2002; Gregory, 2000; Noddings, 1984). The concern is with the way teachers use (or do not use) their power for their students.

### **Caring in Adult ESL**

Caring not only affects school-aged children's learning, but also the education of adult ESL learners. Researchers, e.g., Vandrick (1998) and McKay and Tom (2006), described a need of an ethic of care in ESL instruction. The need derives from the discrepancy between adult ESL instructors and their students: often, adult ESL instructors are native speakers without a sufficient comprehension of their students' life circumstances. If these instructors explored an ethic of care, they could maintain equilibrium between the prescribed and personalized curricula into classrooms by assessing and synthesizing students' personal needs. For example, Vandrick (1998) observed that to prevent unfairness and destruction of self-esteem in an adult ESL classroom, instructors could apply the practices of an ethic of care in their ESL classrooms. They can teach their language learners to "share feelings clearly and personally" (Vandrick, p. 81), encourage conflict resolution skills and networking, and value group process skills and strategies to ensure inclusion in the mainstream society. Vandrick also pointed out the need for careful choice of teaching materials with special attention to female authors, inclusion of the interests of women, equal sharing in calling on female and male students, discussion of gender issues in the

United States and the world, and attention to the sexist pronouns and vocabulary of the English language as well as teaching strategies on how to avoid them (1998). ESL curricula rarely assess such items although ESL learners should learn cultural schema along with English vocabulary in order to reconcile their new identity in their new society (Norton & Toohey, 2002; Vandrick, 1998).

In 2006, McKay and Tom researched what adult English language learners bring to the classroom: along with their physical selves, an entire perceived world enters the classroom, which their instructors should recognize, accept, and incorporate into their teaching. The principles of an ethic of care such as respect for the learner's background encourage teachers to incorporate their learners' world into the class activities.

Further, as a new phenomenon, rising numbers of depression among first-generation immigrants should compel ESL teachers to reconsider caring in the classroom. The lack of integration in the new society, often due to deficient knowledge on social etiquette, is the main cause of depression among first-generation immigrants (Cardemil, Kim, & Pinedo, 2005; Hwang, Chun, & Takeuchi, 2005; Kennard et al, 2006). As ESL teachers learn about caring instruction and integrate it into their practice, the effects of exclusion of immigrants from the mainstream society may be dramatically reduced starting in their classrooms (Mitchell, 1996; Soliday, 1999). As Schenke summarized, care for students "... is... not simply one more social issue in ESL but a way of thinking, a way of teaching, and most importantly, a way of learning" (1996, p. 158). Shenke described teaching an advanced-level ESL class where the majority of the students were females interested in soap operas. She and her students "together" (p. 157) incorporated soap operas and romantic readings into the curriculum, with the focus on personal reflections. The students' responses were overwhelming. They not only constructed some

“remarkable set[s] of writing” (p. 157), but they positioned themselves in the society, closing the gap between their surroundings and their own views of themselves. Practicing an ethic of care fosters a form of liberation in voicing “who they [ESL students] are meant to be and who they desire to be” (p. 156) in their new country. Consequently, a caring ESL teacher facilitates the process in which her/his students reconstruct themselves by creating classroom situations that allow the students to learn the necessary skills to fully function in their new country.

In conclusion, an ethic of care in education may reform adult ESL teaching as the acknowledgement of students’ life experiences, the constant seeking of ways to improve teaching practices, and the development of empathy toward students and their perceptions (Freire, 2006; Owens, 2005) may serve adult ESL students’ needs better.

### **Caring is Cross-Cultural**

Studies suggest that caring is valued and appreciated across cultures (e.g., Eaker-Rich & Van Galen, 1996; Gay, 2000; Lin, 2001). For instance, ethnic communities within mainstream societies desire and seek care via recognition and acceptance of their ethnic background. Van Galen (1996) especially established the urgent need of underrepresented school minorities to be among the cared-for. Their study described examples from a school with 700 students; of those, 75 percent (n=525) were African-American and 25 percent (n=175) Hispanic. The teachers of this school embraced caring for one school year. Their caring was exhibited, for example, by spending more time with their students outside the classroom, communicating more often than before with parents, and spending time with individual students. The researchers reported that “nearly every student readily explained in interviews that they knew that teachers were consistently willing to stay after school to help” (p. 155). Students also reported “warmth and humor” as evidence of their teachers’ caring nature. The teachers’ caring resulted in increased

participation of minority parents and guardians in school events such as workshops on parenting skills and academic assistance. The caring also manifested in students' attitude toward school. As one participated reported, "God did I hate school. Now I like school" (p 160).

Gay also discussed (2000) the bond between culturally responsive pedagogy and ethnically diverged students. Students whose ethnic background was positively perceived by instructors excelled in schools: the caring of their teachers about their ethnic background affected the students' academic success. For example, teachers who increased expectations from their African American students also lowered the students' "learned helplessness," which was pertinent among minority students. Gay recommended ways to care for minority students: Incorporating the techniques of an ethic of care into teaching –high performance expectations, advocacy, empowerment of students, and high use of pedagogical practices –facilitated school success among African American, Latinos, and Native American students.

Mercado's research (1993) also illustrated that "across a number of important distinctions, including class, ethnicity, and language (p. 80), caring was desired. In her research, she described how activities, such as writing about personal experiences, lead to empowerment for students, aged 11 and 15, primarily of Hispanic and Afro-Caribbean Americans origins, in one middle school. Those students whose personal connection with their teachers was manifested in mutual respect, dialogues, and care, excelled academically. Mercado stated that care could build self-esteem and make a difference in the lives of students and teachers:

[our] way of relation to one another is an important influence on students' academic accomplishments. It is because students perceive that we care about them as individual that they are willing 'to put more effort into their work,' and to accomplish what many

consider to be beyond their capabilities. However, in the process of engaging in these experiences, their capacity to care is also nurtured and developed. (p.80)

Therefore, not only the individual benefitted from a caring relationship with his or her teachers, but the individual also learned to care for others. According to Mercado, caring is essential to transform teaching and learning in schools, and the “quality of life in our communities and in our society” (p. 103), and equally welcomed in different ethnic and cultural relations.

### **Caring is International**

Crocker (2008), Held (2006), and Tronto (1993), among others, claimed that an ethic of care is international across borders and states. For instance, through the principles of an ethic of care, susceptible communities receive aid from various groups and individuals. The aid assists those who are in need, but the moment the needs are no longer sustained, the relationship between those in need and those who help them, loosen. These researchers offered the promise of “the possibilities of global civility” (Held, 2006, p. 4) via practicing an ethic of care.

Noddings (2010) argued that an ethic of care could be applied globally. In her view, an ethic of care in the global perception must be adopted by the institutional levels; large organizations should create “conditions under which caring-for can flourish” (p. 392). The first and foremost feature of a global ethic of care is communication. In Noddings’s view, communication includes attentive listening and active participation among nations. In the case of the United States, attentive listening translates into recognizing and accepting other nations’ values and ethics. Active participation further enhances the later notion: “we [the United States] should be sure that the people of other nation can participate in any plans for their future” (p. 392). Therefore, the basic concept of ethic of care - “apprehending the other’s reality” (1984, p.

16) and (b) “make[ing] a commitment to act” (p. 16) are straightforwardly transferable from local to global meaning.

Other researches, e. g, Christie (2005), Clapton (2008), and Said (2004), also supported the global implication of an ethic of care. For example, in Australia, Christie argued that adopting the values of an ethic of care would reduce the “vulgarizing us-versus-them” (Said, 2004, p. 50) and promote global discourse. The global discourse should be incorporated in curriculum across nations and cultures, which would focus on caring for others “who are not the same as ourselves” (Christie, 2005, p. 246). Clapton (2008) also argued for care as “part of our contemporary human service practices” (p. 579), which embedded mutual understanding and responses to needs. Researchers from other countries, e.g., Popescu and Gunter (2011) from Romania, and Vikan et al. (2005) from Norway and Brazil suggested that an ethic of care aided in recognizing and accepting similar and different values. Zembylas (2010) tied an ethic of care and citizenship education internationally and urged policy makers across the globe to recognize marginalized groups— “lesser citizens” (p. 241)—in their societies, and address their specific issues, e.g., education. He argued for positive attitudes in curricula toward immigrants and urged to recognize ‘mis-taught’ concepts, for example, bilingualism as a destructive rather than constructive conception.

In conclusion, an ethic of care has a place in global education. Engaging in global communication, promoting active participation locally in global decisions, and recognizing marginalized groups’ needs and acting on their behalf are part of the globalized ethic of care.

### **Implications of the Ethic of Care**

Manton (1998) admitted that “[f]or many years I taught adults without ever doing a serious needs analysis, without knowing them well enough to know what they most needed to

learn from me” (p. 41). This practice dramatically changed when one of her (female) ESL students brought to class a pile of official letters that the student could not read. This concrete instance led Manton to use students’ lived experiences in creating her curriculum.

Creating a learner-centered classroom, where students are perceived as active participants in learning with all the lived experience they bring to class and where instructors facilitate rather than instruct their students, will empower second language students in the journey of learning English (Manton, 1998; Owens, 2005; Schenke, 1996). An ethic of care enables the instructor to see the formerly invisible: the concerns the students bring to class. An ethic of care also enables the instructor to take action on the behalf of the students: the alteration of the curriculum to ease the students’ concerns is considered an action. The students’ states of mind highly influence their learning (Vandrick, 1998); thus, practicing the ethic of care allows the individual learner to be the focus of teaching, and the prescribed curriculum becomes secondary in importance (Vandrick, 1998).

Other studies also point out that taking into account learners’ emotions and lived experiences, which are the key elements of an ethic of care, reconstructs the identity of the adult learner (Crabtree & Sapp, 2003; Ricento, 2005; Tisdell, 1998). Additionally, Crabtree and Sapp (2003) suggested that “raise[ing] awareness about the world in which students live” (p. 132) is at the center of caring ESL classrooms. With the aid of caring ESL instruction, adult students can find their new identity in their chosen country (Norton & Toohey, 2002; Smoke, 1998).

In conclusion, the ethic of care has a place in teaching adult ESL classes. Employing an ethic of care in adult ESL classes gives students strategies with which to reconstruct themselves in their new society, build skills for networking and socializing, and learn techniques for raising the self-esteem that many of these students lack.

### **International Aspects of Transitioning Immigrants into Society**

Internationally, several countries shifted their immigrant education from basic language teaching “to national vocational and educational training reform, and greater educational accountability in the form of competency and outcomes-based training.” (Burns, 2003, p. 262)

The new shift targeted low-skilled adults whose education had a great impact on labor force:

It has been shown that a country able to attain literacy scores 1 percent higher than the international average will achieve levels of labor productivity and GDP per capita that are 2.5 and 1.5 percent higher, respectively than that of other countries (Coulombe et al. 2004).

Australia, Canada, and several European countries, e.g., the United Kingdom and Sweden, designed programs to increase basic skills of adults and the quality of the adult basic education services. The programs targeted adult education core curricula, created financial incentives for assisting low-skilled workers to enroll in education, and involved employers to support their employees’ educational goals. (Burns, 2003, Fleming, 2008; Pardos-Prado, 2011)

Australia and the United Kingdom shifted teaching English from a general language teaching concept “towards a strong focus on [...] adult literacy” (p. 262). As a consequence, in Australia, all adult immigrants’ English language training is provided through vocational education and training (Burns, 2003). New Zealand also developed standard-based certificates “of competence in literacy, oracy, numeracy, and other workplace skills including teamwork, problem solving, safety, computing and self-management” (International trends, 2009) to assure quality adult education and the gaining of appropriate credits. The certificates were recognized and accepted by local employers.

Australia, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Italy, and Austria also piloted different financial aids to support low-skilled and at-risk groups. For example, Australia was experimenting with tax reduction for those who returned to school; the United Kingdom established *individual learning accounts* (ILAs). Citizens over 19 received a government grant of 150 pounds upon depositing at least 25 pounds. The money financed vocational trainings (International trends, 2009). Other countries, e.g., Switzerland, Italy, and Austria provided education free of charge for basic reading, writing, and numeracy (International trends, 2009).

Employers directly benefit from skilled labor; therefore, their involvement in shifting the focus of adult education was a crucial component. In the United Kingdom and New Zealand, business and adult services worked closely on creating relevant trainings. For instance, Train to Gain (International trends, 2009) in the United Kingdom was a successful connection between employers and adult education services. Local businesses were able to suggest trainings, which directly targeted the needs of the local. The cooperation resulted in thousands of newly trained employees and the doubling of the program's funding (International trends, 2009).

Countries, e.g., Greece, whose sudden change “from a country of emigration to a country of immigration” [were] “unprepared to cope with the ensuing socio-economic changes and the newcomers' multifaceted programs and needs” (Mattheoudakis, 2005, p. 322). Adult immigrant education focused on basic language learning, which resulted in low enrollment. This trend was changed in Greece with a pilot program in 2001: language teaching and vocational training were tied together and offered to unemployed immigrants free of charge. The future of adult education in Greece took the same direction as in Australia, the United Kingdom, or Austria: to provide language education with a special emphasis on vocational training (Mattheoudakis, 2005)

Another relatively young immigrant country, Sweden, realize the importance of inclusion of immigrants by recognizing and validating immigrants' foreign education and skills (Andersson, 2008). Immigrants' individual education, skills, and the needs of the labor market were then matched, and "vocational and professional training[s]" (p. 44) were provided free of charge. Although the purpose of the validation process in Sweden was to guide immigrants into the Swedish labor force and the society through vocational trainings, it also resulted "in better self-confidence and higher self-esteem in the case of individuals." (p. 45)

In conclusion, the international trends (e.g., Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom) in adult education showed similarities to trends in the United States. Focusing on vocational and professional education in adult core curricula and providing financial incentives for assisting low-skilled workers, as well as involving employers in designing and offering vocational and professional trainings and focusing on the individuals' self-esteem are imperative in transitioning.

### Chapter 3: Method

The purpose of this study was to explore the college transitioning experiences of a group of ABE ESL students. The overall research question of this study was: What are the perceptions of ABE ESL students about their transition experiences as they move from an ABE ESL program to a community college degree program? Two sub-questions helped build the evidence of the study: (a) How do ABE ESL transfer students perceive differences and similarities in academic cultures between an ABE ESL program and a community college? and (b) What do ABE ESL transfer students say about the kinds of support and services that contributed to their successful transition?

The study design was qualitative (Creswell, 2004; Wolcott, 2001), using a phenomenological approach (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Smith, Flowers, & Larking, 2009; Sokolowski, 2000). The qualitative phenomenological research design was intended to provide a structure of “the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in particular situations” (Bogdan & Biklen, p. 25). In this study, *ordinary people* were the “small percentage of ABE ESL students” (Chisman & Crandall, 2007, p. ii) and the *particular situation* was the circumstances under which the students advanced their education beyond English language learning. Therefore, the researcher explored how a group of adult ESL students navigated through events and situations that affected their transitioning from ABE ESL to college programs. In this qualitative phenomenological research design, data were collected via focus group interviews and in-depth individual interviews with focal students.

#### **Researcher’s Background: From ABE to Ph.D.**

In qualitative phenomenological research, a researcher’s “first principle is sensitivity to context” (Silverman, 2005; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 180). To understand how this

researcher developed sensitivity to her study milieu, allow me to personalize by using first-person narrative in the following section.

I am a second language speaker living in a bilingual household. I learned English as an adult, which eventually led to my interest in this current research. I immigrated to the United States in 1993 at the age of 24. I had earned a Bachelor of Arts with a double major in history and geography prior to coming to the United States, and previously taught as a high school teacher in Hungary. When I arrived to the United States, I spoke no English. In my new American life, I first focused on learning English, and in my first year of immigration, I enrolled in a free ABE ESL class at the local community college. At that time, neither my ABE ESL classmates nor I considered pursuing an American college degree. Our primary focus was to master the English language and with the obtained knowledge and language skills, find any position available in the workforce. None of the instruction in language learning classes discussed the possibility and opportunity of moving beyond basic language skills. As a result, my classmates and I had limited to no knowledge as to what an adult immigrant with non-fluent English could accomplish educationally in the United States.

My own personal desire to become a high school teacher helped me transition beyond language learning to pursue a degree. The language learning experience in the ABE ESL program, which I encountered directly as an adult immigrant transitioning from ABE ESL to graduate school, prompted me to help others move beyond this situation. When I returned to my former ABE ESL program as an instructor, I incorporated the ideas of advancing beyond basic language learning into academic settings in the existing ABE ESL curricula. As a result, the first transitioning class that explicitly exposed ABE ESL students to the advantages of pursuing an

American degree was established. Through this college transition program, it became possible for local ABE ESL students to transition to college.

### **Study Context**

**Community college.** This study took place in a community college with more than 12,000 students; most students (76%) attend school part time, and are considered non-traditional students. Non-traditional students in this study are older than 24 and work while taking classes. The majority of the college students do not graduate within three years, which is the graduation goal of this community college. This college is seeking ways to improve the relatively low graduation rate among its students, which is 6% compared to other colleges' 20% graduation rate. Rate of growth for non-native ESL students in the for-credit programs at this community college has increased in the last 10 years. In 2007, approximately 8% of the total student population (1000) was ESL. The college has two ESL programs: a community, non-credit ESL program, and an academic, for-credit ESL program. Typically, ESL students start in the free non-credit classes (e.g. Low Beginning), but only a few transition to the for-credit classes. The college maintains no statistics as to how many students transition from the ABE ESL program to the college ESL program.

**ABE ESL program: Non-credit for language learning.** The Adult Basic Education (ABE) program is housed within the college's workforce development program and attracts students with limited academic skills. The program is funded by a Federal Adult Education & Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) grant (1998). This non-credit and free-of-charge program consists of programs for native and non-native adults, age 17 and older. One program that is being offered for native English speaking students who read at elementary level is a literacy program. Another program for those adult who wish to pursue their General Education Degree (GED) is

GED preparation classes. Another program for non-native English speakers is English as a Second Language classes. During the 2007 fiscal year when this study took place, the ABE ESL program enrolled around 2,000 students and had 23 part-time instructors in these courses.

The ESL program has six levels ranging from low beginning to high advanced. All ESL courses focus on language skills. Beginning courses concentrate on listening and speaking while advanced classes emphasize everyday reading and writing skills. The curricula focus in these courses on employability skills; e.g. filling out job applications; making appointments; and engaging in workforce activities. Consequently, the curricula do not target activities that would be necessary for advancing students to college programs. Students typically take advantage of the free ESL program to improve their language skills in order to advance their current position in the workforce. Statistics on how many students have actually been promoted in their positions are not available since the program has no means to track the students once they leave the ABE ESL classes.

**College ESL: For-credit for a degree.** The college ESL program is located on the main campus and housed within the English Department. During the 2007 fiscal year, the for-credit program enrolled around 1,000 students, and had five part-time and five full-time instructors. The program offers beginning and intermediate level ESL reading, writing, and listening/speaking classes, and English 101 and 102 equivalent ESL classes. The transition class, College Transition Class 101 for Non-Native English Speaking Students, is offered as an ESL elective among other electives such as speech and computer classes for non-native English speaking students. All ESL classes are taught by ESL professionals holding either a Bachelor in Art or an Master in Art degree in TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages). These for-credit ESL classes follow the regular college class fee schedules, which means they

are open to the community. The students' backgrounds vary: (a) first generation immigrants who have graduated from American high schools but have English skills below that of native English speakers; (b) international students who are pursuing a United States degree at this college; and (c) immigrants whose English skills are above the ABE ESL classes and who want to improve their English skills and/or want to pursue a degree at this college.

