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Exploring the Uses of Cultural Funds of Knowledge Among Ethnic Minority Immigrant College Students in Their Constructions of Learning Identities Within a Collaborative Photovoice Project

Stacey Jennell Cooper
Graduate Center, City University of New York

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EXPLORING THE USES OF CULTURAL FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE AMONG ETHNIC MINORITY IMMIGRANT COLLEGE STUDENTS IN THEIR CONSTRUCTIONS OF LEARNING IDENTITIES WITHIN A COLLABORATIVE PHOTOVOICE PROJECT

by

Stacey Jennell Cooper

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Psychology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2016
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by

STACEY JENNELL COOPER

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Psychology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Anna Stetsenko, PhD

_________________________  ____________________________________
Date          Chair of Examining Committee

Maureen O’Connor, PhD, JD

_________________________  ____________________________________
Date        Executive Officer, Psychology Department

Joseph Glick, PhD

David Chapin, Architect

Karen Steinmayer, PhD

Eduardo Vianna, PhD

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
ABSTRACT

EXPLORING THE USES OF CULTURAL FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE AMONG ETHNIC MINORITY IMMIGRANT COLLEGE STUDENTS IN THEIR CONSTRUCTIONS OF LEARNING IDENTITIES WITHIN A COLLABORATIVE PHOTOVOICE PROJECT

By

Stacey Jennell Cooper

Chair: Anna Stetsenko, PhD

Today’s college classrooms are distinguished by an increase in ethnic minority and immigrant student populations, yet there is little reflection of such diversity in the curriculum and teacher preparation and practice. Ethnic minority immigrant students bring with them into learning spaces much valuable cultural knowledge. If validated, this knowledge can become an essential resource from which these students can draw in creating their learning identities and goals.

This study explored how a group of ethnic minority immigrant community college students created potential identities in relation to learning by drawing on their culturally and historically informed funds of knowledge, including values, beliefs, purposes and relationships— as resources in new learning spaces. Using a qualitative and participatory design, this study explored with a sample of seven local ethnic minority immigrant community college students, their perceptions of learning and their cultural funds of knowledge, including how they draw upon and leveraged these cultural funds as resources in developing potential learning identities. This study was guided by the primary research question: How do ethnic minority immigrant college students agentially leverage their funds of knowledge as they position themselves towards learning in college and in the construction of their learning identities? Photovoice
techniques were used to address this question and included the students gathering of digital photographs using smartphones, bi-weekly group discussions and one-and one interviews, which became the main sources of data collection.

The primary theoretical frameworks utilized are funds of knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005), learning identity (Stetsenko, 2004), and identity and agency in figured worlds (Holland, Lachiotte, Skinner & Cain, 1998). Findings from this study supported conclusions found in these literatures by emphasizing learning as a collaborative process. However, this study expanded on these literatures by highlighting the importance of relational and individual agency in the development of learning identities. In particular, the findings revealed that the creation of third space was afforded through the collaborative processes of Photovoice via storytelling, the development of mutual trust, shared competence, reflection, and the recognition and validation of particular ways of knowing (funds of knowledge). Within the third space the shifts in learning identities were possible as students through developing agency, transitioned from perceiving themselves as “non-knowers” towards redefining themselves as “knowledgeable” people and more “capable” learners.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Pearl Cooper… my inspiration… my greatest supporter and my cornerstone.

Here, I stand on shoulders of the women in my family, my mother, my aunts, my grandmothers, and great grandmothers, whose backs have bent for me, as a foundation, as a staircase, and a path. I now walk with their strength, with their hope and embraced in their pride. For their love and sacrifice has allowed me to be, to endure and will always serve as my guide.

I want to thank my father, Samuel Lewis, for his constant words of encouragement and for reminding me that “every road has its end” and “to take just one step at a time.” Even though there were times when I could not see the end and didn’t want to hear these words, yet they provided me with much comfort.

I would also like to thank my advisor Anna Stetsenko, who throughout this long journey has been steadfast in her guidance and support. I am also grateful for the continued support of Joe “the rock star” Glick, who listened to me over the years, and for this I am forever appreciative. I am also especially thankful for David Chapin, who I got to know through participating in the Dissertation Seminar group, but who is now someone I consider to be a friend. I am also grateful for my other committee members, Karen Steinmayer and Eduardo Vianna; without their feedback and support I could not have completed this work. I would also like extend thanks to Maria Jerskey, for giving me the chance to rethink who I am and could be as a writer, and Carol Korn-Burstyn for giving to opportunity become a published author.

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CHAPTER 1: NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Problem Statement

Today, the changing face of America is nowhere more visible than in college classrooms. As a controversial social and economic issue in the United States, how immigrants are educated has significant impact on the future of the U.S. labor force. Getting an education can open up a variety of possibilities for immigrants in terms of economics, social mobility, physical and mental health, and personal development. More important, access to educational opportunities, in particular those at the higher education level—has the potential to improve immigrants’ quality of life in America.

The diverse patterns of immigration in the last decade or so have produced differences in educational engagement and attainment between some of the fastest growing immigrant communities and their native born counterparts, resulting in an ever-increasing achievement gap. Colleges are faced with the challenge of educating a more diverse population and finding ways to close the gap in educational attainment among various ethnic groups (Chiswick, 2003). Some groups of scholars have argued that immigrant students are simply unprepared for college-level work. Others have targeted immigrant families as existing in a culture of poverty (Lewis, 1998) and therefore contain fundamental deficits. Within this perspective, immigrant families are depicted as lacking information, knowledge, and attitudes about the college-going process that constrict immigrant students’ academic performance, dispositions and academic engagement. Therefore, in an attempt to challenge these perspectives, several research initiatives have suggested that one approach to closing educational gaps lies in recognizing and curbing the cultural discontinuities between home and school knowledge, which may be central to improving
student engagement and educational attainment (Kiyama, 2008; Kumar, 2006; Lovelace & Wheeler, 2006; Osborn, Mc Ness, & Pollard, 2006).