Little interaction occurs between the two ESL, non-credit and for-credit, programs. First, the locations of the two programs differ. While the non-credit program is placed on a satellite campus, the for-credit ESL program is located on the main campus. The satellite campus is strategically located in an easily approachable community, while the for-credit program's location, the main campus, is rather isolated. It can only be reached by car or limited public transportation. Furthermore, there are no direct bus lines between the two campuses. These circumstances hinder students who want to transfer from the ABE ESL program to the main campus.

Second, as instructors teach only in one or the other of the ESL programs, little to no collaboration exists between instructors of the two programs. Typically, the ABE ESL instructors do not have credentials such as a Master of Art in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) while it is required for instruction in the for-credit programs. On the other hand, although the for-credit ESL instructors have credentials to teach in the ABE ESL program, they tend not to choose to teach in non-credit programs. The reasons vary: first, instructors perceive teaching in the for-credit program as being more prestigious because those classes are college-level classes, and second, the time spent in the classroom is less in the for-credit program than in the non-credit program. For example, in the for-credit program, teachers spend three hours per class per week as opposed to a non-credit ESL class of eight hours per class per week.

Also, the pay is higher in the for-credit program and, finally, for-credit instructors are not accountable for student retention, unlike the non-credit program. In the for-credit ESL program, students pay a fee, and it is at their discretion whether they finish the class or drop out. There are no job related consequences for their instructors. In contrast, in the non-credit ESL program, students' fees come from a federal fund, which is based on the number of students who finish a class. Therefore, if instructors lose students, the instructors are scrutinized as to why their students dropped their classes. Although there are many reasons as to why students drop out, eventually it is the ABE ESL instructors' responsibility to keep their students. This is a pressure that for-credit instructors do not face and perhaps explains one reason why for-credit instructors choose not to teach in the non-credit ESL program.

Table 2 depicts the main differences between the non-credit ABE ESL and the for-credit college ESL programs.

Table 2

*Differences between ABE ESL and College ESL Programs*

Differences	ABE ESL	College ESL
Location	Satellite campus	Main campus
Fund	Federal Adult Education & Family Literacy Act (AEFLA, 1998)	Tuition
Instructors	Part-time	Full-time and part-time
Qualification	Good written and oral English skills	M.A. in TESL
Salary	Hourly paid	Credit-based

**The transition class: CTC 101.** The first transition class offered in fall 2005 was a result of a partnership forged between the ABE ESL and the for-credit college ESL program administrators. The class was created for several reasons: Firstly, because only a small percent of ABE ESL students had transitioned from the college ABE ESL non-credit classes to academic, for-credit classes (Csepelyi, 2008). Since the ABE ESL program was not included in the main campus student data management program, there was no record as how many ABE ESL students actually transitioned to college. All numbers were estimated and anecdotally reported by ABE ESL instructors. Secondly, ABE ESL students had no knowledge of how higher education in the United States worked; thus, the need arose for a transition class, which would provide the necessary skills for college attendance. Finally, the administrators in both ESL programs were persuaded by students' reflections about their lack of information on the college's for-credit ESL program. These reasons all supported the establishment of the transition class, College Transition Class 101 (CTC 101).

The design of the transition class followed a regular academic class schedule. The class met twice a week for an hour and 15 minutes at the main campus, similar to other college ESL classes. The curriculum was built around college concepts: major vs. minor; academic honesty; academic services; and financial help. Instructional strategies included field trips on the main campus, lectures by guest speakers, and visits to academic classes. The purpose of the field trips was to expose the CTC 101 students to college services and to familiarize them with the main campus. Guest speakers were often former ESL students who had started taking academic classes. They shared their own transitioning experiences—struggles and strategies that helped them overcome obstacles—with current CTC 101 students. By visiting academic classes, students could alleviate their fear of attending college level classes; CTC 101 students often

described how they believed their English level was not appropriate for academic classes. Upon observing academic classes, these students were often reassured that their English skills would not hinder them in transitioning.

The class served as the first academic course for ABE ESL students; they were required to write essays, read textbooks, and give oral presentations. The teacher covered topics such as discrimination against non-native speakers on campus, cultural expectations, and handling college enrollment for undocumented students. Additionally, learning objectives were designed to develop academic skills necessary for students to be successful in academic classes; note-taking, reading strategies, and composition skills, for instance. The curriculum also included the development of personal and academic goals. Personal goals included building self-esteem and confidence; academic goals included encouraging students to familiarize themselves with various college support systems such as the college tutoring center and the library. The curriculum selection was centered on helping students understand the American college system. Topics included what undergraduate and graduate studies mean and how to calculate academic credits. Upon completion of the transition class, the students were eligible to enroll in academic ESL classes. Moreover, at the end of the semester, each student left the class with a detailed educational plan that identified a specific major, the number of credits required by that major, a financial plan to support his/her education, and a timeline from the current semester to the date when the student hoped to receive his or her first certificate or associate's degree.

This transition class was federally funded during data collection in 2008; it was possible to count the credits for the course as elective credits toward a degree. The fact that the transition class offered three academic credits free of charge was a feature unique to this course as none of

the existing transitioning programs in the United States offers their classes for credits (Alamprese, 2005; Zafft, Kallenbach, & Spohn, 2006).

### **Data Sources and Data Collection Procedures**

**Participants.** The participants of this study were former students of the transition courses who had already taken a transition class from the non-credit ABE ESL to the for-credit college programs. At the time of the study, the participants had started taking for-credit classes at the college.

The sample came from seventy-five students enrolled in the transition class between the fall of 2005 and the fall of 2007. Sixty-seven of 75 students registered and completed at least one college class upon completion of the transition class. Of the 67 students, 20 were currently taking classes during the period of data collection. These 20 students were invited to join the study. In the process of selecting the participants from the student pool of the transition class, only one criterion played a role when selecting informants: the informants needed to have taken at least one academic class in the college in any for-credit program. Therefore, their country of origin, gender, marital status, completed education, and educational goals were not primary concerns in the selection of participants.

**Recruitment.** An invitation was mailed to all 20 students (see Appendix B for the recruiting letter). Fourteen students replied to the invitation via e-mail. Of the 14, three had moved out of town and could not participate in the study. Of the remaining 11 students, 10 attended the two focus group meetings. One student, whose work schedule changed at the last minute, could not attend the focus group meeting. Consequently, 10 students shared their transitioning experiences from the non-credit ABE ESL to the for-credit college ESL programs

in two focus groups meetings. The focus students' demographic data and their chosen names in the study are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

*Demographic Data of the Invited Students*

Pseudo-name	Country of Origin	Gender	Marital Status	Education Completed	Educational Goal
Linda	Taiwan	Female	Married with Children	High School Diploma	Nutritionist
Orijime	Costa Rica	Female	Single	High School Diploma	Physician
Michelle	China	Female	Married with Children	High School Diploma	Nurse
Lili	El Salvador	Female	Married with No Children	B.S. in El Salvador	Business
Vilma	Columbia	Female	Married with Children	GED	Business
Mandy	Columbia	Female	Married with Children	GED	Business
Gigi	Costa Rica	Female	Single	High School Diploma	Interpreter
Javier	Mexico	Male	Single	GED	Landscape Architect
Kim	Brazil	Female	Married with No Children	High School Diploma	Business
Isabella	Mexico	Female	Married with No Children	B.S. in Mexico	Business

**Data Collection**

**Focus groups.** More than one person at a time is interviewed in a focus group (Glesne, 1999; Kamberelis & Dimitriadis 2006; Kitzenger & Barbour, 1999; Mansell et al., 2004). As Glesne (1999) stated, certain topics such as experiencing social changes are better discussed in small groups with 5-12 participants (Stewart et al., 2007). Stimulating interactions among participants can generate more information than individual interviews (Stewart et al., 2007). Further, focus groups “are particularly useful for exploratory research when rather little is known about the phenomenon of interest” (Stewart et al., 2007, p. 41), as is the case in this study. A typical focus group conversation lasts 1.5-2 hours and is conducted in a variety of places, e.g. homes to offices. The literature does not prescribe an optimal number of groups or meetings (Stewart et al., 2007).

Researchers conducted on effective focus groups (e. g., Kitzenger & Barbour, 1999; Krueger & Casey, 2000; Stewart et al., 2007) suggest that relatively homogeneous groups, on the basis of demographics, personality, and physical characteristics, are more prolific in their responses than heterogeneous groups. Homogeneity can increase the comfort levels and the interpersonal communication among participants within focus groups. The participants’ comfort levels rise with similarities: age, gender, income, occupation, education, religion, and race (Stewart et al., 2007). Also, the surroundings during interviews can influence the dynamism of the focus group. For example, the seating arrangements, the general proximity of the participants, and types of refreshments all have an effect on the participants’ contributions. The moderator also plays a critical role: he or she needs to establish group rules and expectations, and to moderate the discussion. The moderator also encourages interaction and (re)directs the conversation back to the topic (e. g., Kitzenger & Barbour, 1999; Krueger & Casey, 2000; Stewart et al., 2007).

The focus group meetings need to be well-planned (e. g., Kitzenger & Barbour, 1999; Krueger & Casey, 2000; Stewart et al., 2007). The recruitment of the participants and the interview guide are the key elements of successful focus group research. The interviews need to consist of fewer than a dozen questions, with the opportunity to add more if needed. The questions need to be well-formed, easy to understand for second language speakers, and succinct.

This study had two focus group sessions. One group had six participants and one group had four participants. The numbers came from the availability of the participants. Of the 10 participants, 6 students were able to come on one day and 4 on another day. Focus Group I had five females and one male participant, and Focus Group II consisted of four female participants. Although research shows that participants' speaking comfort levels often rise in homogeneous groups (Stewart et al., 2007), the male participant in Focus Group 1 showed no signs of being uncomfortable speaking up in front of the others. On the contrary, the female participants paid special attention that the male in the group be included in the conversation. Further, in this group, two of the participants were sisters who had taken the transition class together a year prior to the interview. The rest had not taken the transition class together, but eventually all six had taken academic classes together at least at one point. Therefore, all six participants had known one another prior to the focus group meetings. The researcher anticipated that this circumstance would make them more comfortable speaking together. Of the six, three were from Spanish-speaking countries; two from Mandarin speaking countries; and one from a Portuguese speaking country. All were in their early 30s. Three participants had children. The participants from the other focus group knew each other not only from school, but also through the community. Two were from Costa Rica, one from El Salvador, while the fourth participant was from Mexico, and all four had been friends for months prior to when the focus group interview was conducted. All

four appeared comfortable sharing their opinions on language learning, college experience, and future goals. Their comfort level with one another was obvious when they discussed topics such as being frustrated with classmates or instructors. Of the four participants, two were married; two were single; and none had children. Ages of the participants ranged from early 20s to early 30s.

The two focus groups met on two different days, two days apart. A conference room at the college was reserved for the group interviews. During the focus group interviews, the researcher played the role of the moderator and facilitator. She was responsible for selecting the participants, establishing a comfortable conversational environment, and paying attention to seating arrangements.

On the day of the focus group interviews, the focus group questions were posted on the whiteboard (see Appendix C). Each set of participants was asked a set of questions with probes (see Appendix D). Both focus group conversations were audiotaped. On average, the sessions were approximately 90 minutes in length. Both conversations were transcribed and sent to the participants to validate their statements and also to provide further possibility to add to the interviews (see Appendix E for the follow-up letter).

**In-depth individual interviews.** Individual interviews are designed to investigate how specific informants experienced a phenomenon (Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Schostak, 2006). In this study, the goal of the individual interviews was to investigate individual informants' transitioning experiences on the personal level (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Individual interviews followed a protocol similar to focus group interviews.

Of the 10 informants, three focal interviewees were selected for individual, one-on-one, more in-depth interviews to gain more specific and detailed information about transitioning. Therefore, one single male (Javier), one single female (Gigi), and one married female with no

children (Lili) were interviewed in a one-on-one interview setting. Their unique perceptions contributed more data to the study.

Javier was a single Mexican male who, at the time, had been living in the United States for over four years. He had worked on a farm in Mexico and worked as a landscaper in the United States. When he was taking the college transition class, his educational goal was to become a landscape architect. Javier had the perspective of a male student whose academic skills in his native language had yet to be developed. Javier's perspective contributed to the understanding of what college was like for students whose basic English literacy skills still needed improvement.

The two females, Gigi and Lili, were from Costa Rica and from El Salvador. Gigi was single and lived with her family. She graduated from high school in Costa Rica and was a computer teacher. She wanted to hold a similar position in the United States. Her family role was to take care of her brother's young children and her mother, who had been ill for some time. While she was taking the transition class, she worked towards a Microsoft specialist certificate. Her perspective contributed to the understanding of those students who had had a career in their native country and wanted a career in their new country.

Lili was married to an American citizen who was born in the same city in El Salvador where Lili was born. Lili had finished her Bachelor of Science degree in marketing before she married and moved to the United States. Her dream was to pursue a Master of Business Administration in the United States and become a businesswoman. Her story aided in an understanding of the college transition experience by those immigrant professionals who were highly educated upon arrival to the United States, but whose English language skills needed much improvement.

After the focus group meetings, the three participants were asked to come back for a follow-up conversation. The purpose of the follow-up conversation was to provide another opportunity for participants to share and clarify any thoughts that surfaced after the initial group interview, as well as to conduct in-depth interviews to explore individual circumstances in transitioning. The purpose of the individual interviews in this study was to gain information about the students' personal histories with regard to transitioning to college. These personal interviews were divided into two major parts: (a) the personal history of the participant, and (b) the transitioning experience. The first part consisted of two subsections: (a) family background and (b) education history, both in the native country and in the United States. Questions in the background knowledge subsection related to recent family life, immigration circumstances, and life in the native country. Questions in the education history subsection related to the interviewee's education in the native country, whether family members had a secondary or post-secondary education, and the interviewee's perception of the value of education. The second part of the interview focused on the student's transitioning experience from ABE to college. This part consisted of two subsections: (a) background information about attitudes toward and circumstances in transitioning, and (b) perceived differences between ABE and college ESL programs.

Questions on background were to provide information about what kinds of attitudes and circumstances these students possessed that may have influenced their transitioning. Appendix F contains the questions for the interview protocol. Other questions, such as who, in the family and at work, supported the college attendance and what kept the student motivated, were included to explore the transitioning circumstances. Also, students were asked to describe how they perceived differences in the academic culture between ABE and their two-year institution and

how these differences influenced their transitioning experiences. Other questions focused on exploring the services a two-year institution provides for ABE ESL transitioning students and on what these students say about which support services contributed to their retention.

The interview questions were open-ended, audio-taped, and transcribed. Also, the researcher initially took detailed notes by hand during the interview. Taking notes interfered with the flow of the interview, so the researcher stopped taking notes and paid undivided attention to the interviewees. This aligned what previous research had suggested, which is that during an individual interview, the individual might feel intimidated by being tape recorded alone (Rubin & Rubin, 2005), or if he or she notices the interviewer taking extensive notes. Hence, during the three individual interviews, although the researcher had planned to take handwritten notes, she abandoned her notebook and focused exclusively on the interviewees.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

The data analysis occurred in two phases: First, the researcher collapsed the responses of the two focus groups and prepared the transcripts. Then, the researcher counted every sentence within the focus group conversations. After that, she identified and sorted concepts, themes, and events answering the research questions. For example, she sorted practices that participants found troublesome or trouble-free in the process of transitioning to college. Second, those concepts, themes, and events were compared to one another and combined to formulate a description of the transitioning experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). This was repeated for each discussion until all common themes were exhausted (see Table 3 in Chapter 4). Once all comments were exhausted and sorted into themes, the themes were physically separated into eight piles. Each pile of comments was placed in an envelope for further analysis in Chapter 4. Chapter 4 presents the analyses of these data. After carefully analyzing all focus group interview

data, the researcher constructed three individual interviews which portrayed three most successful participants' college transitioning experiences. The interviews were prepared in the following steps: after the focus group conversations, the researcher prepared the individual interview questions. The individual interview questions were designed to capture the content that the researcher still wanted to explore regarding the individual transitioning cases. During the individual interviews, the participants were asked questions that gave them more depth. In other words, the interviews were used to help gain data on each student's life story, values, and goals for future. The interviews were analyzed as follows. First, all three interviews were transcribed. Then, the researcher analyzed each transcript for "the complexity of human interaction by portraying it in the words of the interviewees" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 202). The analysis focused on extracting information unique to each interviewee. In Javier's case, the analysis focused on the perspective of a single male who finished elementary school in his native country and now wanted to pursue post-secondary education. In Gigi's case, the inquiry concentrated on how a former professional navigated through the American educational system in order to become a professional in this society. In Lili's case, the focus was on her experience as a highly educated immigrant who recognized that her foreign Bachelor in Science degree would not satisfy the career criteria that she wanted to pursue. Chapter 4 presents the results of the in-depth interviews.

To ensuring validity, the researcher mailed the transcripts to each interviewee of the focus groups and the individual interviews for accuracy of meanings and interpretations.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The following chapter provides findings from an analysis of data from the focus groups and individual interviews. These help shape the conclusions in Chapter 5.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

In the previous chapters, the researcher provided a clear case of the need for the study (Chapter 1) by providing an overview of the immigration situation in the 20th century in the United States through a review of literature on adult ESL students, adult second language acquisition, trajectories in adult ESL education, and elements that led to ABE ESL transition (Chapter 2). The research design that was used in this qualitative phenomenological study (Chapter 3) was also provided. The intent of Chapter 4 is to present results of ABE ESL students' transfer experiences from ABE ESL to community college degree programs. The chapter findings are guided by an overarching question: What are the perceptions of ABE ESL students about their transition experiences as they move from an ABE ESL program to a community college degree program? Two sub-questions guided the analyses of data: (a) How do ABE ESL transfer students perceive differences and similarities in academic cultures between an ABE ESL program and a community college; and (b) What do ABE ESL transfer students say about the kinds of support and services that contributed to their successful transition?

Data were collected through focus groups and in-depth individual interviews. Accordingly, Chapter 4 is divided into two sections: The first section presents results from the focus groups that address the two research questions, and the second section presents results from the individual interview from three students selected from the study.

### **Focus Group Findings**

In this part of Chapter 4, the focus group findings are reported based on the focus group discussion results (see Appendix D for the focus group questions). The answers to the two sub-questions guided the report of the findings: (a) How do ABE ESL transfer students perceive differences and similarities in academic cultures between an ABE ESL program and a

community college; and (b) What do ABE ESL transfer students say about the kinds of support and services that contributed to their successful transition?

### **Differences and Similarities in Academic Cultures Between an ABE ESL Program and a Community College**

Based on the reoccurring topics in focus group conversations, the researcher discerned four major themes, which were 1) nature of interaction between teachers and students; 2) nature of school work; 3) cost-related issues; and 4) site-related issues. Also, two sub-themes emerged within the first major theme: (a) nature of teachers and (b) nature of classmates. The four major themes were identified as the most significant issues with respect to the informants' experiences in the non-credit ABE ESL and the for-credit community college settings. Table 4 depicts the four themes and conversational turns in regard to research sub-question 1 (How do ABE ESL students perceive differences and similarities between ABE ESL and a two-year institution?). The first column in Table 4 presents the four major themes. The second column provides an overview of the number of conversational turns that dealt with the informants' ABE ESL experiences. The third column provides an overview of the number of conversations that dealt with the informants' two-year college experiences. For example, conversational turns about nature of interaction in respect of nature of teachers regarding the ABE ESL setting occurred 23 times while the same topic regarding the two-year institution was mentioned 45 times. All together, the ABE ESL column marks 79 turns and the two-year institution marks 208. Generally, participants conversed more about the two-year institution related issues than they did about the ABE setting.