**Background**

One of the most significant issues in current discussions on immigration and education reforms is the need to improve the educational attainment of immigrant students, at all levels. Despite a rise in immigration, several recent studies on educational achievement have indicated that immigrant students’ educational outcomes tend to be below those of nonimmigrants. Research has shown that although immigrants are attending college in higher numbers, many do not graduate (Schnepf, 2007; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2009).

Research has shown that higher education serves as a major pathway for adult immigrants to integrate into American society and is a central topic in the current debate on immigration reform. However, research on immigrant educational engagement and attainment has lagged behind that on the immigrant economic assimilation. These studies primarily focus on human capital transfer, human capital investment, and the labor market adjustment of immigrants. Researchers and educators alike have argued that examining the educational patterns of immigrants is essential to understanding both the economic and social incorporation into American society of this population. Though comprehensive examinations of immigrant college students’ college going experiences are few and far between (with the exception of Kim & Diaz, 2013), sociological and anthropological research has succeeded in delineating a confluence of factors that construct the landscape of learning for ethnic minority immigrant students, including the challenges faced in attaining a higher education (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2009). These factors influence instances of cultural discontinuity and cultural deficits
(Anderson, 2012; Malcolm & Zukas, 2001; Smit, 2012) as well as the display of resilience and persistence among many immigrants in facing these difficulties (Cardoso, 2010; Tinto, 1998).

The bulk of this research has focused on how well immigrant students fare at the K-12 level (Kao & Tienda, 2005; Rumbaut, 1994, 1995; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2007; Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2009; White & Kaufman, 1997). However, within these areas, little is known about how immigrant students manage at the post-secondary level, particularly with regard to how they enter into, engage with and progress through college.

Further research is necessary to investigate how immigrant students grapple with issues resulting from the acculturative process, which present challenges in accessing higher education, maintaining cultural values and, coping with racial and ethnic differences. Because recent immigrant students are likely to be members of ethnic minority groups, they are also likely to be subject to negative stereotypes and expectations ascribed by the rest of society (Garcia-Coll & Magnusson, 1997). Additionally, for many immigrant students these challenges are made more difficult if they occur simultaneously with learning a new language. Learning the culture of American higher education is not a simple task, even for native-born students and their families. Ethnic minority immigrant students may be at a disadvantage in understanding and navigating this culture, its practices and its role in their personal development and socioeconomic attainment because of a lack of access to human, cultural, and financial capital (Trueba, 2002), which is also correlated with limited language and literacy skills. Thus, the immigrant students’ relationships with community, place and family represent key resources in their everyday lives and provide useful means through which to understand how they navigate their college experience. Additionally, these resources may shed light on their modes engagement with and persistence within college.
Connecting Immigration, Culture and Learning

Recently, in the field of psychology there has been much interest in examining the connections between immigration, culture and learning (see Coll & Marks, 2012; Suarez-Orozco & Sattin, 2007). Researchers in this field have mainly concerned themselves with the question of what happens to individuals who have developed in one cultural context, when they attempt to live in a new cultural context (Berry, Phinney, & Sam, 2006).

Sociocultural theories offer much in the way of examining the immigrant experience because of their focus on cultural activities and practices as being central to individual identity development. In this way, immigration is understood as a developmental process that is deeply rooted in the cultural context, involving the individual in shared practice—including organized activities, values, norms and affordances. In this approach, an identity serves as a pivot between the social and the individual. In terms of learning, identity allows for the existence of variations among and between these two levels of functioning (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003), which may give rise to distinct learning styles among individuals or groups. However, when it comes to applying these concepts to the theme of immigration, few studies within the sociocultural perspective have attempted to do so (cf. Alfred, 2003).

Although sociocultural theories offer a framework for the conceptualization of multiple factors, processes, and levels of analysis, they have not included a pointed discussion of how immigration, learning and identity intersect in the everyday lives of immigrant students (for an exception, see Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejada, 1999). Despite this limitation, two perspectives within this field hold much potential in shedding light on immigrant student experiences. They are, “funds of knowledge” (Moll, 1992) and “learning identity” (Stetsenko, 2010). The funds of knowledge theory posits that immigrant households contain substantial
cultural and cognitive resources, which hold great potential for classroom instruction (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). However, this line of research presents some issues. For example, the concept of funds of knowledge is well-examined in the K-12 literature, yet there are very few examples using the funds of knowledge approach beyond K-12 classrooms, like in higher education, outreach programs and adult education (see Kiyama, 2010). A more in-depth discussion of the limitations of the funds of knowledge theory will be discussed in the theoretical framework section of this dissertation. This study will extend the funds of knowledge research into the subject area of college level immigrant students. Also, funds of knowledge research provide little information on the types of educational ideologies maintained in households, and how these ideologies can influence immigrant students’ college-going beliefs and behaviors (Kiyama, 2010), which is an additional area of concern for this study. Also, in line with traditional funds of knowledge research, this study will explore the ways in which to characterize students’ funds of knowledge and their subsequent use within learning settings.