Table 4

*Themes and Conversational Turns in Regard to Research Sub-Question 1 (How do ABE ESL students perceive differences and similarities between ABE ESL and a two-year institution?)*

Themes	ABE ESL	College ESL
Nature of interaction		
Nature of Teachers	23	45
Nature of Classmates	5	24
Nature of School Work	33	40
Cost-Related Issues	3	76
Site-Related Issues	15	23

Table 4 served as a heuristic overview of how the order of topics was structured in the focus group discussion. The first topic discussed was the nature of teachers within theme one (nature of interaction) as it relates to the informants' ABE ESL experiences. This was followed by the same theme as it relates to the informants' two-year institution experiences. In the next session, the researcher discussed the second part of theme one: nature of interaction between classmates first among ABE ESL students and then among students in the two-year institution. This pattern was followed for the remaining three major themes: first, participants' experiences in the ABE ESL program, and then the participants' experiences in the two-year institution.

#### **Nature of Interactions between Teachers and Students**

Researchers (e.g., Barnett, 2010; Cox et al., 2010; Wilson, Ryan, & Pugh, 2010) addressed faculty and students' interaction in community colleges. Findings indicate that interaction between faculty and students "influences students' sense of academic integration,

which, in return, influences intent to persist” (Barnett, 2010, p. 216). The participants in this study commented on the quality—or nature—of interactions between their ABE ESL teachers and their college instructors.

**Nature of teachers in the ABE ESL program.** According to Deggs and Miller (2011), ABE ESL teachers must assume several roles. The roles include promoting the value of learning, embracing ideas and opinions from their students, advocating for educational attainment, and modeling engaged citizenship. These roles assume the nature of ABE ESL teachers, who are “to be successful in positively influencing the amount and value of social capital available to the citizens of communities” (p. 29). Thus, the assumption is that the nature of ABE ESL teachers is fundamentally supportive, approachable, and caring.

Across the two focus group interviews, the issue of the nature of the ABE ESL teachers occurred 23 times regarding the informants’ ABE ESL experiences. The 23 comments focused on different aspects of the interactions that the informants had with their teachers in the ABE ESL program. For example, seven of the comments focused the level of dedication of the ABE ESL teachers in their work. Isabella, one of the participants, commented, “The teacher was dynamic, very, very enthusiastic, and you [students] came early, and the teacher finished 20 minutes later, and everybody wanted more.” Five other students stated that their ABE ESL teachers pushed them in positive ways to move forward in their learning. Gigi and Orijiime stated how their ABE ESL teacher pushed them to the next level academically.

Gigi: She was the only teacher who said, “Gigi, you have to go on to college. I don’t want you to be here anymore.” I said, “Oh no, I am scared.” She said, “No, no, no. You can go!”

Echoing Gigi's comment, Orijime said: "Yes, she told me, 'I don't want to see you here anymore.'" Javier had the same experience: "I would not say they kicked me out," he laughed, "but they [ABE ESL teachers] did." He also perceived this action as indicating that his teachers wanted him to excel in English as well as academically. Gigi, Orijime, and Javier's instructors let them know that they believed in them and their abilities to succeed at the community college just as they had succeeded in their ABE ESL classes. All three recognized their language teachers' act as a positive and significant motivator in their transition from ABE ESL to the college program. Based on their ABE ESL teachers' assessment, the participants started thinking of pursuing a college degree. While their ABE ESL teachers considered the students college-ready, many times the students themselves did not feel as confident. The only obstacle at this point appeared to be their self-esteem and self-perception: "We are not kids who are not very shy," as Kim stated. She referred to her personal experience as to how she had lost her confidence upon starting a new life as an adult in a new country. She and the other participants could not objectively assess their language proficiency, so they relied on their ABE ESL teachers' assessments. "My teacher believes that my English is ready for college work." (Javier) Therefore, these ABE ESL teachers who "kicked out" (Javier) their students to a two-year institution not only motivated their students to go beyond ABE ESL language learning, but built student self-esteem and a sense of self-worth. Eventually, the care of ABE ESL teachers, motivating and pointing them toward college, led Gigi, Orijime, and Javier to transit to college.

The participants identified additional ways that the ABE ESL teachers helped them. For example, Orijime stated that one of her teachers helped her with English pronunciation. "[My teacher] brought feathers to help with pronunciation." The teacher brought a feather for each student to practice, for instance, the English specific voiceless TH sound as in the word "thank".

If the feather was moved by the effused air, the students were able to reproduce the voiceless TH sound correctly. This teacher brought in supplementary material to an ABE ESL class that would generally use only photocopied exercises. Lili added that her ABE ESL instructor “cared about the students,” which Orijime explained by saying “she had a book and copied the book, gave it to everybody and followed it.”

The participants highly praised their ABE ESL teachers for building community cohesion in their classes. “At the end, we had the whole class together,” Isabella stated. She further explained that the classmates befriended one another; they felt comfortable practicing their English in front of one another. Kim also illustrated how the beginning of her learning English was emotional and how ABE ESL teachers helped her overcome her fear of English learning.

We are worried to express ourselves, we had never learned English before...we are shy...we are super illiterate...And this was the point when [ABE ESL] helped me a lot [emotionally].

Orijime’s words, “at [ABE ESL], the instructors are like your mom, they help you with everything,” supported Kim’s statement. Javier strengthened his classmates’ opinion by saying, “[ABE ESL instructors] are so patient. They know that every person who goes to class go here to learn. They spend time with us to make us learn.” Kim demonstrated through another example how she perceived her instructor’s care:

We had lots of languages and when we talked to our friends in our native language, next day, we needed to bring a bag of candy to share that with everybody because here, we need to respect everybody, speak English, so everybody can understand.

As Isabella further explained, “we did not feel behind” because these ABE ESL teachers

“left no one behind” (Isabella). ABE ESL teachers were approachable, they incorporated community building activities in their daily teaching, and they developed a learning environment where students felt safe to take risks while probing their English learning according to Isabella.

Kim summarized how the needs of ABE ESL students and the nature of ABE ESL teachers met: “if you are starting, . . . , you need a teacher very patient, very organized, because you have lots of students from different countries, different levels, and you need to be with them like kids.” The participants nodded in agreement with Kim’s opinion and also expressed great appreciation for the care demonstrated by their ABE ESL teachers.

Javier added: The teachers from ESL are well-prepared. They know we don’t know any English, so they spend time with us, they are so....

Kim interrupted Javier’s sentence: nice.

Javier continued: patient. They spend time with us to make us learn. And after that the teacher [sends me to college].

The participants agreed that based on their ABE ESL experiences, they expected caring instructors in their college learning.

Lili added one more feature to the nature of ABE ESL teachers: she expressed that her ABE ESL instructor “did not do any pressure to the students. For me, it is good to have a kind of pressure to be motivated, to learn, to study.” The rest of the participants disagreed with her, saying that those ABE ESL instructors who had pushed them beyond language learning and moved them from ABE ESL to college ESL pressured them. Lili thought for a second, then recommended that a constant reminder about college as an overarching theme would benefit those students who did not even consider moving beyond basic English. The rest of the participants agreed with this suggestion.

The participants' comments regarding their ABE ESL instructors focused on how those instructors supported them emotionally, which significantly helped them raise their self-esteem and move beyond ABE ESL language learning. All of these students were motivated by their instructors who had assured the participants that their language proficiency was sufficient for them to take on college level classes. Based on the participants' experience with their friendly and caring instructors, participants expected the same caring attitude from their forthcoming college instructors.

**Nature of teachers in a two-year institution.** The issue of the nature of the college teachers occurred 45 times regarding the informants' college experiences. The comments regarding college instructors were split between the critique of the instructors and comments that expressed the students' desires about how they wanted their college teachers to be.

Isabella's remark opened the conversation about the college teachers, which was that college teachers "have lots of knowledge." None elaborated on this matter although all participants nodded in agreement. They furthered the conversations with comments on how college teachers did not care for the individual students. Mandy illustrated this non-caring nature with an example. She described a situation when her college teacher did not correct the students' quizzes but rather made the students correct each others' tests. Mandy perceived this as a sign of her instructor's lack of caring: "the instructor obviously did not want to spend time outside of class on students' work." Mandy continued, "A lot of students quit because of her." While discussing the ABE ESL teachers, none of the comments indicated that these informants would know anybody in the ABE ESL programs who had quit because of any of the ABE ESL instructors' actions. Javier inserted his comment, "sometimes the teacher, sometimes it is not the

teacher, but the students have problems.” Mandy reassured him that in “this case, it was the teacher.”

Orijime described another experience with a different college instructor who appeared to “not care about her” and made her quit the class:

I had to do an essay, and I did but she [the instructor] gave it back to me that ‘this is not what I wanted.’ I said, O.K., so at the end of the class I asked her what she wanted. And she said, ‘you are too subjective.’ There were some words I did not understand. It was a late night class, maybe she was tired but if you teach that late class, you still should have to help your students...I cried when I withdrew from that class.

In another example, Orijime described yet another college teacher who “sometimes got mad” when Orijime asked for extra help outside of class. When the teacher asked whether Orijime understood the assignment, “I said ‘yes’, but I did not [understand]. I did not want her to shout at me.”

Javier excused college teachers from being caring as he stated “college teachers have a lot to do, they don’t have time to care. Some care but some don’t.” Mandy seconded that “exactly, they are busy.” Isabella added another layer to the discussion above about care: “Here [college] teachers are strict. They say ‘that is her problem.’ They push all the responsibility onto students. Isabella continued discussing the topic of caring:

But sometimes we need somebody who would [care and] push us because we wanna go but we have something else bad experience in our life, family, maybe. It is hard to be brave and some students need that push.

Javier raised an issue regarding caring instructors: “because not every [college] teacher is caring, [ABE ESL] teachers falsely prepare—if at all—[ABE ESL] students for college

instructors.” “This is what happened to us,” Vilma and Mandy seconded Javier’s observation. Both Vilma and Mandy were disappointed in their college teachers who “did not care,” and they both lost confidence in studying. Their example was that in the college transitioning class, students were required to submit their homework assignments in a folder. They incorrectly believed that that was a standard procedure in any college class. However, when they wanted to submit their first assignment in their first college class, the instructor rejected the folders. The students reported that how the instructor expressed herself was disrespectful and “[they] lost confidence” and “[they] felt lost in that class.”

What features did the participants desire from their college teachers? They desired college instructors who were “caring but not too caring” (Javier), who were friendlier (Kim), who dedicated more time to students (Kim), who explained points that ESL students would understand (Mandy), who were enthusiastic toward the topic and teaching in general (Orijime), and who were empathetic toward their students (Orijime). Isabella and Orijime stated, “The teacher is the key ...they can help us find a job, [and] to feel confident. The teacher makes the difference.” “Yes,” Orijime added, “this is when you have a career not for the money but because you like it.”

### **Nature of Interactions between Students in the ABE ESL and the Two-Year Institution**

Not only interaction between students and teachers may influence persistence in college, but interaction among students, too (Delaney, 2008). In this section, the participants' comments on collaboration and communication among students in their ABE and college classes are reported.

**Nature of interaction among ABE ESL students.** Across the two focus group interviews, the issue of interaction among students in their ABE ESL and the two-year institution occurred 29 times. Of the 29, five comments addressed the ABE ESL classmates and 24 comments the classmates in a two-year institution. All five mentioned the ABE ESL classmates positively. Among them, Kim captured the nature of her ABE ESL classmates with this statement:

I was so shy when I came here. I could just say 'thank you', 'hello', 'excuse me', just these. I was not sure about any expression, so I was like avoiding to express myself. ...they [classmates] were 'no, no, you can do this.' So it was a very good experience over there. Because if you study here [college], you will quit.

The positive atmosphere seemed to be an important factor in retention and learning English throughout the students' educational experiences. Lili further explained that being among other ESL students who were also learning English made her comfortable and confident to speak in class.

Lili: "When you start [taking ESL classes], you feel more confident to speak in a class where only ESL students are."

Kim agreed: “When I started studying [English] in the ABE ESL program, I saw everybody was at the same level. Other students know not much more like me, that I told myself that Kim, you can do this.”

Orijime added: “We want to feel comfortable” while learning the language.

These students also reported a sense of belonging to their ABE ESL class while they were learning English. Kim, for example, started helping other students while taking the same class with them. “It was a good experience over there,” she reminisced. Only Orijime raised a concern : “What if you want to be out the world where everybody is a native English speaker and you are in a class where only ESL people are...?” The participants interrupted Orijime: “When you start [learning English], start taking classes in the ABE ESL program where everybody is alike” (Lili).

The participants described a learning community in their ABE ESL classes where students helped one another and felt comfortable with their classmates. “Had I started at the college, I would have quit” (Kim).

**Nature of interaction between ABE ESL and college students.** The nature of college classmates seems to follow the pattern of the nature of teachers. While the ABE ESL classmates left positive emotions in the students, the college classmates appeared to have an opposite effect. Vilma explained, “Sometimes, we make friends; sometimes we don’t have time to make friends. You have another class, you have to go home... Higher level classes, you have your responsibility, then it is more difficult [to befriend].”

“We want to feel comfortable [in classes],” Orijime explained, but according to the participants’ description, that was not the case in college level classes. Lili complained about her college classmates as “honestly, since I came here [college], I never had a friend because they

[native speakers] do not want to talk to you. They are not interested in you.” Therefore, the foremost issue with college classmates seems to be the lack of opportunity to make friends. On the other hand, Lili rationalized another point regarding her college classmates:

[I]n college, all the students, we have the same interest, we are going to the same goal which is different from the non-credit program. For example, I know some older people [in ABE ESL] who did not want to go to college. And they were like, no vision, not getting the knowledge, or getting a degree. Here, you can be with students who want the same, they have the same goal and that motivates me.

Another type of motivation that Javier reported was “here [college] is lot higher level than in the non-credit program. Here I was the small one...I was like 1, 2, 1, 2. I am working on my skills, but this level is higher than in the non-credit program.” In the ABE ESL program, he was one of the highest level students. In college, he could see his weak points. For instance, since he knew his classmates in college were computer literate, he diligently practiced typing, and even set up an e-mail account that he had never had before attending college.

### **Nature of School Work**

School work—homework and in-class assignments—was mentioned 73 times during the focus group interviews. The participants clearly distinguished school work between the ABE ESL and the two-year institution. While they found college work overwhelming, they expressed their desire for stricter curricula in the ABE ESL program.

**Nature of school work in ABE ESL.** According to Javier, “ABE ESL is just English, college is more.” Vilma agreed with this notion: “ABE ESL begins your English; college focus on more than language.” Kim had the same opinion: “You have to have the basics before you attend college.” However, the disparity between the ABE ESL classes and college classes was

obvious as the participants reported how the ABE ESL program had not prepared them for college. “We learned street-English and not college-English,” said Orijime, “and that English did not help in college.” She further elucidated on this issue: “ABE ESL should teach more grammar and more speaking. If you do not know how to speak or ask a question, you will never ask college teachers because you were not taught how to do that.” Lili seconded that. She had studied English in her native country, but upon arrival, her speaking skills were not well-developed. However, because the placement test in the ABE ESL program is reading, Lili was placed in a high-advanced level class. Based on her experience, she recommended that the ABE ESL high advanced classes should concentrate on developing college appropriate speaking skills. “Honestly, I feel ashamed because of my pronunciation. With native speakers, I am very shy, and I don’t talk.”

Furthermore, the participants reported that the high advanced ABE ESL classes should give homework to their students. All participants agreed that “[it is] good to have homework because homework is about what we saw in the class and if the homework is about it, the next day we will remember better” (Javier). “If you want to learn, you want homework. If you don’t then students do not like homework” (Michelle). Vilma added that homework helped her review what the class had been about. However, Mandy stated that homework should be meaningful and connected to the class objectives. If students cannot see the purpose of the homework, they would lose interest in it. Kim approached homework from a different point of view:

When you do homework, you can discover yourself, too. For example, you have class till 9:00 p.m., you go home, have dinner, and you do your homework, you keep going with your homework, when you done, Wow, I did this! After a month, you look back, Wow, I did this. I improved!

She also added that she missed these challenges from her ABE ESL classes. All participants agreed with Kim's comment. According to the general perception of ABE ESL instructors, ABE ESL students are too preoccupied with their busy life to do homework: they often have two-three jobs, families with children, and only on the side do they attend ABE ESL classes (Warton, 2001). The participants contradicted Warton's research; Javier believed that it is "good to have homework." Due to the lack of challenging school work, students might leave the program. Lili shared, "That happened to my friend. She got bored in the ABE ESL program." The students also agreed with what Lili said: "Advanced classes should have more pressure [on students]: more homework, more challenging because when you come to the college, those things are different here." Michelle elaborated on what the ABE ESL program should offer its students: quizzes. She also explained that the required and centrally administered reading tests at the end of each ABE ESL course did not assess what their teachers had covered in class, and emphasized that she would have liked to experience quizzes and tests administered by the teacher during class. For example, a weekly vocabulary test gave the students a general overview about their own learning. "I got 10 out of 10 on a test and made me feel good about myself," Kim explained. Linda added: "No homework and no pressure, so you cannot improve much."

**Nature of school work in the two-year institution.** Concerning comparison of course work, the participants agreed that the college classes differed vastly from the ABE ESL classes: the college classes are faster, one topic after another, and they cannot interrupt the instructors for clarification (Linda and Javier). "The academic level is high, the environment is totally different. But we need to understand what college is. No handouts. No. The teacher can tell you one lesson and you have to study and you have little time" (Isabella). Javier found a way to ask his questions: "When I did not get it, I saved [my questions] on paper and after class I asked the

teacher.” Upon the completion of their first college class, however, Kim, Vilma, and Mandy felt confident asking questions in class. Once they accelerated their learning and were able to sustain the pace of the class, they reported that completing assignments made them feel more confident about themselves.

Kim: In a reading class, I read three books in that class. Those were my first books in English. Wow! My confidence was growing!

Another point that clearly differed from the ABE ESL classes in college was homework. “You have much homework here. And you came from a school but you do not need to worry about homework [in ABE ESL], and when you get here, oh, no! I have no time!” (Lili) Not only the homework but the feedback received about it overwhelmed these students. College instructors tend to give more and “harsher” (Orijime) feedback than their ABE ESL counterparts. However, those comments were well-received as Vilma remarked, “You learn from your mistakes.” She always reviewed the comments and tried to learn from them for her next assignments. Mandy also supported Vilma’s opinion: “I review the feedback to learn from mistakes.”

Further, the participants also discussed that the college offers more options to choose from than the ABE ESL program. Gigi stated, “The college offers skill classes. I need more reading, writing, listening, so I go to college. Also, the college prepares for a degree, and through that degree, for life.” The students also found that the college program was more systematic and used more formal methodology than the ABE ESL program. For example, having a syllabus—a plan for the semester—implied a strong sense of structure for the college classes. On the contrary, lacking a syllabus in an ABE ESL class suggested a lack of direction in those classes.

### **Cost-Related Issues**

The ABE ESL program that these participants had attended was offered free of charge while the college program required a tuition.

**Cost-related issues in ABE ESL.** This program was federally funded through the Department of Education Workforce Investment Act of 1998 with the mission statement aimed at helping ABE ESL students learn English. As part of the program, students did not pay for tuition, school supplies, or textbooks. Although most ABE ESL teachers required a binder with lined paper, that was not a criterion to attend these classes. The participants agreed these free English classes gave them a sense of hope that they could learn English. “[The ABE ESL program] was convenient because it was free” (Isabella). Nevertheless, these students agreed that free “is not good” (Michelle). Michelle elaborated:

There are many students who graduated from a tuition free American high school, and they don’t know how to speak, write, and read in English. I have classmates graduated from here and they are in class with me.