The funds of knowledge line of research can be strengthened and expanded on with the goal of further revealing conditions that facilitate the integration of identity and learning, and the role that the agentic use of funds of knowledge plays in such integration. A considerable number of recent sociocultural studies have focused on the intersection of learning and identity (Gee, 2000-1; Wenger, 1998; Rogoff & Gutierrez, 2003; Nasir, 2009; Vagan, 2011; Stetsenko, 2004; Vianna & Stetsenko, 2011). These researchers have shown that learning involves the process of identity formation, primarily because it goes beyond the acquisition of skills and information and involves becoming a certain type of person (Gee, 2000)—that is, “a learner.” These studies underscore the importance of understanding how identities develop in relation to learning situations, and maintain a focus on what it means for students to learn, or at the very least how
they come to see themselves as learners.

The funds of knowledge approach can be connected to the notion of learning identity via the notions of history and transformation (concepts shared by both theories). In the cultural-historical activity theory (e.g., Stetsenko, 2004), identity is historical in origin and emerges from how one views oneself in the process of carrying out life projects and activities (cf. Black et al., 2010). In learning, students develop identities that actively draw upon their funds of knowledge as a cultural tool for positioning themselves in relation to learning practices. In turn, for funds of knowledge to be effective for learning, students’ themselves must identify, negotiate, activate, enhance, and invest these funds in order to benefit fully from them. As such, it is necessary to understand how immigrant students themselves leverage—that is, recognize and activate — these resources in the process of learning to become agents of their own learning.

In this way, funds of knowledge can move beyond being points of reference, towards being tangible resources that students can draw from in the process of collaboratively contributing to the practices of humanity while simultaneously transforming them (Stetsenko, 2008). Taking this approach, cultural knowledge is not merely passed on from generation to generation, but must be and is transformed by students in their everyday use (activation), thus creating links between everyday knowledge and formal or academic knowledge and knowing oneself. Taken in this way, there is no gap between changing one’s world, knowing it, and being (or becoming) oneself, with all three dimensions emerging and developing synergistically within and through collaborative transformative practice (Vianna & Stetsenko, 2011).

Building upon these sociocultural approaches, in which these processes are intrinsically linked, a core assumption in this study was that providing students with the support and cultural tools to make learning a meaningful project, opens a way to drawing together their cultural
knowledge as legitimate resources within the contexts of learning (Moll et al., 1992) directed towards their evolving identities and academic pursuits (Stetsenko, 2010). In other words, if academic learning is to appear relevant to ethnic minority immigrant students and if they are to build identities as learners, then creating connections between academic learning and immigrant experiences is important for their educational engagement and attainment. More specifically, to understand how students construct their learning identities requires a reconsideration of how immigrant students act agentically to draw upon their culturally and historically informed knowledge bases—including beliefs about, meanings of, and purposes for learning as they engage in new learning situations and practices, and as they construct new and ongoing learning goals and enact productive learning. In addition to their beliefs in their own capacity to master learning through sustained and thoughtful effort (Jackson, 2003), students need to come to see themselves as agentive learners or active *doers of learning*.

**Purpose of the Research**

The goal of this study was to investigate how students agentically leveraged their cultural funds of knowledge in constructing learning identities that is—how they see themselves as “learners.” More specifically, this study documented the everyday funds of knowledge among a group of ethnic minority immigrant community college students participated in a collaborative photovoice project and how these identities related to agency and the concept of the self as “a learner.” This project involved using digital photographs, group discussions and in-depth interviews with ethnic minority immigrant students to explore the various aspects of their everyday immigrant lives. Examining these socially constructed experiences allowed us (the group) to explore the incongruities between learning and identity in this population and it also shed light on the means by which to close these existing gaps. This study also maintained much
theoretical and practical significance; it suggested that the funds of knowledge theory could be strengthened by going beyond the household and by incorporating into funds of knowledge perspective the sociocultural notions of learning identity and agency. In terms of practical significance, this study was based on a real-world need to increase the academic engagement and educational attainment among ethnic minority immigrant college students.

Findings from this study offer much insight into how ethnic minority immigrant students used their funds of knowledge in constructing learning identities, including the challenges and incongruities they encounter in attempting to gain a college education, thus influencing practice in higher education and outreach programs. Therefore, practitioners can gain insights to understand the nuanced and intersectional nature of immigration, culture and ethnicity and its influence on student learning and development. More important, these contributions showed that the group dynamics provided a key space for the emergence of leverageable funds of knowledge, as it allowed students to reflect on, recognize and activate their funds of knowledge in agentically constructing their identities as learners. In addition, these findings also revealed that recognition and validation were key factors in allowing students to agentically activate and take ownership of their funds of knowledge within the group setting and take up learning identities as knowledgeable people.

Representation of Voice

As previously stated, the main method of inquiry used in this qualitative study is called Photovoice. I would like to take a moment to explain why I think this approach is relevant to my own educational experiences and how those experiences have shaped my research perspective.

First, if my life were depicted in a stream of photos, my experiences as a college student would have foreshadowed the type of research that I do. I am first-generation, Trinidadian-
American college student. I came to New York City to go to college—an opportunity that many in my family could never have envisioned, much less make real. My grandparents, who were immensely influential in my life, in particular my childhood, were working-class. My grandfather was a machinist and my grandmother a homemaker. The parents of eleven children, in a country where only one island scholarship was given per year to an exceptional student to attend a British University, college-bound ambitions were a distant dream, or a near impossibility. To them, every day was a day to work hard for whatever little was available. My parents, also working-class, worked in the oilfields of Trinidad for their entire adult lives.