These participants found that free education was beneficial when they were new to the country, but many ABE ESL students “took English classes [in the ABE program] because it was free” (Isabella), but for advancing their English, they believed tuition based English classes were needed. Once the students transferred to for-credit classes, their language learning expectations changed: “to learn beyond street-language” (Orijiime) “because I pay for my education, I want to study and I want a good grade. I do not want to waste my money” (Michelle).

**Cost-related issues in the two-year institution.** College courses involved a fee for tuition, supplies, and textbooks. In the two-year institution, the students reported that they were

concerned about how to pay for classes and school supplies in college. Furthermore, these students were not aware of the different financial aids available to them: scholarships, loans, grants, and work study. Even if they were aware of scholarships, the students reported they did not understand how scholarships worked. Mandy gave an example as to how she and her sister, Vilma, misunderstood a scholarship application. The first year, they applied for a scholarship and received it. They supposed that the same scholarship would be available for the following semester not knowing that certain scholarships could be awarded only once. By the time they realized that they had no scholarship for that semester, the semester had started and they had to withdraw from their classes as they had no other means to pay for their classes.

However, these students justified why college classes cost money. Lili's explanation focused on three areas: 1) credits, 2) the education of the college instructors, and 3) the lack of sponsorship of the college program. Lili explained her first point by stating that because college classes offer credits, therefore a degree, they cost money. "[ABE ESL] classes never offer credits. Students can take free ABE ESL classes, but they never receive a certificate about their school attendance." Second, she supposed that college instructors have higher education than their ABE ESL counterparts, so that rationalizes the college cost. Third, the ABE ESL program was federally sponsored with the goal of teaching English to immigrants. The college program is not sponsored; hence, the students have to pay tuition.

The participants agreed that money was an issue for them to attend college; money and the lack of understanding about how to find financial sources concerned these students the most. Orijime felt strongly about self-initiation: "Don't say 'but.'" Find scholarship, financial aid, and save money." She worked full-time and she also financially helped her family in Guatemala. Yet, she consciously made time for community work, which eventually resulted in different

scholarships she used for paying for her schoolwork. Isabella added that many people simply do not know about scholarships or have misunderstandings about free money. She explained that a sense of pride, a reluctance to receive money that they had not worked for, prevented them from exploring scholarships. Other students agreed that this misconception must be addressed, especially with Hispanic students for whom many scholarships were available. Regarding financial aid, there was much more information that students had to explore before they could take and pay for academic classes. For example, deferred payment was a concept of which the students were unaware. When they took more than six credits, the college allowed students to pay in two payments.

The students agreed that college tuition was shocking for each of them, but “if they really want to pursue a degree” (Lili), students would find ways to pay for their classes (Orijime). They also agreed that this is the least known college aspect, and incoming ABE ESL students need as much information as they could receive about this topic. Isabella explained this:

Before the transition class, I did not know about the scholarships. I thought scholarships were for homeless, no husband, nothing, or some sponsorship, company, but you had to prove that you are poor.

Lili seconded that:

When I came to the United States, I thought how I am going to get a scholarship. I just came but the second semester I got a scholarship. We can do it, immigrants. There are many people who do not know about these opportunities, they cannot take advantage of them.

However, once they paid for their classes, they expected more from themselves:

“Because I pay for my education, I want to study and I want a good grade. I do not want to waste my money” (Michelle).

### **Site-Related Issues**

The ABE ESL and the college are located in two very different sites. The ABE ESL program is strategically located in a Hispanic neighborhood with easy public transportation access. The college buildings, on the other hand, are located in an isolated area: only two bus lines offer infrequent buses to transport people. Therefore, approaching and regularly attending college necessitates that students have a private car. ABE ESL personnel often reasoned that the location of the ABE ESL program and the distance between the two campuses is the reason only a few ABE ESL students transferred to the for-credit program. The following session summarizes what these students said about this issue.

**The site of ABE ESL.** The ABE ESL central office was located in the heart of the city, and was easily accessible with public transportation, freeway access, and even by foot. The location of the building was in a neighborhood where primarily Spanish-speaking families lived, so they could walk to their classes. Several bus lines had a stop in front of the building for those without a private car. Also, in front of the building, plenty of free parking spots were available. The building was designed to be an office building, so it lacked many features that a college campus would otherwise offer. For example, there was no common area where students could gather and only very limited college services were offered in that building. In fact, the extent of the college was a computer lab and a satellite library, both with limited business hours. No Admission and Records, Controller’s Office, advising, or any other services were located in the building. Most classrooms were equipped with computers and whiteboards, but the rooms the

Adult Basic Education program used had no computers. The students reflected on these issues during the focus group interviews. For example, Isabella: “In the ABE ESL program, we can’t have tutors. You have to be a student at the main campus to work with a tutor. I think the school has to open this option to ABE ESL students.” Also, Gigi would have liked a study place in the ABE ESL building, but since the building was chosen by its location, these features were secondary to its location.

**The site of the two-year institution.** Compared to the location of the ABE ESL program, the main campus seemed far to the students. The physical 8 miles distance—a 10-minute drive on the freeway—from the ABE program was perceived by students as “too far” (Isabella). The main campus was located north of town, at an exit from the freeway, where there were no residential areas. Hence, the only way to approach the main campus was by car and by limited public transportation. However, parking was scarce and the public transportation was challenging. It often happened at the beginning of the semesters that students could not park their cars due to the lack of parking spaces. The public transportation was even more discouraging; from the ABE ESL program, the 8-mile distance via public transportation could take a 2-hour bus ride. Despite the location differences, once the students found their way to the main campus, the distance was not a significant factor in college attendance. Out of the 10 participants, eight owned a car, while two—Isabella and Orijime—did not. The latter students rode two busses to the college and two other busses home, which totaled four hours of commute daily. Isabella:

The main campus is too far. When you see the class schedule, you see the different classes but the for-credit English classes are offered only at the main campus. When you wait for the bus, get your books. If you really want it, you can do it.

Isabella added that she could not study on the bus because she “[gets] dizzy in the bus when [she] [reads]” but she would attend classes nevertheless. Orijime, the other student who rode the busses, completed her mathematics homework as well as her reading while riding the bus. Other students also commented on the distance of the main campus from the city. Michelle complained about the gas prices and wished some English classes were offered online. Javier condensed his opinion in one sentence, “Now the gas is too expensive, however, if students want to go to school, location does not matter.” Vilma concurred with Javier’s opinion: “You get used to it...when you have to go, you have to go.” The students, including Michelle, agreed.

Kim, Linda, and Gigi discussed some other site-related issues. The main campus offered services that the ABE ESL building did not. For example, Gigi praised the library and the computer labs on the main campus where she could study between classes. She also found parking easier at the main campus since she made sure to arrive early before the morning classes. Linda and Kim focused on the tutoring center. The tutoring center offered help with English, mathematics, biology, and chemistry free of charge. Both Linda and Kim had received help with their college assignments. Generally, the main campus offered more services to students than the ABE ESL location, and was more student friendly because it offered study spaces and tutoring.

### **Kinds Of Support and Which Services Contributed To Their Successful Transition**

The second question of the first section addresses the three major contributory factors that helped the participants’ transition and persistence in college. In Table 5, the first column presents the three major themes; and the second provides an overview of the number of conversational turns that occurred while the informants discussed these topics. The three major themes that addressed the second research sub-question (What do ABE ESL transfer students say contributed to their success?) were 1) role of the characteristics of the students themselves (53

turns); 2) the role of the transition class (61 turns); and 3) the role of the college transition teacher (66 turns).

Table 5

*Themes and Conversational Turns in Regard to Research Sub-Question 2 (What do ABE ESL transfer students say contributed to their success?)*

Categories/Themes	Conversational turns
Role of characteristics of students themselves	53
Role of transition class	61
Role of the transition class's teacher	66

### **Role of the Characteristics of the Students Themselves**

“Nobody can break my dream,” said Michelle. This amount of determination seemed to be a common feature among these students. This characteristic originates from each individual’s background, their experiences growing up, and the experiences they had lived through prior to transitioning to college, as well as outside factors such as being promoted in the workplace.

Isabella’s story stemmed from her health issues. At the age of 24, she went through pancreatic cancer. Those years while battling her cancer made her rethink her life and life in general. “I want to be the best person I can be and have an education.” While Lili agreed with Isabella’s comments, Lili’s determination came from a different aspect: from her parents. “Since high school, I set my goals and thank God and thank to my parents, I am reaching my goals...my parents... are happy for what I have accomplished.” Gigi echoed Lili’s sentiments. Gigi was married with no children, similar to Lili. Just like Lili, Gigi was supported by her parents and her husband.

Vilma was determined to have a better job and she believed that the only way for her to accomplish that was to take more English classes, improve her English, and finish a short-term certificate. She also added that, “I like the way they teach here.” Mandy had already experienced the benefit of improving her English. “After I finished my first English classes, I was able to find a job.” Ever since, she has been educating herself, especially because “my job pays me to take classes related to my career.” Linda concurred that “you have more opportunities” with more education and better English. In opposition, Kim described her instructive source of power:

For me, education is if you choose to be educated. You can develop that any time.

Education is for your own desire, only your own wish. To learn more, to develop, to grow in one area, and even if it is not your profession. If you are happy by doing this and if you earn more, getting more education, getting a better job is great. But sometimes because you are happy doing something, you make more money.

Javier added to Kim’s comment, “Education gives the tools to anybody who wants to succeed in the work area and the daily life as well. It helps you everywhere.” Vilma agreed:

Education is for your family, too. You will be able to reach your own family, your son, your daughter. They see you study all the time, good scores, and later you will be able to be a good person in their lives.

Orijime’s life experience and characteristics seemed to combine what her colleagues had already shared - persistence:

I keep going... I am at age when you have not gone through all. I do not have kids but I think I do have three. They call me mama and I send money to them. I work full time; I study full time. Some of my family support me; some just don’t care, and that hurts. I wanna show them that I can do it. And some ways they push me

which is not good because if I need something, I need to get it [on my own]. I am not where I wanna be. I wanna go further and further. It does not matter how many years it takes, I keep studying.

Michelle agreed with Orijme, “education keeps you learning and improving life,” but she was not sure where to go and what directions she had to take. That was the point in her life when she signed up for the college transition class. Upon completing the transition class, she had a clear vision about her future: she wanted to become a nurse. “The transition class helped me, so I focus on nursing.”

Although the interviewees came from different educational backgrounds, upbringings, and cultures, they seemed to have one common feature: the belief that with education, they could better their life.

### **Role of the Transition Class**

The second most commented supporting service was the transition class. All 61 comments praised the opportunity to take the class. The comments referring to the transition class were divided among the general importance of the class, the curriculum, and the gaining of self-esteem that would eventually make the participants confident enough to sign up for their first college level class.

The participants commented overwhelmingly on the importance of a transition class; for example, how the class in general enabled them to move from the ABE ESL program to the college:

Linda: “The transition class is very important, like a bridge.”

Michelle: “I think everybody who wants to go to college should take a transition class as the first step because it introduce you [to college], to save money [on books].”

Javier: “The transition class helped us be familiar with the buildings [on the main campus]. And because it was offered on the main campus, we felt like we were college students already.”

Isabella: “Before the transition class, I did not know about scholarships. I thought scholarships were for homeless, no husband, nothing and you had to prove that you are poor.”

Lili: “Yes, when I came to the United States, I thought how I am going to get a scholarship. The second semester I got a scholarship. Many people do not know about these opportunities and they cannot take advantage of them.”

Kim: “After the transition class, I took four classes. My confidence was growing. I took a writing class, which was very hard, but I worked on homework until 1:30 A.M. because I knew I could do it.”

Mandy: “If we were coming here [taking college level classes], we could have not finished it. We would have felt lost because I could have not had a clue.”

The participants also commented on the college transition class’s curriculum. Isabella emphasized the importance of acquiring note taking skills while taking a transition class. “[It] sounds easy, but no. And you have to know in college how to take notes.” Gigi mentioned the class in regards to the American education system: “It was great because I did not know about the levels here.” Orijime added: “Education is totally different than in my country.” The participants agreed that not knowing about the American higher education system and the specifics about, for example, community colleges, hindered their transition to college before the transition class. They also mentioned “how the library works” (Gigi), inspiring guest speakers (Lili), the career services (Isabella), and “you can see here people like you that they did it, so you can do it, too” (Orijime).

The informants also commented on the weekly journal writing. Michelle: “I took the transition class, and my writing improved a lot.” The class curriculum also made the participants realize what skills they had to work on in order to succeed in college. Javier: “the transition class made me see what I had to improve... not knowing how to use the computer inspired me to learn it.”

Learning about the American education system, improving writing skills, and working on computer proficiency were as important to these students as were the gaining of confidence in themselves that they were worthwhile people for pursuing a college education: “I learned a lot, I learned the college system, and I know what I want. But the most important thing is that I [found] confidence.” (Linda).

Mandy: “For more, the transition class is the key. Every single student should take this class, not only for college, but to improve personal life.”

Michelle: “The transition class taught me writing, spelling, grammar, journals, reading, focus on a degree. That is the most important. I came from China, I stayed in America for 7 years, and I did not know what I wanted. Now I do.”

Kim: “The transition class helped grow confidence. I can keep going, I can ask if I need help, so all this structure and support the class gave helped me keep going forward.”

Vilma: “This is how I feel, too.”

Michelle added that “the transition class is important because while you are taking it, you should think what you want to be, a doctor, a lawyer.”

Mandy: “Yes, after the transition class, every student knows what to do.”

The aims of the transition class seemed to meet the students’ needs: learning about the college and college life, providing a rigorous curriculum, and helping students raise their self-esteem.

Participants reported that gaining knowledge about the American college system and life, the demanding college transition course work, and their changing self-perception had contributed to their transition from the non-credit ABE ESL to the for-credit college programs and their persistence in pursuing their college degrees. However, “the transition class could not have had as much impact on the students without its instructor as it did with its instructor” (Michelle).

### **Role of the Transition Class Teacher**

“The teacher is the key. It is a cheap, expensive, long, short class—you will always remember the teacher” (Isabelle). The participants extensively commented on the transition class instructor. Their comments focused on the relationship between the teacher and inspiration. Their transition class teacher was a non-native English speaking teacher who had been in the ABE ESL program as a student. This common experience with her students seemed to play an important role in the relationship between the teacher and her students.

Michelle: “We [ABE ESL students] want teacher like the transition class teacher. She teaches well and speaks clearly.” The participants agreed and shared stories about how they had not understood some native English speaking teachers who spoke too fast in classes. Vilma and Javier also added that it was fortunate that their transition class teacher did not speak Spanish, their native language, “because the teacher still understood us, has been in the same situation, but we had to use our English with her.” English was not the native language of the instructor, but her same experience with transitioning contributed to the open relationship with her students.

Mandy: When the transition teacher talked about her experience, when she said how she felt and how she improved her career that inspired me.” Linda also emphasized the importance of the close relationship with her college transition teacher: “We can talk to her.” Linda brought up an example of how the teacher inspired her: “I remember when the teacher told us to write a note

to ourselves and every morning, when we wake up, we should read it and remind ourselves about our goals.” Michelle also remembered that story when her teacher inspired her to write a daily note: “I put it [the note] in my purse, I open it, and I see it [every day]. Nobody can break your dream; it is your brain and you see it in your purse.” Kim further explained: “Yes, [the teacher] pushed us to learn. She gave us this [study] habit. When I write something, I go to the dictionary online, they have sentences, and now it is part of my study habit.” Vilma had the same opinion. “I do the same. At my job, I have an open dictionary, and I check the words and pronunciation. I learned that from [her].” Isabella also echoed these words: “She has changed my mind [about my future].”

**Care and the relationship of teacher and students.** The word care was mentioned in the relationship between the teacher and her students numerous times. Lili’s words summed up this care: “She cared not just because we are student. She cared because we are persons, like we are friends and family.” “She believed us and because she cared, I change my work schedule to be in [the transition] class. She had empathy...” (Vilma). Another example from Isabelle was, “I can e-mail her any questions, silly questions, and she always answers.” Gigi added: “Yes, weekends, too. She listens closely, ‘What do you need?, even when I can’t find the words to transmit my feelings.” Isabelle agreed with Gigi’s comment. Only Javier raised the issue of being “too caring”: “After the transition class, I realized not every teacher is caring. Some care but some don’t. And we have to be ready for that.” The students remained silent for a second, but then they agreed that the transition class teacher should remain caring.

Orijime also appreciated the teacher’s honesty with the class. She mentioned a story when the teacher was absent from class. “When she was away, she could have said ‘I was absent because of personal problems,’ but she told us about her cancer. I cared about her and I wanted

to help, so I was glad that I knew what was going on in her life.” Gigi: “And the personal stories motivate us.” Orijime followed up on this thought: “We get energy from her.” Javier added: “Listening to her story at the college when she was a student is very motivating for everybody.”

Interestingly, giving homework in the transition class was also perceived as a caring action by the teacher. “I even liked the teacher’s quizzes. She gave us 30 new words, and on the quiz, she had only 10. So what did we do? We studied all. She pushed us to learn” (Michelle). Vilma continued: “First class, I was scared, but I then I saw how she was going to teach this class, and I thought, ‘O.K., it is going to be an interesting class and keep me going and going.’” She also commented on the school work by this teacher: “We needed to type our homework and study words. We got out early from work to study for the spelling tests.”

Javier also commented on how the teacher inspired him: “I did like the idea of short and long term goals from the teacher. Now, I know what I want to accomplish within a year and within five years.” Kim: “Just like Javier explained, we needed a teacher very patient, very organized, because the transition class teacher had lots of students from different countries, with different [English] levels. She was our ideal teacher.” “Every class was beautiful and meaningful” (Michelle). Mandy added: “If there were no ‘this teacher,’ nobody would finish a career from the ABE ESL program. She is someone who cares about the students and makes the students love learning.”

The comments regarding the role of the transition class teacher were noteworthy. The participants used the word “care” frequently to describe they were treated in their former transition class. They perceived the teacher as “a fellow ABE ESL classmate”, “successful”, and “caring.” They agreed that all these features helped build a close relationship between the teacher

and the participants, which greatly contributed to the participants' inspiration for pursuing a college degree.

### **Individual Interviews**

The researcher interviewed the three most successful students within the two focus groups. The most successful students were determined based on their college status: their long-term college goals and how many classes they had taken. The purpose of the individual interviews was to understand individual student's motivation and determination, and to see if there were any patterns that could be used to motivate ABE ESL students to transfer and persist in college programs. Three individuals were selected: Javier, Gigi, and Lili. Javier's perspective contributed to the understanding of what college was like for students whose basic English literacy skills still needed improvement. Gigi's perspective contributed to the understanding of those students who had had a career in their native country and wanted a career in their new country. Lili's story aided to understand those immigrant professionals' college transfer experience who were highly educated upon arrival to the United States, but whose English language skills needed much improvement.

#### **Javier: He did not quit. He stopped.**

Javier, the only male participant, came undocumented from Mexico in 2004. He came from a family of five: one older brother, one older sister, and two younger brothers. Of his siblings, the sister was married and lived in Mexico. His two younger brothers were single and lived in the United States. The oldest brother was married and lived with his English speaking family in the United States, and Javier lived with them. The spoken language within the home was Spanish, while at his work it was English and Spanish.

Although he learned some English in middle school, Javier's English learning journey began a year after his arrival to the United States. He enrolled in the local community college's free non-credit ABE ESL program. After spending a year in the non-credit program, he participated in the college's transition class (CTC 101) and then had taken college classes. At first, he reported that school seemed a fun place to be: a place to make friends and to learn English. His original intention was to attend school because he was single: "I've got more time for myself than married people." But then, his intention shifted. "I decide[d] to do something in my life."

He worked as a landscaper, which was "a good work." When he and the researcher first met in the CTC 101 class, he wanted to become a landscape architect. Having finished CTC 101 and learned more about his opportunities, his educational focus shifted: now he wanted to pursue a degree that would allow him to help fellow immigrants.

Javier: Now that I know more, I said to myself, landscaping...is a good job but if you'd like to be something else, why not? Something like help people. Something to help people.

Researcher: Teacher?

Javier: No, not a teacher. Like, I don't know (hesitant to say), I want something that does not take too many years in the school to get it. Something short, and I have not looked but something, uhm, (hesitant to say), I don't know. You may know something about chiropractic?

The idea of helping people came up multiple times during the interview. "What I want is to help people." As he explained his plan, he was clearly in need of moral support. In fact, among the top motivating factors, he mentioned "stories from you, teacher, or other people or

movies are good motivation for me.” A supporting group could keep him assured that he can indeed pursue an education “to improve my life.”

As one of the first steps toward his educational goal, he enrolled in a GED program and successfully passed the exam. Thus, during the interview, he held a GED diploma and was ready to start his college career classes.

Beside work and school, he—like many other immigrants—supported his family back in Mexico. During these past four years, he had purchased a piece of land and built a house on it for his father who lived with his relatives after separating from his wife. Javier, as a middle child who had no family on his own, felt compelled to help his father.

I am not married but I have parents. It is not a lot of money but I have done a really big thing back there. It is about my parents: they do not live together... But now we are supporting my mother and years ago I decided to build a small home for my father. Because he used to live in somebody else’s house. And I have done it. It is not a fancy house... it is small house but I know that nobody is going to kick out my father from that house. Now it is I feel more relaxed and I spent a lot of money on it. That was a goal and now I feel good.

Because of family ties, Javier went back to Mexico right after the interview.

In December, I am going back to Mexico and fix a couple of things [in the house] and I am not sure...I talked to my parents, they are O.K. but I have not seen them for years. I also want to fill out an application for visa for my parents to visit my brothers here. And I have to be there to make sure they are O.K.

He knew he would risk his return due to his undocumented status in the United States:

I am not scared to come back the way I came here the first time... I'd like to come back here the same way I came here the first time but all depends on if I go back and do all those things fixed and I might not be able to come back. I have plans when I come back. Keep working and get in college. Or stay in Mexico and get in college. Either way, but college.

This was the determination that keeps Javier in school. He listed several other examples about what kept him in college—stories from others, parental support—but his ultimate motivation was his inner determination.

Javier: All I need is this [college]. I have no family but my parents and two younger brothers. Now they are O.K. They are doing the right things that make me feel more relaxed and make me want what I want to do. Either I stay in Mexico and I work and study, or I come back and I work and study.

**Gigi: “I believe I can graduate in 2010.”**

“I will be a professional some day. I started in my country but I never finished.”

Gigi had a well-structured plan to finish what she had started in her native country.

Gigi was born in Costa Rica and moved to the United States with her parents at the age of 26. She lived with extended family: mother, father, two brothers, and their children. Since the nephews spoke English only, she spoke English with them and Spanish with her parents. She also spoke French; after high school, she spent three years in France learning about the French culture. Her mother was a high school graduate and her father was a university graduate. While she was growing up, Gigi's mother tended the children while her father worked as a high school teacher in El Salvador. In her native

country, she finished high school and worked as a computer assistant. In the United States, she supported herself by babysitting while she attended college.

Gigi had a clear vision how to obtain her degree in general studies, because “it is easy to finish,” and it was also transferable to the local university. She also wanted to pursue a translator certificate because she said, “maybe there will be some opportunity. So I am going to have both certifications. One with credits and one without but I don’t care, I want both.” Gigi’s plan of pursuing her education involved participating in academic groups, laying out a program of studies, keeping in contact with an academic advisor, applying for scholarships, and setting a long-term goal: to transfer to a university.

Gigi’s 4.0 GPA was noticed by the college, and she was invited to join a professional academic group, of which she took advantage. “I am a member of Phi Theta Kappa International Honor Society. This program has benefits. They help to make a [recommendation] letter. Later, when I look for work they will help me. It is an international organization, so if I want to study in Canada, I can do that.”

She also understood the importance of having a very clear timeline for her education, and for that, she had the information for her classes semesters before they began:

Gigi: Next fall I start my translator certification because they offer it only in the fall. In 2010, spring, I will graduate from general studies and also from this interpreter course. They start in August and finish in February.” Gigi also understood that she needed as much education as she could pursue:

Gigi: I want to be an interpreter for courts, so I need more education because of vocabulary. Criminology, the college offers it. I have to pick the right classes. I believe psychology, I need. Also, information systems, I need that. Also, I want to take a class on medical vocabulary. The plan is to finish general studies and transfer to the university. I am thinking (considering) everything.

She was also proactive: she kept in contact with an academic advisor to make sure she took the right classes and she could graduate on time. “I went to Donna’s office on the last day of class, last Tuesday. She told me I can graduate next year if I take two classes.”

She found her motivation in multiple sources: scholarship, family, and other immigrants who pursued their educational goals. Her biggest motivator was her scholarships: “I feel motivated because I don’t have to worry about money. I have scholarships.”

Researcher: “How did you get them?”

Gigi: “I got the first one from the college, \$1200 for two semesters. I got another \$2000. Then, from Hispanic Service, the heritage scholarship.”

Her other major motivator was her family.

Gigi: “My family like ‘you have to finish, you are the only one who can finish.’”

Although in her family her siblings did finish high school, nobody pursued a college degree. She was the first one. Her brother works in construction and he advised Gigi, “You know I am making good money but I have to use my back. What happens if I break my back? If you have your education, you can use your mind.” Gigi: “this motivates me.”

Her third motivating influence came from fellow immigrants who—before Gigi—were able to pursue an American education and career. One of her examples was her CTC teacher and other immigrants who “study, study, study, and look at them now. And they do not lose time.... I know one friend right now. Her dream is to become a nurse. She has two kids, and her husband helps her. She is taking two classes every semester. She won a scholarship, and she keeps going because she says ‘one day this for my kids’. One day, she wanted to stop because of the money, but I talked to her, ‘no, no, don’t stop,’ and she didn’t.”

**Lili: B.S. in El Salvador, M.S. in Economics in the United States**

Lili was born, raised, and finished her undergraduate studies in financial analysis in El Salvador. Her mother was a high school graduate and her father held a Bachelor in Science in Psychology. She had studied English during her elementary, high school, and undergraduate studies in El Salvador, so when she enrolled in the ABE ESL program, she was able to start at the highest level, although “you know when you study a foreign language, you do not really know how to speak it.” She spent one year in the non-credit ABE ESL program before she enrolled in the college transition class. During the college transition class, she started working on translating her undergraduate degree and the process of transferring her undergraduate credits to further her education in the United States. Her plan was to graduate from an American university with a Master’s in Science in Economics and Financial Management. She was married to an American citizen who was born in El Salvador, so their common language was Spanish.

Researcher: “Your English is beautiful.”

Lili: School has been really hard because of my English. I feel it is not myself. You know when I was in El Salvador, I always felt confident, a top student, but here no. I feel like I am no one. Usually I do not participate because I do not want to make mistakes. I do not want to make myself as a fool. Most students are American and Asians, and no Latino. I am always afraid. I tried to take two classes, but I couldn't, so I am taking only one class. But it makes me frustrated because it takes longer to complete my degree.

Researcher: "but eventually you will graduate."

Lili: I am frustrated. I am not happy. My expectations were different. I did not know it would be so hard. I started last year and it will take me forever to graduate.

Lili started the application process for the university while she was still living in El Salvador. First, she applied as an international student:

I had to work hard to get in. I had to translate my entire transcript and validate the transcripts. Then the university wanted my original transcripts but my Salvadorian university said no, we have not done this before. Then, my former professor contacted the university here. Everybody helped, so I can't quit right now.

And she did not. While Lili was persuading her degree, she also worked full time for a collection agency. She deliberately had looked for a job where English, not Spanish, was required:

There is one more Latina, but in another department who deals with Hispanics. I was lucky because of the owner is a white guy who at the beginning did not even respond to my greetings. He did not even see me. The office before me hired only

white people. Then, now they know I work hard and do my best. I also dress professionally, which I brought from my culture, and the owner noticed that.

Lili felt lucky that the owner was a “white guy,” so Lili had to practice her English. She declined other job offers prior to this current position because “95% of the customers were Hispanics. I told no because I wanted to learn English... I knew that if I had taken that job and talked only in Spanish, it would have been bad for me.” Lili eventually wanted to be a manager and for that position she needed to polish her English. She wanted to become a manager not only for a better paycheck, but she also wanted to help fellow immigrants.

Lili: The manager who hired me told me, ‘When I first saw your resume, I did not want to hire you, but I thought I wanted to give you an opportunity.’ So when I am in that position, I want to give an opportunity.

Lili’s motivation derived from her inner ambition. “That was always my dream to get a master degree.” Then, the application procedure—starting from El Salvador—required a lot of effort and money, “so I can’t quit.” Also, her husband was at the same university pursuing a dual major undergraduate degree. He financed most of Lili’s tuition; therefore, because of the already invested money, Lili would not quit no matter how hard or how long it would take to graduate. Also, her parents have been encouraging her:

My dad told me, ‘you have to think about where you are going to be in the future. Think about the benefits that this future is going to bring to you. Do not worry about time; think about the benefits. It does not matter if you go slow, but do it.’

Lili tried to study with classmates but her full-time work schedule and her classmates' full-time study schedule did not allow them to meet.

Lili also raised a topic that no one else had raised: the cultural expectations of Hispanics.

Language and culture are us and we need acceptance. Hispanics are frustrated that Americans think we are from Mexico. Our identity is taken away. And many Americans don't like Mexicans, and they think everybody is the same. But we are us, it is me. My limitation is my language and people think I am dumb. But I will defend my degree. Education is my life time purpose and goal.

Although all three individual participants were highly motivated while pursuing their American education, there were differences in their ways of persisting in their education. Prior to immigration, education, family support, and perceptions about financial aid seemed to impact how these students dealt with college transition. The discussion of the three individual interviews is presented in Chapter 5.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In Chapter 4, the researcher sought to explore the focus group participants and the individual students' transitioning experiences from the non-credit ABE ESL program to the for-credit college programs. The researcher reported data from the focus group conversations concerning the two research sub-questions, which were (a) How do ABE ESL transfer students perceive differences and similarities in academic cultures between an ABE ESL program and a community college? and (b) What do ABE ESL transfer students say about the kinds of support and services that contributed to their successful transition? In the second part of Chapter 4, the researcher presented data from the individual cases. The individual interviews were also meant to

answer the research questions and to understand that the individual students' motivation was their determination to transit from the non-credit ABE ESL program to the for-credit college program.

The following chapter provides conclusion from the results section. Chapter 5 also provides strategies for program development for future transition programs for immigrant students moving from ABE to college courses.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications for Practice, and Recommendations for Future Research**

In this phenomenological study, 10 former ABE ESL students who successfully made the leap from a non-credit ABE program to a for-credit two-year college program were interviewed. By identifying the similarities and differences in their transitioning experiences, the researcher strove to provide further insight into the factors which promote transitioning from a non-credit institution to a for-credit institution.

The discussion of the results in Chapter 5 is divided into four major sections. The first section provides interpretative results from the focus groups concerning the two research sub-questions. The second section provides data from the individual cases of three focus students. The third section presents recommendations for future research studies. The final section provides a summary of the study.

In Chapter 2, the researcher presented an analysis of studies from four areas: (a) Adult ESL students; (b) adult second language acquisition; (c) trajectories in adult ESL education; and (d) elements that lead to ABE ESL transition. In Chapter 2, the researcher also provided a discussion of an ethic of care from three perspectives: 1) reviews of research studies on an ethic of care; 2) how these studies are typified in the classroom; and 3) how these studies are typified in classroom practices. The ethic of care by Noddings (1984) served as a theoretical framework in this study. The qualitative phenomenological research design of the study was intended to provide a structure of “the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in particular situations” (Bogdan & Biklen, p. 25). In Chapter 4, the results of data collection, focus group interviews, and in-depth individual interviews with three focal students, were presented.

The purpose of Chapter 5 is to present the discussion, implications for practice, and recommendations for subsequent program implementation and actions (Creswell, 2004). Furthermore, the voice of the 10 students who transitioned from an ABE ESL program to a community college degree program serves as data for future research studies in this area. The overarching question in this study was: What are the perceptions of ABE ESL students about their transition experiences as they move from an ABE ESL program to a community college degree program? Two sub-questions helped build the evidence of the study: (a) How do ABE ESL transfer students perceive differences and similarities in academic cultures between an ABE ESL program and a community college? and (b) What do ABE ESL transfer students say about the kinds of support and services that contributed to their successful transition?

### **Discussion of Results**

#### **Differences and similarities between ABE ESL and a two-year institution**

Four major themes were found related to the first sub-question: 1) Nature of interaction between ABE ESL students and their teachers in the non-credit and the for-credit programs as well as ABE ESL students and their classmates in the non-credit and the for-credit programs; 2) nature of school work in the ABE ESL program and the college program; 3) cost-related issues in the ABE ESL program and the two-year institution; and 4) site-related issues in the ABE ESL program and the two-year institution.

**Nature of interaction and adult second language students.** “Decades of research demonstrate that college students benefit from positive interaction with faculty” (Cox at all, 2010, p. 767), yet, faculty members appear to have relatively little contact with students outside of teaching time. (Cox at all, 2010; Delaney, 2008; Wilson, Ryan, & Pugh, 2010). Researchers explored the nature of ABE ESL students: what their expectations are and what experiences they

bring to ABE ESL classrooms (Ferguson, 1998; Kruidenier, 2002; Mathews-Aydinli, 2006; McKay & Tom, 2006). Other researchers (e.g., Skilton-Sylvester, 2002) found that in a student-centered classroom adults take charge of their own learning. The more the adult students feel a sense of belonging, the more motivated they are in their education (Bello, 2000; De la Fuente, 2002; Ellis 1999; Krashen, 2003). The participants in this study tended to report a sense of belonging to the ABE program. For example, participants felt supported by their teachers who pushed them toward college (Gigi, Javier, Kim). They reported that ABE ESL teachers exhibited a sense of embracing their students' life experiences by encouraging them to continue a college career in the United States (Lili, Gigi, Javier, and Kim). Students also reported that the frequent interactions with ABE teachers helped students in their own learning and also helped support them emotionally.

The ABE ESL teachers were perceived as caring in nature, and their students could rely on their teachers' support when they needed personal help. It was not as evident that the teachers in the college program provided the same level of support. For example, while the instructors in the ABE ESL program accepted excused absences for missed classes and no consequences were implemented if students did not show for class, the college counterpart accepted no emotional, physical, or alternative excuses. Furthermore, in the ABE ESL program, when students called their instructors and let them know about their absence, the students were perceived as responsible. In the college program, no explanation was required or even expected for a missed class. Another example was Orijime's reflection when she asked for help from her college teacher regarding homework: the teacher "got mad." The participants in the study perceived this difference as an indication that the college instructors did not care about their students.

Conversely, the participants expected a “pressure to the students” (Lili) from the ABE ESL instructors. What Lili meant by “pressure” was structured ABE classes, high expectations from students, and accountability for school work. The participants also expected their ABE instructors to constantly remind their students about college. Mentioning college regularly and helping students set goals beyond the ABE ESL program motivate and inspire students (Dörnyei, 2002; Gardner, 1985; Larotta, 2007; Knowles, 1990). Overall, the participants found the ABE program too relaxed and unprofessional. These notions especially were reflective when they compared the nature of school work in the ABE and in the college programs.

**Nature of school work and trajectories.** The participants in this study reported differences between ABE ESL school work and college school work. This coincided with the research of Harper and de Jong (2009) and Lundien (2009) who found that high quality of ABE ESL school work, which prepares students for post-secondary education, is scarce across the nation (Strawn, 2007). This is despite the fact that the majority of the GED students, 66%; had the goal of “further education” (Strawn, 2007, p. 5). This was evidenced in three components in this study: homework, counseling, and course syllabus.

Homework - or lack thereof - was commented on by the participants. They perceived the ABE ESL as an easy program where students could learn “street language” (Javier), but not academic vocabulary. The ABE program did not use regular materials; instructors selected random books and sources, which did not give an overarching framework to the ABE ESL classes. Raising the expectations in the ABE ESL program would drastically change the common perception that anybody can teach ABE ESL classes.

Furthermore, while for-credit programs devote funding to counseling and advising, most adult education programs do not. This includes the ABE ESL program in which the informants

participated. Thus, the absence of career counseling often results in students not moving beyond the ABE ESL framework due to lack of information (Strawn, 2007).

Finally, the participants welcomed the idea of having a syllabus when they took college courses. As the ABE classes were not required to use one, some participants were not familiar with the concept of course syllabus prior to transitioning. Lili recommended adopting a regular practice of using syllabi in the ABE program as it would be a simple yet very beneficial component. Michelle added that syllabi would suggest professionalism in the ABE program, would imply goal setting for the class and for its students, and would encourage ABE ESL students' transition to college as "college classes have syllabi" (Michelle).

**Cost-Related Issues and Institutional and Life Trajectories.** The non-credit ABE ESL program was available to its students free of charge, which included instruction and class materials. Although the participants agreed that upon arrival to the United States, a free program where they could learn English was "convenient because it was free" (Isabelle), this later hindered them in transitioning. When they faced the tuition and the book costs for the first time, some of the students reported that they often felt overwhelmed, which resulted—in many cases—dropping out from the college classes.

Furthermore, financial aid appeared to be an unfamiliar concept to most of the participants. None of the students in the study was familiar with scholarships, works study, or grants prior to their transition. Additionally, two of the participants had out-of-state status, which meant they had to pay twice as much for tuition as other students, and they were not eligible for federal grants and loans.

Vilma and Mandy also mentioned that they felt guilty because of the amount of money they spent on their own education. They both had children and both reported that their children

should have received that money. Michelle—coming from a different culture—had no doubt that her tuition was an investment for her family, and her children would benefit eventually from her schooling. Six participants had no children, thus this was not a concern for them. The seventh participant was in a financial situation where she could afford her tuition without feeling guilty about it.

**Site-Related Issues and Institutional and Life Trajectories.** Although the participants complained about the location of the main campus, they learned to cope with the distance. Isabelle and Orijime rode the bus and learned to use the time for studying; Michelle learned to cope with the gas prices; Vilma and Mandy car-pooled; and Javier perceived his driving to the campus as part of his college experience.

For strategic reasons, the transition class was placed on the main campus, and students explored the main campus with their transition instructor as part of the curriculum. Once the students were familiar with the main campus, the services at the location compensated for its relative isolation from the city: the tutoring center, the library, and the main admission services were available to them. Some participants (Michelle, Kim, Javier) reported that they had needed support to explore the campus, and with the guidance of the transition instructor, they were able to overcome the emotional and physical distance that existed between the ABE and the college locations. The participants' observation corresponded with Mercado's study (1993) who found that "being understanding and providing emotional support are especially important for students who get easily discouraged when required to work in unfamiliar ways" (p. 92). The site-related issues diminished once the participants became familiar with the main campus.

### **Kinds of support and services that contributed to their successful transition**

Three major themes were found related to the second sub-question: 1) Role of characteristics of students themselves; 2) role of transition class; and 3) role of the transition class's teacher.