It is evident to me now that positive ideations of education were always present in my household. I also realize that my family’s funds of knowledge influenced my own attitudes and educational expectations. Oftentimes, I reflect on the fact that the opportunity to go to college was available neither to my parents nor grandparents. I, like many of participants in my earlier research project on British West Indian immigrant students’ notions of learning, reiterate this same fact as part of our familial story. Like them, this concept is central to my own educational ideology and notions of striving and sacrifice. As my own mother would remind me during many a long-distance phone call, that I was here—in foreign place, facing many difficulties, for a purpose!

Second, I came to this project also because of my own experiences as an immigrant and student in New York City. Having come to the United States to further my education, I have faced several obstacles on the path to achieving my academic goals. For me, my immigrant identity is tightly bounded with my student identity, because I came here to “study.” As an immigrant one faces the inevitabilities of acculturation, and begins to question, how do I fit in

---

1 See page 80
here? How can I make something of myself here? What can I do here? Although I was determined to make something of myself here, like so many immigrant students with student visas, I could not apply for scholarships, work off-campus (legally that is), or get financial aid. As such, my legal status constricted the types of opportunities that were available to me.

Additionally, deeply embedded within acculturation is the idea that one should forget where one has come from and focus on where one is at, achieved by embracing a sort of cultural amnesia. For immigrants, there is much pressure to “forget that place,” and “act American,” because “who cares about your culture, are you even sure you have a culture.” Those who are critical of immigrants often assert that ethnic immigrants use our culture as a strategy to separate ourselves from other ethnic groups, implying that cultural maintenance is simply a means by which to get ahead of other stigmatized groups. Suffice it to say, acculturation is pressure to conform to the ways of the new culture, and forgetting one’s historical past is the quickest way to getting there. As an immigrant, I have always questioned the simplicity of this argument, mainly because I am unsure about how to go about forgetting my cultural past, especially since there are several aspects of “me” that do not allow for my smooth transition into American culture: mainly, race, ethnicity and class. Throughout my fifteen plus years of living in America, I have worked to maintain a balance between seemingly fragmented parts of me: the Trinidadian, the immigrant, the woman, the “African-American”. I do not fit perfectly into anyone one of these categories, because a lot of me lingers in an in-between space, sometimes fragmented, sometimes hybridized. However, what I do feel positive about is the idea that I came here with a purpose, a raison d’être—at least that is what my mother keeps reminding about on a weekly basis, and after all these years, I think she may be on to something.

---

2 All statements that have been made either to me directly or to participants in my “British West Indian Immigrant Students’ Notions of Learning” (2010) study.
Every time I visit my parents’ home, I bring them pictures of things and sights in New York City. We sit and talk about them and somehow the conversation always focuses on the dreams and hopes that they (my parents) had for my siblings, themselves and myself. We also go through our family albums and talk about my grandparents and what their lives were like. These moments are particularly special because they are rare occasions when I can learn the stories of my grandparents, who have long passed on. I learn about what values my family holds via these stories. At special times, I get to hear these stories from my extended family members, each of whom all have varied interpretations of how life used to be back then. I regret not recording these conversations and stories, but they do remain with me. These experiences have taught me the significance of providing people with an opportunity to share their family histories. By exploring the past, they can, as I have, learn volumes about what they bring with them as immigrants.

The Voices of Ethnic Minority Immigrant Students and Families

Why are immigrant students’ stories important? These stories give insight into the funds of knowledge, educational dispositions and immigrant experiences of ethnic minority and working-class immigrants, their families and even my family. Although the parents of many newcomer immigrants have never completed a formal college education, immigrants still hold many ideas about learning, including its purpose and meaning. In addition, all immigrant students have legitimate cultural knowledge, values and beliefs that are resources upon which they can capitalize within school-based learning.

Photovoice methods provide a means by which to attain detailed visual and oral descriptions of the context, settings and activities, as well as the individuals (and families) involved in varied activities that make up everyday lives of immigrant students. I have chosen to
use students’ own voice to provide these descriptions. The students contributed their stories via
digital photographs, a shared Facebook page, group discussions, individual interviews, journals
and drawings. The intention behind using these varied techniques was to elucidate, highlight and
validate the experiences of these immigrant students and their families—the ways that funds of
knowledge are present in their everyday experiences, and the way in which they make sense of
their college-going experiences.

I believe that using Photovoice methods gave the students in this study the opportunity to
reflect upon and share their often-overlooked stories, familial or otherwise. In this study, the
power of the Photovoice technique became possible through the students shared valuing of each
other’s stories. In the group setting, the students not only valued the opportunity to express
themselves, and relate to others, but they felt amongst the group where who they were and what
they brought to the group—was respected.

Research Questions

This study utilized a theoretical framework that linked the idea of funds of knowledge with a
sociocultural approach to identity and learning development. This approach was useful because
independently these perspectives do not fully address the nuanced nature of ethnic minority
immigrant students’ higher education experiences, nor do they speak to students’ development of
learning identities within and across learning contexts (household, community and school). The
primary research question that framed this study was: How do ethnic minority immigrant college
students agentically recognize and activate their funds of knowledge as they position themselves
towards learning in college, in constructing learning identities?

Three additional questions extended the primary question:
1. How do ethnic minority immigrant college students make sense of academic learning and the pursuit of higher education as they participate in a collaborative student group?

2. What experiences do ethnic minority immigrant college students perceive as barriers to and supports of their learning, engagement and achievement?

3. What kinds of funds of knowledge in relation to academic learning are present and utilized by ethnic minority immigrant college students?

Methodology

With the lens of this research centered upon elucidating ethnic minority immigrant students’ funds of knowledge and their recognition and activation of these funds in their construction of learning identities, this study utilized a qualitative research design to explore the complexities of the everyday experiences and meanings that ethnic minority immigrant college students bring to school from the contexts of home and community. The data for this study was obtained from several sources including via Photovoice techniques.

Photovoice involves asking participants to use photographs to document aspects of their lives and experiences. The photovoice process allows participants to become documentarians of their own communities. This process integrates photography with critical discussion to investigate emergent issues from the perspective of “resident experts—that is, the people living, working, playing and praying in a targeted context” (Freedman, Pitner, Powers, & Anderson, 2012, p. 4). In this study, participants were asked to utilize their smartphones (with camera and internet capability) to take digital photographs and short videos that depict their understanding of, beliefs about and the issues related to their lives as immigrant students, and by exploring the places within which these constructs take place. In taking these pictures, participants were guided by specific phototopics, primarily—“the school,” “the community” and “the home.”
These photo topics will also guide participants’ subsequent captioning of these digital photos and narrating of short videos. After taking their images participants uploaded them to a private Facebook page and shared with the group.

**Group Discussions**

Participants engaged with the researcher in 17 bi-weekly group sessions that each lasted for one hour, where students discussed their photographs and captioned depictions. These photographs were used to spark critical dialogue and reflections about the issues and interactions related to the particular places depicted within them. Using the SHOWeD method of inquiry (Wang, Morrel-Samuels, Hutchison, Bell, & Pestronk, 2004), participants were asked to share their opinions about their photographs. Participants were asked to answer the following questions about their photographs: What do you see here? What is really happening? How does this relate to our lives? Why does this problem or strength exist? What can we do about it?

**One-on-One Interviews**

In addition to weekly discussions, participants also took part in individual interviews. These interviews provided the researcher with an opportunity to explore in depth with participants those issues and themes raised in group discussions. Also in these interviews, participants elaborated on those photographs they choose to be most representative of themselves and their immigrant student experiences.

It should be noted that while this study brought together a group of students who are ethnic minority immigrants, it does not hold any assumptions about the existence of sameness among this group. Furthermore, this study philosophically stands in opposition to perpetuating some essentialized view of the “traditional student” or replicating the binaries of “good” or “bad” student. Instead, it takes an asset-based approach, which assumes that immigrant students bring
to the classroom unique cultural knowledge that influences their distinctive relationships with learning.

**Definitions of Key Terms**

*Immigrants* are defined by the Office of Immigration Statistics (OIS), a division of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security as, “foreign-born persons who (intend to) live permanently in the United States,” while nonimmigrants are “those foreign-born who reside in the United States temporarily.” Kim and Diaz’s (2013) model expands the definition of immigrant to include three core dimensions: 1) nativity (citizenship at birth), 2) legal residence, and 3) generational status (place of birth).

*Native-born* is a term used to describe anyone who was a U.S. citizen at birth, including persons born in the United States, Puerto-Rico, and the U.S. Island Area (example, Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, or the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands), or abroad of a U.S. citizen parent or parents (Gryn & Larsen, 2010).

From a sociological perspective, ethnic minorities belong to a group that has less power than the dominant group, has less esteem and prestige, and is often the target of discrimination. *Ethnic minority immigrant* refers here to immigrants who occupy non-dominant positions in U.S. society, in particular in higher education; for example, Black immigrants, Latino immigrants and women immigrants. It must be noted that the sociological meaning of minority does not refer to the numerical size of a group, nor to any specific ethnicity, race, gender or other real or imaged factors as these factors are relative to a specific society. In this study, the term “ethnic minority immigrants” refers to Black and Latino immigrants.

*Higher Education* is education beyond the high school level, in particular college or university. In this study, it refers to community college.
*Funds of knowledge* is a construct that was originally coined by Wolf in 1966, the definition of funds of knowledge used here follows that of the Arizona researchers (Moll et al., 1992; Moll & Greenberg, 1990; Tapia, 1991; Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 1992). It refers to those historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge, including information, skills and strategies, which underlie household and individual functioning, development, and well-being. In this study, funds of knowledge also refer to those knowledges and skills that relate to learning, and which can be legitimized within academic learning practices.

*Learning Identity* refers to how one comes to see oneself as a learner. Here it also includes how one’s immigrant experiences and available funds of knowledge come to influence how individuals see themselves as learners (Gee, 2000).

), and how they position themselves in relation to learning (Davies & Harre, 1990; Stetsenko, 2004).
CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Landscape of Learning in a New Land

Current U.S. immigration rates are rivaling those that existed at the turn of the 20th century (Hirschman, 2005; U.S. Census Bureau, 2009; Simms, 2012). Recent estimates have indicated that foreign-born immigrants\(^3\) make up 12.9 percent of the total U.S. population. Immigrant arrival numbers have doubled within the 2000-2010 decade, increasing from 20 million to over 40 million during this period (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Including the children of immigrants\(^4\), this number increases to one quarter of the U.S. population (Hirschman, 2005), making this group the fastest growing immigrant population (Portes & Fernandez-Kelly, 2008). As of 2009, there were about 16.9 million children age 17 and under with at least one immigrant parent. They account for 23.8 percent of the 70.9 million children age 17 and under in the United States. Of this population, 14.6 million were second-generation; the remaining 2.3 million were born outside the United States to foreign-born parents (Batalova & Terrazas, 2010).