**Role of characteristics of students themselves and ESL Students.** As Crandall and Sheppard (2004) stated, "there is no typical adult ESL student" (p. 4). Factors such as age when immigrated, education in their first language, wealth, skills, and cultural background greatly vary among adult immigrants (e.g., Feliciano, 2005; Lambert, 2008; McKay & Tom, 2006). Furthermore, the desire to integrate into American society and the motivation level to learn English also vary among individuals. While these characteristics indeed varied among the participants of this study, some characteristics were shared by all of them.

All 10 participants had strong personal and emotional support through their family ties; Isabella's and Kim's husbands, Lili's parents and husband, Vilma's, Mandy's, Michelle's, and Linda's children, Gigi's family, and even Orijiime's and Javier's families in their home countries added to the participants' motivation to keep going with their American education. Somebody in the family was proud of each participant's educational progression. "I wanna show them that I can do it" (Orijiime). Personal and emotional support was among the elements that researchers (e.g., Buttaro, 2004; Estrada, 2005; Harrington, 2000; and Saari, Storla, & Turtola, 2006) described as key in transitioning.

The participants also shared the belief that, through education, they could improve their American lives. For example, while Gigi was a professional in her native country, due to her limited English skills and lack of education in the United States, she earned her income through babysitting. Michelle also recognized that "education keeps... improving life." Javier had no

opportunity in his native country to pursue an education, which eventually led to his immigration to the United States. Upon arrival, his primary goal was to learn, then improve, his English, and then obtain a high school diploma. While he was working on his GED, he was promoted at his work, which he perceived as evidence that with more education, he could achieve more. The participants' natural belief in education coincided with Rumbaut's longitudinal study (2005): post-secondary education is critical to promoting social mobility among first and second generation immigrants.

Another shared characteristic was that all the participants had realistic and specific goals (Knowles, 1990; Larotta, 2007). Realistic and specific goals inspired and motivated the participants to keep taking classes and pursuing their career choices (Dörnyei, 2008; Gardner, 1985). Consequently, although all 10 participants struggled with some type of life trajectories (Menard-Warwick, 2005; Mirowsky & Ross, 2007; Reder, 1999), setting specific goals seemed to aid their problem-solving skills and overcome their everyday struggles. This finding coincided with Johnson and Parrish's study (2010): Critical thinking skills were crucial elements in successful college transition.

Finally, another vital common constituent among the participants was that all had taken the transition class, which the students reported helped them translate their goals into realistic outcomes.

**Role of transition class.** "I think everybody who wants to go to college should take a transition class as the first step because it introduces you [to college]" (Michelle).

The CTC 101 class embraced ideas about adult second language acquisition (e.g., Krashen, 2003); motivation theories (e.g. Dörnyei, 2008; Gardner, 1985); goal-driven, meaningful and authentic teaching (Knowles, 1990; Larotta, 2007); and personal and emotional support (e.g.,

Buttaro, 2004; Estrada, 2005; Harrington, 2000; and Saari, Storla, & Turtola, 2006) to provide the ultimate circumstances for students to transition from ABE ESL to college.

Accordingly, the purpose of the transition class was not only to educate the ABE ESL students about the American higher educational system, but also to build a community where the ABE ESL students felt they belonged and received the support they needed to pursue a certificate or a degree. For example, the CTC 101 students often exchanged phone numbers, studied together, and eventually became friends. Through their friendship, they encouraged each other to attend classes and complete homework, and “after the transition class, every student knows what to do” (Mandy).

**Role of the transition class’s teacher.** “The teacher is the key. It is a cheap, expensive, long, short class—you will always remember the teacher.” Isabelle’s comment aligned with Cox et al (2010) who stated that college students benefitted from positive interaction with faculty. The participants appreciated the positive interaction with their transition class teacher who “understood us and has been in the same situation” (Vilma), who inspired the students (Mandy), and who was credible (Kim), as she had once been an ABE ESL student herself.

One feature that the participants especially commented on was the caring attitude that the CTC 101 teacher had exhibited. “She cared not just because we are students. She cared because we are persons” (Lili). Adult ESL students often battle with the perception that their limited English skills must limit their thoughts as well; hence many adult second language speakers lose their self-esteem and self-confidence (Cardemil et al., 2005; Curry, 2004; Nieto, 2009). Also, adult learners reported a sense of appreciation when their instructors shared personal experiences with them. The ideal CTC 101 teacher is someone who “cares about the students and makes the students love learning” (Mandy); someone who “apprehend[s] the other’s reality” and “make[s] a

commitment to act” (Noddings, 1984, p. 16); and someone who holds his or her students to high academic standards.

### **Individual Interviews**

The three foci students approached transitioning from the non-credit ABE ESL program to a for-credit college program in three different ways.

#### **The Three Approaches to Transitioning**

**Javier.** He came from a poor family where education was not a focus. He did manual labor on farms prior to immigrating to the United States; in the United States, he worked as a landscaper. At first, he only wanted to improve his English – he had no other specific goals. Then, upon completion of the transition class, he realized that with education he could change his life. He took small steps toward his education: first, he completed his GED, and then, he started taking college level English classes. He paid out-of-state tuition, and since he thought applying for scholarships was stealing—receiving money without outright earning it was not right—he did not apply for financial aid or scholarships. Nevertheless, his family ties interfered with his education. He sent most of his saving to his parents in Mexico, and right after the interview, he returned to Mexico to help his parents build their homes. However, he did not quit school; he only stepped out. He said he would return once his family ties allowed him to continue his education.

Javier felt once his family was on the right path in life, it was his turn to pursue his goal: a college education with which he could help other people. Either in Mexico or in the United States, he wanted to continue what he had already started: obtaining a degree. Javier built his college career step by step: first, by attending non-credit ESL classes from where he was promoted to taking the College Transition Class 101. Then, from CTC 101, his interest for learning English shifted to learning English *and* pursuing a career. After completing CTC 101, he obtained a GED

while concurrently taking academic - for-credit - preparatory English classes. He completed two levels of English classes and a computer class. Although his family obligations made him step out of—not quit—school at that point, among his long-term goals, college was given a primary importance. He surpassed the needs of improving his basic skills; he was ready to take academic classes.

**Gigi.** Her family fully supported Gigi’s education. She lived at home, sharing the daily household responsibilities and expenses with family members. Her basic skills—speaking, listening, writing, and reading—in English had met the college requirements. She also completed her high school education, which allowed her to transit right away to the for-credit college program. Further, the transitioning seemed to be seamless regarding other aspects as well. For example, she understood what scholarships were meant for, so she applied for different scholarships and received many. Because of her immigration status, she was not eligible for financial aid; therefore, she attended part-time as she could not afford full time tuition. She supported herself with her babysitting salary, which allowed her to take one class or two in each semester.

When Gigi started the CTC 101 class, she was already aware of what she wanted. She had her high school diploma from her native country, her immediate family support in town, and a clear vision that with education, she would be able to pursue the life she wanted to live. She stated that the CTC 101 class not only helped her clarify what she wanted, but enabled her to put the discussed tools—applying for scholarships, academic advising, and obtaining family support—to practice immediately. With the college knowledge she acquired through the CTC 101 class, she was on her way to graduating from college.

**Lili.** She knew precisely why she wanted to pursue an American degree: to build an American career similar to the one she had left behind in El Salvador. For that, she first worked on her English. Then, she realized she had to move from the non-credit ABE ESL program to the for-credit college program while she was applying for a Master of Science in Economics at the university. Once she was accepted, she intentionally accepted a job where 1) she could improve her English; and 2) her job was related to her future career. In the meantime, she applied for scholarships; she was the only one from the interviewed participants who applied for financial aid to pay for her classes.

Lili's motivation was derived from many sources: a cumbersome university application procedure to the university was a hurdle that, once cleared, made quitting even more undesirable; a husband who was in school himself; scholarship applications; a full-time job in her study field; and her parental support. All seemed to contribute to her determination that she would defend her degree.

**The different perspectives.** Javier's perspective contributed to the understanding of what college was like for students whose basic English literacy skills still needed improvement. For the many Javiers, strong and long-term institutional support, counselors and advisors –along with role models— are needed. They are some of the most vulnerable students as they not only need to improve their basic skills in their native language, but they also need to face cultural pressure, e.g., helping family members financially instead of spending money on their own education. Furthermore, a clear understanding of financial aid is essential.

Gigi's perspective contributed to the understanding of those students who had had a career in their native country and wanted a career in their new country. For the many

Gigis, an initial support—showing the right educational path—seems to be needed. They already possess a clear understanding that education is an investment and no matter how hard they must work to obtain it, they will succeed.

Lili's story aided in understanding those immigrant professionals' college transfer experience who were highly educated upon arrival to the United States, but whose English language skills needed much improvement. For the many Lilis, early exposure to academic language skills, vocabulary, and grammar are the most beneficial.

### **Implication**

While the individual differences that ABE ESL students bring into their classrooms are beyond the control of any educational setting, there are common features that can be controlled by ABE and college programs. The 10 participants who successfully transitioned from the ABE ESL program to a college program recommended several modifications and adjustments to build a smoother and more seamless transition pathway for ABE ESL students. These recommendations can ease the transition from the non-credit ABE program to the for-credit college program and can be sorted into two major categories: 1) practical implications, and 2) theoretical framework.

### **Practical Implications: Changing the Institutionalized Trajectories**

This study helps support the statement that transitioning ABE ESL students must be a priority for colleges. To accomplish this, the institutionalized trajectories need to be changed. There are several ways to diminish the separation of the ABE and the college programs: The professionalization of the ABE program, collaboration with academic departments, and aligning ABE and academic curricula are only a few examples that will change institutionalized trajectories in transitioning ABE ESL students to college programs (Spurling, Seymour, & Chisman, 2008).

**Professionalization of the ABE ESL programs.** “ABE ESL is just English, college is more” (Javier). The professionalization of the ABE ESL programs is necessary to expand the scope of ABE programs and make transitioning from ABE to college. First, raising the expectations in the ABE ESL program would drastically change the common perception that anybody can teach ABE ESL classes (Crandall, Ingersoll, & Lopez, 2008). That would imply a change in the hiring procedure: Currently, the qualifications for teaching an ABE ESL class is open to those with a high school diploma. Aligning the ABE and college ESL hiring procedure would likely upgrade and enhance the professional skills necessary to teach adult ESL.

Second, professional development is necessary for all levels of ABE instructors to be educated on why moving beyond the ABE program benefits their students. When academic skills are introduced in ABE programs, they are taught in advanced levels (Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, 2005). However, many academic skills can be introduced to ABE students in the beginning English classes, which would prepare ABE students to transition. These include effective organization skills, time-management, problem solving, and developing critical thinking skills; all benefit all adult students (Parrish & Johnson, 2010). To understand the shift of teaching academic skills from the beginning level, professional development for ABE instructors is imperative.

Third, aligning the ABE and college ESL curricula would also provide continuity from ABE to college programs (Harper & de Jong, 2009; Lundien, 2009; Parrish & Johnson, 2010). Problem solving, critical thinking, presentation skills, and integration of technology into ABE ESL curriculum will aid ABE students’ transitioning.

Fourth, assigning homework was also commented on by the participants. They perceived the ABE ESL as an easy program where students could learn “street language” (Javier), but not

academic vocabulary. The participants of the study highly recommended assigned homework in ABE ESL programs.

Fifth, the participants welcomed the idea of using a syllabus in the college program. As the ABE programs were not required to use one, it would be a simple yet very beneficial component for ABE ESL students to transition to college.

Finally, high expectations from all levels of ABE ESL students, which include being accountable for arriving at class on time and teaching academic skills as opposed to everyday skills, were recommended by the participants. When they first transitioned to college, the fast pace intimidated them because the teaching and learning tempo in the ABE ESL program was much slower.

**Collaborating academic departments.** Based on the 10 participating students' transitioning experience, there are several ways the academic department can be involved in transitioning. First, in transitioning, college teachers seem to hold a key position in retaining ABE ESL students who need to overcome their English language and personal obstacles to pursue a college degree. Thus, college instructors are recommended to participate in professional development workshops to learn about the characteristics of the incoming ABE ESL students. Additionally, ABE ESL instructors are accountable for the students who quit: They are required to call and find out the reason why a student dropped out. The reason behind this requirement is that the ABE ESL program receives federal funds to run the program based on retention. College instructors have no retention requirements; therefore, they have no obligation to find out what might have happened to their students.

Second, the office of financial aid should cooperate with the ABE program. The non-credit ABE ESL program is offered free of charge, including the program-provided classes and

materials. Therefore, students had not been exposed to educational fees until their transition to college. When they first faced the tuition and the book costs, they often felt overwhelmed, which resulted—in many cases—dropping out from the college classes. One recommendation was to introduce some fee in the ABE program as “free is not always good” (Michelle). The fee could cover either the course costs or the adopted textbooks as part of the preparation for the for-credit college environment where courses and books cost a great deal of money.

Third, intake procedure to the ABE ESL program is based on the traditional paper and pencil method, whereas college intake is computerized. Another difference is that the ABE ESL program assessment is a reading exam while the college intake exam contains mathematics and English (sentence structure and reading). Exposing ABE ESL students to computerized assessments would help them transition to college. Further, incorporating numeracy into ABE ESL curriculum would not only help ABE ESL students in their transition to college, but would also develop skills necessary in everyday life.

Fourth, for a seamless transition, technology should be part of ABE ESL programs; for example, exit exams could be taken on computers. Another example could be that ABE ESL programs would offer computer-based English classes. Also, technology must be available for those ABE ESL classrooms, which have no regular projectors, laptops, and Internet access.

Fifth, extended service hours are fundamental to serving non-traditional students. While the ABE program offered service hours from 8:00 am to 9:00 pm, the for-credit program was open from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm. The latter would need to be expanded to better accommodate non-traditional students, for example, those transitioning from ABE ESL or CTC 101 classes.

Finally, a harmonized college tracking system for the ABE ESL and the college students is important. Traditionally, the ABE program used a different data system than the for-credit

program. The ID numbers in the ABE program did not work in the for-credit program. The ABE ESL students had to follow the entry steps like new students, even though they already were in the data system. One recommendation to ensure smoother transition from ABE ESL would be if the ABE ESL program used the same data system as the for-credit program. Once the ABE ESL students are in the same college tracking system, dual enrollment—taking ABE ESL classes and for-credit classes simultaneously—could provide a smooth transition between the ABE and the college programs.

## **Recommendations**

### **Additional Ideas for Transitioning**

Aligning the ABE ESL programs and the college programs is necessary in order to increase transition rate from ABE to college (Spurling, Seymour, & Chisman, 2008). Based on the collaboration of the ABE ESL and the academic programs, more services could be introduced to help ABE ESL students' transition to college. One of them is an event, for example, College for a Day. The College for a Day project was initiated by the National College Transition Network (<http://www.collegetransition.org>) and serves as a safe activity to expose ABE students to college programs. The purpose of the event is to reduce the perceived emotional and physical distance between ABE and college programs by taking a field trip from the ABE sites to the main campus. The field trip includes familiarizing ABE ESL students with the campus locations, the academic services, and exposing them to academic classes. Not only the students but also faculty could benefit from such events. Faculty and the ABE ESL students could meet during this event and explore mutual collaboration.

Another service could be a College Transition 101 Alumni Club. Through the club, former ABE ESL students could meet with former classmates, instructors, and advisors and share their

struggles and questions. The club could invite guest speakers on topics in which students are interested. Further, the club also could keep the former ABE ESL students informed about scholarships or new classes. The alumni club could retain the concept of community these students built in earlier classes and extend it beyond their college experience.

Organizing a college for a day event, or establishing an alumni club and other ABE ESL transitioning supporting services, are examples of the collaboration between the ABE ESL and the college programs, which is pivotal for successful transitions. The collaboration may start with the recognition that ABE ESL students are potential college students who need additional support and care before they enroll in college classes.

### **Theoretical Framework: An Ethic of Care**

This study was rooted in the theoretical framework of an ethic of care. The ethic of care (Noddings, 1984) is more than a mother-child relationship; it is a relationship when the one-caring meets the needs of the cared-for. For example, in a teacher-student relationship, the teacher could realize that a student needs extra explanation, and the teacher can provide the extra explanation after class. It is important to notice that caring is individually formed; the one-caring assesses the cared-for's needs and based on the needs, the one-caring acts. It is an ethical relationship between – in educational settings – teacher and students.

The study outcomes support the theoretical framework – the ethic of care – in this phenomenological study. It appeared that when students were treated with the ethic of care, not only were they motivated to learn, but they also recognized a sense of belonging to their teachers. For example, the Lili praised her ABE ESL instructors and the transition class instructor for being caring and for noticing the “person” and not only the student. The participants also understood the level of care among teachers. “Some [teachers] care, some don’t” (Javier). The participants

reported that they did not know “anybody [in the ABE ESL program] who had quit because of the teachers,” but they knew many who did in the college program (Mandy and Vilma). Javier raised the question about when caring was too much: “[ABE ESL] teachers falsely prepare students for college instructors.” ABE students need to know that not all instructors were caring, and the lack of caring could result in losing “confidence and studying” (Mandy and Vilma). Consequently, caring could become enabling. However, for this group of students, caring made a difference, and helped in transitioning to college.

The two characteristics that the participants used to describe their ABE instructors coincide with the foundation of an ethic of care (Noddings, 1984; Owens, 2005). Nevertheless, it must be recognized that caring is a complex concept and students had trouble defining it. Further, caring is not merely about sympathizing with students (Goldstein, 1998); it is about respecting students, holding high expectations, and “model[ing] academic, social, personal, and moral behaviors” (Gay, 2000, p. 46). Thus, simply being nice does not equal caring and does not serve students’ interest. It appeared that the participants longed for instructors who acknowledge the students’ life experiences, who constantly seek ways to improve their teaching, and who keep an open dialogue with students to achieve the highest possible academic accomplishment (Owens, 2005). Coinciding with Tarlow’s study (1996), participants wanted an instructor who was available in person for questions, and who also accepted reciprocated caring from his or her students; in essence somebody who could become a mentor for the students.

Researchers (e.g., Cardemil, Kim, & Pinedo, 2005; Hwang, Chun, & Takeuchi, 2005; Kennard et al, 2006) reported rising numbers of depression among adult immigrants due to the loss of a sense of belonging in their new country. This study’s finding on care help support the

research that found that students who are acknowledged and find ways to incorporate their languages are able to integrate faster into their new society (Owens, 2005; Tarlow, 1996).

A practical implication of caring could be, for example, establishing transition advisor positions in ABE ESL programs. A transition advisor would explicitly keep connections with ABE ESL students from the beginning of their English learning (Parrish & Johnson, 2010) and advise students on how to transition from ABE to college. Through an advisor –schooled in the ethics of caring–, ABE ESL students could develop a sense of belonging to their college, build college coping skills, and make personal and emotional adjustments (Buttaro, 2004; Estrada et al., 2005; Harrington, 2000). An ABE ESL transition advisor would also be part of the college advising center to further aid ABE ESL students who have already transitioned to college programs.

Another practical implication of caring could be to educate college instructors on the positive effects of caring teaching (Barnett, 2010; Cox et al., 2010; Wilson, Ryan, & Pugh, 2010). Through professional development workshops, college instructors would be able to learn more about the reality of immigrants and about their struggles of integrating into college life. College instructors also could learn more about building class-communities and integrating an ethic of care into their teaching.

### **International Research on Transitioning**

The results of this study and international research on transitioning have common characteristics. First, it has been internationally recognized that immigrants bring many features to their new country (Andersson, 2008). Relatively young immigrant countries with moderate numbers of immigrants, e.g., Sweden, attempt to examine what immigrants bring to their new countries. Individual trainings and counseling are provided free of charge (Andersson, 2008).

Conversely, traditional immigrant countries with flow of immigrants, e.g., Australia and the United Kingdom, altered their immigrant services. The emphasis in adult education has shifted from basic language teaching to explicit literacy education (Burns, 2003; Mattheoudakis, 2005). Furthermore, vocational education and trainings are incorporated, and its certificates are recognized by local employers (International trends, 2009).

Young immigrant countries and traditional immigrant countries acknowledged that financial incentives are needed to assist immigrants, and they offer vocational and professional trainings free of charge for educating their newcomers. Although the primary goals of the trainings are to educate and guide immigrants into the labor force, the personal counseling also results in higher self-esteem and better self-confidence (Andersson, 2008).

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

Although this qualitative phenomenological study contributed to the research community on ABE ESL transitioning, the results implied the need for future research (Creswell, 2004). First, longitudinal research studies are needed to establish appropriate services for transitioning students. Even though in-depth studies of phenomena are important, a study over time provides details that may not be disclosed entirely by one interview session. Second, research studies are needed on the professionalization of ABE programs. These programs tend to be individualistic and changeable, depending on the course instructor and funding. Third, studies are also needed on professional development among ABE ESL and college ESL instructors as well as administrators from both sides. Perhaps, this area is the one that is most lacking in the review of research. Furthermore, the presented study focused on non-native English-speaking students; studies are needed to follow native English speaking GED students' transitioning experience from the ABE program to college programs. Additionally, a different research design, for

example, action research (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007; Wallace, 2004) might expose additional aspects in transitioning. Action research “is a form of structured reflection [which] comes to a solution” (Wallace, 2004, p. 15). Finally, a case study (Yin, 2009) on a CTC 101 instructor could provide an opportunity for further reflecting on “some real-life situations” (Yin, 2009, p. 185). To follow a transition teacher whose students successfully transition from ABE to college might reveal in depth understanding of strategies that could be used in “practical terms” (p. 185) when establishing transitional services.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Overall, this study provided insights and implications that were not expected. For example, although research studies showed that there were no typical adult English language students (Crandall and Sheppard, 2004) and these study participants’ background coincided with that notion, this group of adult English language learners showed remarkable resistance to hardship. For example, Orijime and Isabella rode the city bus to and from school, which meant spending hours on the bus. Lili is another example; she stated that although college tuition was expensive but “if they really want to pursue a degree,” students would find ways to pay for classes. Javier and Michelle accepted that although gas was expensive, they had to drive to school to take classes. These students were all willing to overcome whatever obstacles they faced while attending college.

Another unexpected outcome was that the participants were able to verbalize the differences between the ABE and the college ESL programs. The participants pointed out the differences in resources, teachers, and teaching strategies. They helped to make a strong case that professionalization of the ABE program is necessary.

This qualitative phenomenological case study explored the factors that led to ABE ESL students' transitioning from a non-credit ABE ESL program to a for-credit community college program. The theoretical framework—an ethic of care—proposed that transitioning was linked to 1) the quality of interaction between ABE ESL students and ABE ESL and college instructors; 2) the quality of interaction between ABE ESL students and college students; 3) ABE and two-year institution cost-related issues; and 4) ABE ESL and two-year institution site-related issues. The literature implied that external situations influenced career choices. According to the 10 participants involved in this study, three features influenced their transitioning. While themes varied as to individual values, the underlying conclusion of the focus groups' data in this research study were that transitioning was aided by a general ethic of care for students through a caring faculty member and firm knowledge regarding the for-credit system.

## References

- ACCUPLACER (2012). <https://www.accuplacer.org>
- Alamprese, J. (2005). *Helping adult learners make the transition to postsecondary education*. Retrieved January 16, 2011, from <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/transpost.pdf>
- Amstutz, D., & Sheared, V. (2000). The crisis in adult basic education. *Education & Urban Society*, 32(2), 155.
- Andersson, P., & Osman, A. (2008). Recognition of prior learning as a practice for differential inclusion and exclusion of immigrants in Sweden. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 59(1), 42-60.
- Asher, J., & Garcia, R. (1982). The optimal age to learn a foreign language. In S. Krashen, R. Scarcella, & M.H. Long (Eds.), *Child-adult differences in second language acquisition* (pp. 3-12). Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Avison, W. R. & Cairney, J. (2003). Social structure, stress, and personal control. In S. H. Zarit, L. I. Pearlin, & K. W. Schaie (Eds.), *Personal control in social and life contexts* (pp. 127-64). New York, NY: Springer.
- Barnett, E. A. (2010). Validation experiences and persistence among community college students. *Review of Higher Education*, 34(2), 193-230.
- Baum, S., & Flores, S. M. (2011). Higher education and children in immigrant families. *Future of Children*, 21(1), 171-193.
- Bello, T. (2000). *The importance of helping adult ESL learners set goals*. Washington, D.C.: Clearing House for ESL Literacy Education. (ED 445562)

- Bley-Vroman, R. (1990). The logical problem of foreign language learning. *Linguistic Analysis*, 20(1-2), 3-49.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods* (5th ed.) New York, NY: Allyn & Bacon.
- Burns, A. (2003). ESL curriculum development in Australia: Recent trends and debates. *RELC Journal*, 34(3), 261-283.
- Buttaro, L. (2004). Second-language acquisition, culture shock, and language stress of adult female Latina students in New York. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 3(1), 21-49.
- Cardemil, E. V., Kim, S., & Pinedo, T. M. (2005). Developing a culturally appropriate depression prevention program: The family coping skills program. *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 11(2), 99-112.
- CASAS (2012). <https://www.casas.org>
- Cassidy, W., & Bates, A. (2005). "Drop-outs" and "push-outs": Finding hope at a school that actualizes the Ethic of Care. *American Journal of Education*, 112(1), 66-102.
- Center for Adult English Language Acquisition (2012). <http://www.cal.org/caela/>
- Chisman, F. P. & Crandall, J. (2007). *Passing the torch. Strategies for innovation in community college ESL*. Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy. Retrieved September 28, 2007, from <http://www.caalusa.org/occasionalpapers.html#anchor393247>
- Choy, S. P. (2002). *Nontraditional students: Findings from the condition of education*. Washington, DC: United States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. [nces.ed.gov/pubs2002/2002012.pdf](https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2002/2002012.pdf)
- Christie, P. (2005). Towards an ethics of engagement in education in global times. *Australian Journal of Education*, 49(3), 238-250.

- Clapton, J. J. (2008). 'Care': Moral concept or merely an organisational suffix? *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 52(7), 573-580. doi:10.1111/j.1365-2788.2008.01078.x
- Collier, M. (2005). An ethic of caring: The fuel for high teacher efficacy. *The Urban Review*, 37(4), 351-359.
- Cook, V. (2001). *Second language learning and language teaching*. New York, NY: Oxford University.
- Coulombe, S., Tremblay, J., & Marchand, S. (2004). Literacy scores, human capital, and growth across fourteen OEDS countries. Statistics Canada/Human Resources and Skills Development Council Canada. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/>
- Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy (2012). <http://www.caalusa.org/>
- Cox, B., McIntosh, K., Terenzini, P., Reason, R., & Lutovsky Quaye, B. (2010). Pedagogical signals of faculty approachability: Factors shaping faculty-student interaction outside the classroom. *Research in Higher Education*, 51(8), 767-788. doi:10.1007/s11162-010-9178-z
- Coxhead, A. (2006). *Essentials of teaching academic vocabulary*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Crabtree, R. D. & Sapp, S. A. (2003). Theoretical, political, and pedagogical challenges in the feminist classroom. *College ESL*. 51(4), 131-140.
- Crandall, J., & Sheppard, K. (2004). Adult ESL and the community college. *Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy*. [www.caalusa.org/eslreport.pdf](http://www.caalusa.org/eslreport.pdf)
- Crandall, J., Ingersoll, G., & Lopez, J. (2008). Adult ESL teacher credentialing and certification. *Center for Adult English Language Acquisition*.  
[http://www.cal.org/caela/esl\\_resources/briefs/tchrcred.html](http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/briefs/tchrcred.html)

- Creswell, J. W. (2004). *Research design. Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Crocker, D. A. (2008). *Ethics of global development: Agency, capability, and deliberative democracy*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University.
- Csepely, T. (2008). Teaching college success skills for non-native English speaking students: From ABE to college ESL. *Essential Teacher* 1(1), 32-34.
- Cummins, J. (1979) Cognitive/academic language proficiency, linguistic interdependence, the optimum age question and some other matters. *Working Papers on Bilingualism*, (19), 121-129.
- Curry, M. (2004, Fall). UCLA community college review: Academic literacy for English language learners. *Community College Review*, 32(2), 51-68.
- De la Fuente, M. J. (2002). Negotiation of oral acquisition of L2 vocabulary: The role of input and output in the receptive and productive acquisition of words. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*. 24(1), 81-112.
- Deggs, D., & Miller, M. (2011). Developing community expectations: The critical role of adult educators. *Adult Learning*, 22(3), 25-30.
- Delaney, A. (2008). Why faculty-student interaction matters in the first year experience. *Tertiary Education & Management*, 14(3), 227-241. doi:10.1080/13583880802228224
- Diamond, L. & Gutlohn, L. (2006). Teaching vocabulary.  
<http://www.readingrockets.org/article/9943>.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2002). *Teaching and researching motivation*. Essex, England: Pearson.
- Doyle, L. H. & P. M. Doyle (2003). Building schools as caring communities: Why, what, and how? *Clearing House* 76(5): 259-61.

- Eaker-Rich, D. & Van Galen, J. (1996). *Caring in an unjust world: negotiating borders and barriers in schools*. Albany, NY: State University of New York.
- Ellis, R. (1999). *Learning a second language through interaction*. Philadelphia, PA: Benjamins.
- Ellwood, D. T. & Kane, T. J. (2000). Who is getting a college education? In Sheldon Dansigern & Jane Waldfogel (Eds.), *Securing the future* (pp. 283-324). New York, NY: Russell.
- Estrada, L., Dupoux, E., & Wolman, C. (2005, August). The personal-emotional social adjustment of English-language learners to a community college. *Community College Journal of Research & Practice*, 29(7), 557-568.
- Feliciano, C. & Rumbaut, R. (2005). Gendered paths: Educational and occupational expectations and outcomes among adult children of immigrants. *Ethnic & Racial Studies*, 28(6), 1087-1118.
- Feliciano, C. (2005). Educational selectivity in U.S. immigration: How do immigrants compare to those left behind? *Demography*, 42(1), 131-152.
- Ferguson, P. (1998). The politics of adult ESL literacy: Becoming politically visible. In T. Smoke (Ed.), *Adult ESL: Politics, pedagogy, and participation in classroom and community programs* (pp. 3-17). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Flege, J. E. (1987). The production of 'new' and 'similar' phones in a foreign language: Evidence for the effect of equivalence classification. *Journal of Phonetics*, 15, 47-65.
- Fleming, D. (2008). Becoming citizens: Punjabi ESL learners, national language policy and the Canadian language benchmarks. In M. Manteno, P. Chamness & J. Watzke (Eds.), *Readings in language studies: Language across disciplinary boundaries* (pp. 143-158). St. Louis, MO: International Society for Language Studies.

- Freeman, G., & Hill, D. (2006). Disaggregating immigration policy: The politics of skilled labor recruitment in the U.S. *Knowledge, Technology & Policy*, 19(3), 7-26. Retrieved October 20, 2007, from Academic Search Premier Database.
- Freire, P. (2006). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Continuum.
- Gardner, R. C. (1985). *Social psychology and second language learning: The role of attitude and motivation*. London, England: Arnold.
- Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching. Theory, research, and practice*. New York, NY: Teacher College.
- Glesne, C. (1999). *Becoming qualitative researchers. An introduction*. New York, NY: Longman.
- Goldstein, L. (1998). Taking caring seriously: The ethic of care in classroom life. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA.
- Goldstein, L. (2002). Commitment, community, and passion: Dimension of a care-centered approach to teacher education. *Teacher Education and Practice*, 15(1-2), 36-56.
- Gregory, M. (2000). Care as a Goal of Democratic Education. *Journal of Moral Education* 29(4): 445-61.
- Harper, C. A., & de Jong, E. J. (2009). English language teacher expertise: The elephant in the room. *Language and Education*, 23(2), 137-151. doi:10.1080/09500780802152788
- Harrington, J. B. (2000). *Transitioning GED and ESOL (ESL) students into community college*. Rio Salado College ABE Transition Program. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 451 376).
- Held, V. (2006). *The ethics of care*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

- Henle, T., Jenkins, D., Smith, W. et al., (2005). *Bridges to careers for low-skilled adults: A program development guide*. Chicago, IL: Woman Employed Institute. Retrieved September 30, 2007, from <http://www.womenemployed.org/docs/BridgeGuideFina...>
- Herschensohn, J. (2009). Fundamental and gradient differences in language development. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 31(2), 259-289.  
doi:10.1017/S0272263109090305
- Horst, M., Cobb, T. & Nicolae, I. (2005). Expanding academic vocabulary with an interactive online database. *Language Learning & Technology*, 9, 90-110.  
<http://lt.msu.edu/vol9num2/horst/default.html>
- Hwang, W., Chun, C., & Takeuchi, D. T. (2005). Age of first onset major depression in Chinese Americans. *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology*. 11(1), 16-27.
- Johnson, K. A., & Parrish, B. (2010). Aligning instructional practices to meet the academic needs of adult ESL Students. *TESOL Quarterly*, 44(3), 618-628.
- Kamberelis, G. & Dimitriadis, G. (2006). Focus groups. Strategic articulations of pedagogy, politics, and inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 887-909). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kearney, L.K., Draper, M. & Barón, A. (2005). Counseling utilization by ethnic minority college students. *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 11(3), 272-285.
- Kennard, B. D., Stewart, S., Hughes, J. L., Patel, P. G., & Emslie, G. J. (2006). Cognitions and depressive symptoms among ethnic minority adolescents. *Cultural Diversity And Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 12(3), 578-591. doi:10.1037/1099-9809.12.3.578
- Kimer, J. (2005, July). Landmarks in U.S. immigration policy. *NACLA Report on the Americas*, 39(1), 34-35. Retrieved October 20, 2007, from Academic Search Premier database.

- Kitzenger, J. & Barbour, R. S. (1999). Introduction: The challenge and promise of focus groups. In R. S. Barbour & J. Kitzenger (Eds.), *Developing focus group research. Politics, theory and practice* (pp. 1-21). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Knowles, P. (1990). *The adult learner: A neglected species* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.) London, England: Routledge Falmer.
- Krashen, S. D. (2003). *Explorations in language acquisition and use*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann.
- Krueger R. A. & Casey, M. A. (2000). *Focus groups. A practical guide for applied research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kruidenier, J. (2002). Literacy education in Adult Basic Education. In J. Comings, B. Garner, & C. Smith (Eds.), *Review of adult learning and literacy*. (Vol. 3). London, England: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates [Electronic version]. <http://www.ncsall.net/?id=574>
- Lambert, O. D. (2008). Who are our students? Measuring learner characteristics in adult immigrants studying English. *Adult Basic Education & Literacy Journal*, 2(3), 162-173. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Larotta, C. (2007). Inquiry in the adult classroom: An ESL literacy experience. *Adult Learning*, 18(3/4), 25-29. Retrieved from EBSCOhost.
- Lee, S.L. & Munice, J. (2006). From respective to productive: Improving ESL learners' use of vocabulary in a postreading composition task. *TESOL Quarterly*, 40(2), 295-320.
- Lenneberg, E. H. (1967). *Biological foundations of language*. New York: Wiley.
- Lin, Q. (2001). Toward a caring-centered multicultural education within the social justice context. *Education*, 122(1), 107-114.

- Lincoln, F., & Rademacher, B. (2006). Learning styles of ESL students in community colleges. *Community College Journal of Research & Practice*, 30(5), 485-500.
- Lumina Foundation (2012). [www.luminafoundation.org](http://www.luminafoundation.org)
- Lundien, K. (2009). *Exploring a secondary urban ESL program: Addressing the social, affective, linguistic, and academic needs of English Language Learners (ELLS)*. Kansas State University). *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*, Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/304914265?accountid=452>
- Mansell, I., Bennett, G., Northway, R., Mead, D., & Moseley, L. (2004). The learning curve: The advantages and disadvantages in the use of focus groups as a method of data collection. *Nurse Researcher*, 11(4), 79-88.
- Manton, J. (1998). The relationship between knowing our students' real needs and effective teaching. In T. Smoke (Ed.), *Adult ESL: Politics, pedagogy, and participation in classroom and community programs*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Marri, A. R. (2005). Building a framework for classroom-based multicultural democratic education: Learning from three skilled teachers. *Teachers College Record*. 107(5) 1036-59.
- Mathews-Aydinli, J. (2006). Supporting adult English language learners' transitions to postsecondary education. Center for Adult English Language Acquisition (CAELA) Retrieved on September 26, 2007, from [http://www.cal.org/caela/esl\\_resources/briefs/transition.html](http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/briefs/transition.html)
- Mattheoudakis, M. M. (2005). Language education of adult immigrants in Greece: Current trends and future developments. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 24(4), 319-336.

- McClymer, J. (1982). The Americanization movement and the education of the foreign-born adult, 1914-1925. In B. Weiss (Ed.), *American education and the European immigrant* (pp. 96-116). Champaign, IL: University of Illinois.
- McKay, H., & Tom, A. (2006). *Teaching adult second language learners* (8<sup>th</sup> ed.). Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University.
- Menard-Warwick, J. (2005). Intergenerational trajectories and sociopolitical context: Latina immigrants in adult ESL. *TESOL Quarterly*, 39(2), 165-185.
- Mercado, C. (1993). Caring as empowerment: School collaboration and community agency. *Urban Review*, 25(1), 79-104.
- Merriam, S. B. (2001). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Mirowsky, J., & Ross, C. (2007). Life course trajectories of perceived control and their relationship to education. *American Journal of Sociology*, 112(5), 1339-1382.
- Mitchell, J. P. (1996). Money, class, and curriculum: A freshman composition reading unit. *Writing on the Edge*, 8(1), 67-76.
- Mokhtar, A., Rawian, R., Yahaya, M., Abdullah, A., Mansor, M., Osman, M., & ... Mohamed, A. (2010). Vocabulary knowledge of adult ESL learners. *English Language Teaching*, 3(1), 71-80
- Nation, I.S.P. (2001). *Learning vocabulary in another language*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University.
- National Center on Education and the Economy. (2009). *International trends in adult education and lifelong learning*. Retrieved from <http://www.jff.org/publications/workforce/international-trends-adult-education-and/909>

- National College Transition Network. (2012) <http://www.collegetransition.org>
- Nellie Mai Education Foundation (2012). <http://www.nmefdn.org/>
- Nieto, D. (2009). A brief history of bilingual education in the United States. *Penn GSE Perspectives on Urban Education*, 6(1), 61-72.
- Nieto, S. (1992). Affirming diversity: The socio-political context of multicultural education. In Fraser, J. (Ed.) (2000). *The School in the United States: A documentary History*. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.
- Noddings, N. (1984). *Caring. A feminine approach to ethics & moral education*, Berkeley, CA: University of California.
- Noddings, N. (2006). *Critical lessons. What our schools should teach*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University.
- Noddings, N. (2007). *Philosophy of education*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Noddings, N. (2010). Moral Education in an Age of Globalization. *Educational Philosophy & Theory*, 42(4), 390-396. doi:10.1111/j.1469-5812.2008.00487.x
- Norton, B. & Toohey, K. (2002). Identity and language learning. In R. B. Kaplan (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Applied Linguistics*. (pp. 115-123). New York, NY: Oxford University.
- Office of Institutional Research, City College of San Francisco, (1998). Non-credit ESL and transitional studies plan. Finding and planning recommendations for linkages between non-credit English as a Second Language, Transitional Studies, City College programs and outside agencies. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 428 809)
- Owens, L. (2005). The ethic of care in teaching: An overview of supportive literature. *Quest*, 57(4), 392-425.