Additionally, these reports have also estimated that 85 percent of incoming immigrants are incorporated as racial minorities in the United States (Shields & Behrman, 2004). Major demographic changes have coincided with the increase in the immigrant population and it is clear that the future of the United States depends largely on how well this group succeeds in becoming an integral part of society.

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\(^3\) Drawing from Simms (2012) and Rumbaut (1997c), this paper uses the following definition of immigrant status. A first-generation immigrant is a person born outside the United States to foreign-born parents and who subsequently moved to the United States.

\(^4\) The immigration literature describes the children of immigrants as falling into several categories. Including, the 1.25 generation includes children who migrated to the United States during adolescence; generation 1.5 include those children who migrated at age 6 or later (but prior to adolescence); and the 1.75 generation includes those who came to the United States prior to age 6. A second-generation immigrant was a person born in the United States and whose mother or father is a first-generation immigrant.
The current wave of immigration vastly differs from that of the early 20th century, primarily because today’s immigrants come from predominantly developing nations and represent myriad racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Between the 1820s and the 1880s immigrants were mostly of German, Irish, English, and Dutch descent (see Ernst, 1994; Ward, 1989). However, 1965 marked a monumental change in immigrant policy with the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act. This revolutionary policy brought an end to discriminatory national quotas, and transformed the demographic makeup of the immigrant population. The implementation of this act was followed by an increase of immigrants from diverse ethnic, cultural and national backgrounds. Post 1965 immigrants typically come from developing nations, primarily from Asia, Latin America, Africa and the Caribbean. As of 2010, America has admitted over 40 million new immigrants, who constitute about one tenth (12.9 percent) of the American population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Additionally, early 20th century immigration differs from that of post-1965 immigration, because of an unprecedented drive towards “Americanization” which involved the adaptation of assimilatory practices by new immigrants that centered upon their shedding of cultural ties.

Additionally, recent immigrants engage in myriad cultural maintenance practices, including maintaining their languages, creating cultural organizations, living in ethnic enclaves, traveling back to their home countries and often practice remigration. Furthermore, immigrants from ethnic minority backgrounds are also subject to the American historical legacies of racial and ethnic stigmatization. It is the intersection of these factors that raises questions as to how this new wave of immigrants adjusts to life in America (Alba & Nee, 1997).

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5 This number includes both legal and illegal immigrants. Source http://cis.org/2000-2010-record-setting-decade-of-immigration
In terms of educational achievement—recent immigrants’ educational levels have fallen behind those of their native born counterparts, resulting in lowered average wages among immigrants (Rector, 2006). In turn, many recent immigrants increasingly occupy the lower end of the U.S. socioeconomic spectrum and their populations are more concentrated in large metropolitan areas. According to the 2010 Census Bureau’s American Community Survey, the U.S. immigrant population was estimated at 40 million, with 1.5 million new immigrants arriving every year (Passel & Cohn, 2012). In these terms, approximately one of every eight United States resident is foreign born. Additionally, between 2005 and 2050, the U.S. population is projected to increase by 48 percent, and the immigrant population is projected to account for 82 percent of this growth. More specifically, Hispanics are expected to make up 29 percent of that total U.S. population by 2050, compared to 14 percent in 2005 (Passel and Cohen, 2006; Kim & Diaz, 2013).

In terms of demographics, the 2010 census data showed that the largest share of the foreign-born population came from Latin American, comprising 54.2 percent of the immigrant population; Asia follows with 27 percent, then Europe with 12 percent. More specifically, Mexican immigrants account for 29.4 percent or 11.7 million of the total foreign-born population followed by China (5 percent), with India and the Philippines each representing 4 percent of the immigrant population (Batalova & Lee, 2012). Additionally, Vietnam, El Salvador, Cuba, and Korea comprised about 2 percent of the immigrant population each. Broken down by Latin American regions, Mexican immigrants comprised 56 percent, followed by the Caribbean (17.8 percent), Central American (14.6 percent), and South Americans immigrants with 11.6 percent (Kim & Diaz, 2013).
**Immigrants and Higher Education**

For immigrants, realizing the American dream means attaining better lives for themselves and for their families. However, in today’s America, realizing these goals is almost impossible without at least some college education. As the United States and the world in general become more economically competitive, immigrant participation and success in higher education become more imperative. That being said, considering how immigrants can become fuller and more rounded human beings should also be an integral part of the American Dream, and understanding how attaining an education fits into that dream should be the focus of any college program.

Despite a rise in immigration, several recent studies on educational achievement have indicated that immigrant students’ educational outcomes tend to be below those of nonimmigrants (Schnepf, 2007; Suárez-Orozco & Sattin, 2007). Although there is much variability in achievement across immigrant groups, a report by the Institute for Higher Education Policy (2007) states that in general, immigrant students have lower levels of achievement.

Generally, the proportion of immigrants with advanced degrees is around 10.1 percent and those with a high school degree or less is about 62.5 percent; these rates have primarily remained the same since 1970. However, the percentage of immigrants with a bachelor’s degree has increased for 12.7 percent before 1970 to 22.2 percent in 2005 (Kim & Diaz, 2013). In a study of immigrant college student populations, using the National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen (NLSF), Massey (2007) reports that the number of immigrants on college campuses is typically representative of the changing demographic composition of their respective populations.