- Paquette, J. (2005). Democratic education and school choice revisited. *American Journal of Education*, 111(4), 609-17.
- Pardos-Prado, S. (2011). Framing attitudes towards immigrants in Europe: When competition does not matter. *Journal of Ethnic & Migration Studies*, 37(7), 999-1015.  
doi:10.1080/1369183X.2011.572421
- Parrish, B. & Johnson, K. (2010). *Promoting learner transitions to postsecondary education and work: Developing academic readiness skills from the beginning*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics. Retrieved from  
<http://www.cal.org/caelnetwork/resources/transitions.html>
- Patthey-Chavez, G., Dillon, P., & Thomas-Spiegel, J. (2005). How far do they get? Tracking students with different academic literacies through community college remediation. *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, 32(3), 261-277.
- Piske, T., MacKay, I.R.A., & Fledge, J. E. (2001). Factors affecting degree of foreign accent in an L2. *Journal of Phonetics*, 29, 191-215.
- Popescu, A., & Gunter, H. M. (2011). Romanian women head teachers and the ethics of care. *School Leadership & Management*, 31(3), 261-279. doi:10.1080/13632434.2011.587404
- Powell, K. M. & Takayoshi, P. (2003). Accepting roles created for us: The ethics of reciprocity. *College Composition and Communication*, 54(3), pp. 394-422.
- Prince, D., & Jenkins, D. (2005). Building pathways to success for low-skill adult students: Lessons for community policy and practice from a longitudinal student tracking study. *CCRC Brief* (25) Retrieved from <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Publication.asp?uid=288>
- Quigley, B. (2000). Retaining adult learners in the first three critical weeks: A quasi-experimental model for use in ABE programs. *Adult Basic Education*, 10(2), 55.

- Reder, S. (1999). Adult literacy and postsecondary education students: Overlapping populations and learning trajectories. In J. Comings, B. Garner, & C. Smith (Eds.), *Annual review of adult learning and literacy*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass [Electronic version].  
[www.ncsall.net/?id=771&pid=523](http://www.ncsall.net/?id=771&pid=523)
- Ricento, T. (2005). Considerations of identity of L2 learning. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning*. (pp. 895-911). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Roseboro, D. L., O'Malley, M. P., & Hunt, J. (2006). Talking cents: Public discourse, state oversight, and democratic education in East ST. Louis. *Educational Studies*, 40(1), 6-22.
- Rubin, H. J. & Rubin, I. S. (2005). *Qualitative interviewing. The art of hearing data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rumbaut, R. (2005). Turning points in the transition to adulthood: Determinants of educational attainment, incarceration, and early childbearing among children of immigrants. *Ethnic & Racial Studies*, 28(6), 1041-1086.
- Rumbaut, R. G., & Komaie, G. (2010). Immigration and adult transitions. *Future of Children*, 20(1), 43-66.
- Saari, D., Storla, S. & Turtola, J. (2006). CNA bridge program at Mt. Hood Community College: A career pathway training for non-native speakers of English. Retrieved on September 30, 2007, from  
[www.worksourceoregon.org/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=doc\\_view&gid=130&Itemid=50](http://www.worksourceoregon.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_view&gid=130&Itemid=50)
- Said, E. (2004). *Humanism and democratic criticism*. New York, NY: Columbia University.

- Schenke, A. (1996). Feminist theory and the ESL classroom. Not just a “social issue”: Teaching Feminist in ESL. *TESOL Quarterly*, 30(1), 155-58.
- Schostak, J. (2006). *Interviewing and representation in qualitative research*. Open University Press.
- Schwarzer, D. (2009). Best practices for teaching the “whole” adult ESL learner. *New Directions for Adult & Continuing Education*, (121), 25-33. doi:10.1002/ace.322
- Scovel, T. (1988). *A time to speak: A psycholinguistic inquiry into the critical period for human speech*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Silverman, D. (2005). *Doing qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Skilton-Sylvester, E. (2002). Should I stay or should I go? Investigating Cambodian women’s participation and investment in adult ESL programs. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 53(1), 9-26.
- Soliday, M. (1999). Class dismissed. *College English*, 61, 731-741.
- Smith, J. A., Flowers, P. & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis. Theory, method and research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Smoke, T. (1998). Critical multilingualism as a means of promoting social activism and awareness. In T. Smoke (Ed.), *Adult ESL: Politics, pedagogy, and participation in classroom and community programs*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Sokolowski, R. (2000). *Introduction to phenomenology*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University.
- Sparks, B. (2001). Adult Basic Education, social policy, and educator's concerns: The influence of welfare reform on practice. *Adult Basic Education*, 11(3), 135.

- Spurling, S., Seymour, S., & Chisman, F. P. (2008). Pathways & outcomes: Tracking ESL student performance. *Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy*.  
<http://www.caalusa.org/publications.html#trans>
- Stewart, D., Shamdasani, P., & Rook, D. W. (2007). *Focus group research: Theory and practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Strawn, J. (2007). *Policies to promote adult education and postsecondary alignment*. New York, NY: National Commission on Adult Literacy.  
[www.caalusa.org/content/strawnbriefrev101807.pdf.pdf](http://www.caalusa.org/content/strawnbriefrev101807.pdf.pdf)
- Tarlow, B. (1996). Caring: A negotiated process that varies. In S. Gordon, P. Benner, & N. Noddings (Eds.), *Caregiving: Readings in knowledge, practice, and politics* (pp. 56-82). Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania.
- Tisdell, E. (1998). Poststructural feminist pedagogies: The possibilities and limitations of feminist emancipatory adult learning theory and practice. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 48(3), 139-156.
- Tronto, J. (1993). *Moral boundaries: A political argument for an ethic of care*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Tyler, J. H. (2003). Economic Benefits of the GED: Lessons from recent research. *Review of Educational Research*, 73(3) 369-405.
- Ullman, C. (2010). The connections among immigration, nation building, and Adult Education English as a Second Language instruction in the United States. *Adult Learning*, 21(1), 4-8.

- Vandrick, S. (1998). Promoting gender equity in the postsecondary ESL class. In T. Smoke (Ed.), *Adult ESL: Politics, pedagogy, and participation in classroom and community programs* (pp. 73-89). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Van Galen, J. A. (1996). Caring in community. In D. Eaker-Rich & J. A. Van Galen (Eds), *Caring in an unjust world: negotiating borders and barriers in school*. (pp. 147-170). Albany, NY: State University of New York.
- Vikan, A., Camino, C., & Biaggio, A. (2005). Note on a cross-cultural test of Gilligan's ethic of care<sup>1</sup>. *Journal of Moral Education*, 34(1), 107-111. doi:10.1080/03057240500051105
- Vernez, G., & Abrahamse, A. (1996). *How immigrants fare in U.S. education*. New York, NY: The RAND Corporation.
- Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. (2005). *I-BEST: A program integrating adult basic education and workforce training* (Research Report No. 05-2). Olympia, WA: Author.
- Warton, P. M. (2001). The forgotten voices in homework: Views of students. *Educational Psychologist*, 36(3), 155-165.
- Wallace, M. (2004). *Action research for language teachers*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University.
- Weiner, H. (1998). The attack on basic writing—and after. *Journal of Basic Writing*, 17(1), 96-103.
- Wilson, J. H., Ryan, R. G., & Pugh, J. L. (2010). Professor-student rapport scale predicts student outcomes. *Teaching Of Psychology*, 37(4), 246-251. doi:10.1080/00986283.2010.510976
- Wolcott, H. F. (2001). *Writing up qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Workforce Investment Act of 1998. (1998). *Workforce Investment Act Laws and Regulations*.

(1998). Retrieved from United States Department of Labor

<http://www.doleta.gov/usworkforce/wia>

Yin, R. (2009). *Case study research. Design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Zafft, C., Kallenbach, S., & Spohn, J. (2006). *Transitioning adults to college: Adult Basic*

*Education program models*. National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and

Literacy. [www.collegetransition.org/docs/nctntransitionpaper.pdf](http://www.collegetransition.org/docs/nctntransitionpaper.pdf)

Zembylas, M. (2010). The ethic of care in globalized societies: Implications for citizenship

education. *Ethics & Education*, 5(3), 233-245. doi:10.1080/17449642.2010.516636

## APPENDIX A

### Models of Transition Programs

Taken from Zafft, C., Kallenbach, S., & Spohn, J. (2006). *Transitioning adults to college: Adult Basic Education program models*. National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy.

<b>1. Advising Model Strengths and Limitations (p. 18)</b>
<b>ADVISING MODEL STRENGTHS:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires less of a time commitment from students than classroom-based transition programs and may therefore appeal more to adults who want to be on a fast track to college;</li> <li>• Tends to be open entry, which allows advisors to serve students at any point during the semester or year rather than making students wait until a new session begins;</li> <li>• Is less expensive for programs to provide than more intensive classroom-based models;</li> <li>• May be incorporated into already-funded counseling hours;</li> <li>• Provides individualized counseling that can be customized to students' needs; and Reaches and accommodates more students than classroom-based models.</li> </ul>
<b>ADVISING MODEL LIMITATIONS:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic skills development is commonly limited to short-term workshops; Academic deficits are addressed in tuition-based developmental education; Advisors' case loads can be high;</li> <li>• Students may chose to opt out of important experiences when offered a menu of voluntary workshops;</li> <li>• The open entry nature of the program can make it difficult to recruit a critical mass of students for particular workshops; and</li> <li>• Students do not typically get the benefit of a learning community or cohort as part of the transition experience.</li> </ul>

<b>2. GED Plus Model Strengths and Limitations (p. 20)</b>
<b>GED PLUS MODEL STRENGTHS:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accelerates learning for students who have the goal of attending postsecondary education;</li> <li>• Has the potential to have an impact on a large number of nontraditional adult learners because the GED is an established educational pathway for adults;</li> <li>• Is less expensive for programs than the college prep model;</li> <li>• Integrates additional academic content, such as critical thinking skills and algebraic concepts, into the GED curriculum; and</li> <li>• Responds directly to the increased emphasis on access to postsecondary education under current WIA Title II guidelines</li> </ul>
<b>GED PLUS MODEL LIMITATIONS:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional academic objectives may be viewed as irrelevant by students who do not have the goal of attending postsecondary education;</li> <li>• The requirement of the new GED tests for more direct instruction may limit the amount of time instructors can spend on college transition objectives;</li> <li>• The GED, like the traditional high school diploma, is not well aligned with college placement requirements, reducing its effectiveness as a way to prepare for college, particularly in the area of critical thinking and mathematics; and</li> <li>• Places additional requirements on GED teachers.</li> </ul>

<b>3. ESOL Transition Model Strengths and Limitations (p. 23)</b>
<b>ESOL TRANSITION MODEL STRENGTHS:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develops academic language skills for college;</li> <li>• Lends itself to addressing curricular alignment with credit-based ESL or introductory composition courses;</li> <li>• Tends to have clear academic benchmarks for admission to the transition-level classes; and</li> <li>• Tends to monitor student learning gains closely.</li> </ul>
<b>ESOL TRANSITION MODEL LIMITATIONS:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limits academic skills development to language arts and tends not to include mathematics;</li> <li>• Tends to have high caseloads for advisors; and</li> <li>• Graduates of the transition classes often still need more ESL instruction in college and may use up financial aid for it.</li> </ul>

<b>4. Career Pathways Model Strengths and Limitations (p. 27)</b>
<b>CAREER PATHWAYS MODEL STRENGTHS:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provides access to college-level occupational training for students who are not academically prepared for college-level courses;</li><li>• Accesses resources for adult transition from public workforce development programs and private employers;</li><li>• Makes instruction more immediately relevant to students' career interests through a contextualized curriculum (which likely improves retention);</li><li>• Creates steppingstones to career preparation programs that can lead to an academic credential; and</li><li>• Ensures the relevance of the curriculum to available jobs when accompanied by employer involvement.</li></ul>
<b>CAREER PATHWAYS MODEL LIMITATIONS:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Can limit students' options to whatever sector-specific training is available;</li><li>• May prematurely narrow students' vocational options; and</li><li>• May not adequately prepare students for future college-level courses, which can inhibit ability to move from certificate-level programs into associate degree programs and beyond.</li></ul>

<b>5. College Preparatory Model Strengths and Limitations (p. 30)</b>
<b>COLLEGE PREPARATORY MODEL STRENGTHS:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides direct instruction to build academic skills, e.g., algebra, reading, and critical thinking;</li> <li>• Is designed to meet the multiple needs of adult students, including academic, psychosocial, and career development;</li> <li>• Lends itself to addressing curricular alignment between the adult education and postsecondary systems;</li> <li>• Helps students conserve personal financial resources and time in college by working toward direct placement into college-level coursework or the highest levels of developmental education;</li> <li>• Creates cohorts within the transition program;</li> <li>• May allow for dual credit for coursework; and</li> <li>• Encourages partnerships with other educational and social service providers and businesses.</li> </ul>
<b>COLLEGE PREPARATORY MODEL LIMITATIONS:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May be considered too time-consuming by students, making them reluctant to sign-up for classes;</li> <li>• Requires instructors to align their instruction with academic requirements of the postsecondary institution;</li> <li>• Requires programs to meet a wide range of student academic needs which can be challenging in terms of instructional methodology and the learning community;</li> <li>• Has no clear ownership by the adult education or the postsecondary education systems;</li> <li>• Has no clear federal public funding stream and is the most expensive program type; and</li> <li>• Typically serves fewer students than other models.</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX B

### Invitation letter sent to recruit participants to the study

Dear

This letter is from Tünde Csepelyi, your former CPD 122 instructor.

Hi! I am contacting you through TMCC to invite you to a research study. I would like to meet you and talk to you about your experience going from the Meadowood program to Dandini. This is all voluntary. If you do not want to be involved, feel free to say no. Talking and listening to you can increase our understanding of the experience of students like you who go from Meadowood Center to Dandini. I will ask questions like: What was your experience? Who helped you? Who did not?

If you volunteer in this study, you'll be asked to take part in a focus group meeting. I would like to invite you for a conversation where you can meet old classmates and share your experiences with them, too. The meeting will take no more than two hours and I'd like to tape record it. Based on your availability, we'll get together in the library on the Dandini campus. I will bring cookies and sodas to share while we talk.

I might ask you for an individual interview when only you and I would meet and talk about your specific ideas. That meeting should last no longer than an hour, and I'd like to tape record it, too. Drinks and cake will be provided! I will ask you for that interview if you and I think future students can learn from your college experience.

Please call me at **673-8200/52226** or e-mail me at **tcsepelyi@tmcc.edu** to let me know that you will be participating in this study any time **before Friday, April 18, 2008**. Leave your phone number, so I can call you back and set up a meeting time.

Thank you!

**APPENDIX C**

Procedure for focus group interviews (listed on whiteboard)

Education in your life	
Consent forms one is yours one is mine	1. Non-credit ABE ESL For-credit college ESL
Choose a name	2. Compare the two programs
Questions ☺ =>	3. Why do you think you are successful?
	4. Recommendations for non-credit teachers students
	5. Recommendations for credit teachers students
+++++ scholarship	

## APPENDIX D

### Focus Group Interview Questions

Warm-up question:	
What roles do education play in your life?	
Research Question# 1: What is the transfer experience from ABE ESL to community college degree programs like for immigrants?	
Focus questions	Probing (follow-up) questions
Why did you attend ABE ESL – non-credit?	Describe your experience
Why are you attending college – for-credit?	Describe your experience
RQ#2: How do ABE ESL transfer students perceive differences in academic cultures between an ABE ESL program and a two-year institution?	
Focus questions	Probing (follow-up) questions
Compare the two programs (non-credit – for-credit)	Physical: location, homework, instructors, classmates, atmosphere
	Emotional: child care, family support, money, mentor (role model)
	English classes: homework, classmates, instructors, books
RQ#3: What do ABE ESL transfer students say about which support and services contributed to their retention?	
Focus questions	Probing (follow-up) questions
What do you think made you successful?	Family, personal traits (perseverance), motivation
What service(s) have helped you to <u>come</u> to for-credit college ESL?	Transition class, Writing Center, Counseling, caring instructors, counseling, library
What service(s) have helped you <u>stay</u> in for-credit college classes?	Transition class, Writing Center, Counseling, caring instructors, counseling, library

+ RQ#4: What recommendations do you have for:	
Focus questions	Probing (follow-up) questions
Non-credit ABE ESL program to help students like you go to college?	People? Services?
For-credit college ESL program to help students like you stay in college?	save money, apply for scholarships
<u>ABE ESL students</u> who have not gone to for-credit college yet?	

**APPENDIX E**

## Follow-up letter on focus group and individual interviews

Dear

Thank you again for participating in my research study. As I promised, here is our conversation, typed. Please feel free to read it and add your thoughts to it. If there is anything that you would like to discuss with me, please send me an e-mail to [tcsepelyi@tmcc.edu](mailto:tcsepelyi@tmcc.edu) so we can set up an appointment.

Also, a self-posted envelope is attached for your convenience: you can send your comments to me in that envelope. Just add your comments to the typed sentences (perhaps on the back side is more space), and I will find them once you send the envelope back to me.

Please contact me via e-mail or through mail by **June 30<sup>th</sup>**.

I look forward to reading your additional thoughts.

Thank you very much in advance.

Sincerely,

## APPENDIX F

### Individual Interview Questions

#### **Before the interview**

The personal history of the participants

#### Family background

1. Pseudonym:
2. Age:
3. Place of birth:
4. Language(s) used in the home:
5. Language(s) used outside the home:
6. Number of years in the United States:
7. Occupational background:
  - a. native country
  - b. United States
8. Family (single, married, children):

#### Educational background:

1. Elementary school:
2. High school:
3. College:
4. Other:
5. Level of English proficiency when you enrolled to your first academic class (not in the transition class):
6. Parents educational level:
  - a. Mother
  - b. Father
7. Husband/wife's educational level:
8. Children's educational levels:
9. Educational goal for children:

## The interview

### A) Questions about transitioning

1. What is the transfer experience from ABE ESL to community college degree programs like for YOU?

Where are you heading with college?

What goals do you want to reach by attending the college?

What do you think made you successful?

What obstacles do you have?

What are your plans to overcome those obstacles?

Which support services helped you come to the for-credit program?

2. How do YOU perceive differences and similarities between an ABE ESL program and a two-year institution?

How would you describe the two ESL programs (non-credit and for-credit)?

What was your experience like in non-credit? In for-credit?

3. What do YOU say contributed to your success?

What specific assistance (services or people) help you stay in school?

Which support services help you stay in college?

What specific assistance (services and people) hold you back to stay in school?

Do you have a role model who would help you stay in school?

### B) Recommendations for transitioning

1. What services or supports would you have liked to receive to go from the non-credit (ABE ESL) program to for-credit (college) ESL?
2. What kind of people would you like to recommend to help students like you go from the non-credit (ABE ESL) program to for-credit (college)?
3. What services or support would like to receive from the for-credit (college) program in order to stay in school?
4. What kind of people would you like to recommend to help students like you stay at for-credit (college)?
5. If that were up to you, how would you help fellow ESL students go from non-credit (ABE) to for-credit (college) ESL?