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6 For this study, immigrant refers to first- and second-generation immigrants, who may or may not have legal status.
7 In this paper, higher education is used interchangeably with post-secondary education and college education.
in America. Although the presence of second-generation Latinos and Asians on college campuses to a large extent reflects the demographic numbers in their populations, in the case of Black immigrants their numbers were overrepresented relative to their share in the larger African American population. For example, in 1999, 13 percent of all African Americans between the ages of 18 and 19 were either first- or second- generation immigrants. Additionally, data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen (NLSF) indicates that among Black freshmen entering 28 selective colleges and universities that same year, 27 percent were first- or second-generation immigrants. Also, Asian (97 percent) and Latino (73 percent) students were heavily represented compared to their respective shares among freshmen college students in 1999, which closely matched their proportions in the population of 18–19-year-old Asians and Latinos, which stood at 91 percent and 66 percent, respectively, in the March 1999 CPS (Massey, 2007). In 2008, the Institute for Higher Education Policy reported that 12 percent if the undergraduate students, nationally, were immigrants. Of this group 13 percent were Hispanic and 14 percent were Black.

An overview of the literature on immigrant post-secondary education attainment also suggests that adult immigrants who are naturalized citizens tend to have higher rates of completing bachelor’s degrees or higher. In contrast, non-citizen immigrants tend to have lower levels of academic achievement—typically having no more than a high school education. Educational attainment also varies by region of origin; for example, immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean tend to have the least education. Three-quarters of immigrants from this region have never attended college and nearly half have not graduated high school.

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8 Massey (2007) reports that the number of black immigrants has more than doubled over the past decade, and that Afro-Caribbeans (persons from non-Spanish-speaking islands in the West Indies, such as Jamaica and Trinidad) now comprise around 70 percent of a foreign-born black population of 2.1 million.
9 According to the March 1999 Current Population Survey (CPS)
However, immigrants from Africa and Asia are the best-educated immigrant groups; around half of these immigrants hold bachelor’s degrees or higher (Kim & Diaz, 2013).

Formidable Barriers to Education: Difficulties Encountered by Immigrant Students in Accessing Higher Education

Despite varying statistics, it is a reality that many college students, particularly those who are first- and second-generation immigrants, are underperforming in school. It must be noted that in addition to the effects of generational differences on educational attainment, educational attainment also varies across varied immigrant subgroups. This is evidenced by low grades, poor attendance and failure to graduate. Along with the threat of cultural deficit thinking, immigrant students encounter several barriers in gaining access to and succeeding in higher education. Issues of academic achievement are often bounded up with other social issues like race, ethnicity, language, low-income households, inefficient school settings, and limited access to appropriate educational resources. The American Council on Education (2011) reports that adolescent and adult Hispanic immigrants are unlikely to be served by traditional educational programs and services because of unique educational barriers they face. Although the data below refers to primarily to Hispanic immigrants—currently the largest growing immigrant population, it is not surprising that other ethnic minority immigrant groups like Black immigrants share many of the same issues. The following barriers to higher education for immigrants have been highlighted.

Age at immigration. Erisman and Looney (2007) suggest that immigrants who come to the United States between the ages of thirteen and nineteen years tend to have the lowest levels of college enrollment and educational attainment. Immigrants from Latin America tend to be teenagers and young adults, whereas Asian immigrants tend to be older adults. This coincides
with the latter group arriving in America with advanced degrees, unlike the former. It also suggests that these groups may be more prepared to attain higher paying jobs or pursue other advanced degrees. However, immigrants who receive all or most of their education in American schools perform comparably with those born in the United States. But, immigrant youth of Mexican origin who arrived later in their lives are four times as likely to drop out of school as those who arrived early in childhood.

**Generational status.** Research on generational status also reports many mixed results with respect to immigrant educational achievement. Several researchers have found that the longer second-generation immigrants live in the United States the worse they fare academically, as is evidenced by the decline of high school grade point averages among this group. This research also indicates that first-generation students are more likely to drop out of high school (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Coll & Marks, 2006). The Pew Hispanic Center (2011) also reports that up to 30 percent of first-generation immigrants have not completed a high school education, compared to only 11.5 percent of second generation of immigrant students.

In terms of college completion, recent studies have shown that college completion declines from second- to third- generation students; for example, only 19.5 percent of third generation immigrants have completed a bachelor’s degree, compared to 21.3 percent of second-generation immigrants (Kim & Diaz, 2013). In a study of college attendance, Rong and Brown (2001) compared the years of completion of Europeans, African, and Afro-Caribbean students. They found that educational attainment, generational status and years of schooling were related. They also found that educational attainment for first-generation immigrant students was higher than that of second- and third-generation, particularly among Europeans and Afro-Caribbeans; however, this was not the case for Africans. The U.S. Census Bureau (2012) also reported that by
2010, 55 percent of first-time and first-generation immigrant undergraduates were Asian, 21 percent were Hispanic and 10 percent were Black immigrants. However, the report also indicated that the largest proportion of Hispanic undergraduates was second-generation immigrants (45 percent), while 38 percent were Asian and only 7 percent were Black. Reporting on Black immigrant college-going activities using 2009 Current Population Survey (CPS) data, Baum and Flores (2011) found that 30 percent of first-generation Black immigrants received a college degree or higher, compared to 42 percent of second-generation students, and 18 percent of third or higher generations (cf. Kim & Diaz, 2013).

In contrast, Glick and White (2003) examined the effects of generation and duration of residency on students’ performance on standardized tests over a two-year period using two nationally representative cohorts for the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) and the High School and Beyond (HSB). In their analyses, generational status did not operate in a consistent manner for both age cohorts (1980 vs. 1990 school attendance) in affecting differences in standardized test performance between cohorts. However, socioeconomic status, ethnicity and grade point average did have some impact on students’ performance on these standardized tests. These results imply that first- and second-generation youths are not in the same position relative to their third-generation counterparts; instead the first two generations face different modes of reception in and incorporation into mainstream United States culture. Additionally, the results suggest that patterns of academic performance differ by immigrant background. Taken together, the results help us understand the relative influence of several factors on educational starting point and trajectory. The performance trajectories of the students in both cohorts were consistently influenced by SES, ethnicity, and age and family structure rather than by generational status itself.
Schooling in country of origin. Immigrants who had schooling problems in their native country are likely either to never enroll or to drop out of school after arrival. Among Hispanic young adults aged 18 to 24 who do not hold a high school credential, 46 percent have never attended a school since arriving in the United States. The likelihood of not being in school while in the United States is shaped by schooling history prior to immigration.

Language barriers. Data suggest that immigrants are less likely to have the language and financial literacy skills to navigate through the complex college application and financial aid application process (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2008). Among Hispanic immigrant households, only 4 percent use English as the primary at-home language, compared with 39 percent for U.S.-born Hispanics. Seven of every 10 Hispanic immigrant adults who have less than a high school education do not speak English well, if at all. Immigrants are less likely to know about available financial aid resources and how to apply.

Pressing economic needs. High labor participation rates are reported among Hispanic immigrants and employment is concentrated in low-skill, low-wage jobs, which make it more difficult for them to bear the high costs associated with pursuing further education, particularly in traditional settings. Research also shows that many college-bound immigrant students are dependent on their parents for financial support, and they are most likely to belong to families with the low socioeconomic status (Erisman & Looney, 2007).

Legal status. All aforementioned barriers can be made more challenging for unauthorized immigrants, placing them at a particular disadvantage. Unauthorized immigrants have lower education levels than legal immigrants and are more likely to work full time in low-skill, low-paying jobs than legal immigrants. As of 2008, about 12 million people in the United States were estimated to be without legal status, making up about 30 percent of the immigrant
population. In addition, the affordability of higher education is directly related to immigrant students’ legal status. As the cost of education increases, paying for college becomes more difficult. If immigrant families have both low income and are without legal status, then going to college may be improbable, the reason being that low socioeconomic status is positively correlated with limited educational attainment. The confluence of the aforementioned factors plays a major role in determining the nature of college-going practices among immigrant students, primarily affecting their enrollment, preparedness, attendance, financial aid, engagement and academic performance (Kim & Diaz, 2013).

Suarez-Orozco, Gaytan, Bang, Pakes, Connor and Rhodes (2010) posit that new immigrant students face more difficulties than native-born students, which present them with unique challenges in getting an education. These researchers report that new immigrants face higher levels of poverty; typically settle in neighborhoods with under-resourced schools; find themselves in segregated schools with large proportions of racial and ethnic minorities and; may attend linguistically isolated schools. Furthermore, many immigrant students challenged the s associated with acquiring a new language, which often prevents them from participating in mainstream classrooms, limits their exposure to relevant cultural information, and hinders their sustained engagement in classrooms (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2010). Additionally, many immigrant students experience educational environments that do not meet their developmental needs. For example, because immigrant students often experience disrupted educational experiences, one by-product of this can be limited English language proficiency causing major delays in the academic progress. Additionally, this issue can lead students to take remedial coursework and seek out assistance both in and out of the classroom. However, in under-funded and segregated school systems, this kind of assistance may be lacking on the part of faculty and staff.
Additionally, immigrant parents may not have the linguistic or educational know-how required to assist their children in navigating the complicated and unfamiliar educational system they encounter in the United States; thus, constricting their academic trajectories, which presents a “formidable barrier” to their adjustment to a new land (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2010, p. 500).

Moreover, immigrant students face many pressures to conform to the rules, attitudes and behaviors of the school environment. However, they also have to deal with the obligations of their families and communities. Research suggests that for some immigrant groups, familial obligations may inhibit student adjustment primarily because they can stand in conflict to those found in the school environment (Harklau, 1998). One area of adjustment that seems to be affected by the disparity between home and school obligations is the student’s sense of belonging. Studies have shown that immigrant college students tend to report lower levels of sense of belonging and satisfaction compared to their native peers. Research also suggests that if immigrant students are presented with welcoming and nurturing learning environments that are cognizant of their individual backgrounds and cultural differences, their college adjustment is potentially less stressful (Kim & Diaz, 2013; Stebelton & Kuzhabekova, 2010).

These issues often further the educational differentials experienced by immigrant students and result in the creation of deficits, academic or otherwise. Studies have shown that immigrant students, like other ethnic minorities, often encounter low teacher expectations, are called on less often in class, receive less positive feedback from teachers, and are less likely to receive direct instruction and interaction with teachers, and so on (Entwisle & Alexander, 1998; Rist, 2000). This differential treatment has clear implications for student motivations and behavior in the classroom thus affecting their overall academic achievement. Although extensive immigrant education research supports the existence of educational differentials, this literature has
predominantly examined the school experiences of primary and high school students, thus leaving the population of adult learners open to speculation.

**Social Reproduction and Schools**

Schools are settings in which immigrant students are introduced to the cultural values of the receiving society. Schools are invaluable facets of the acculturation process—both for the host society and the newcomer immigrant students. Schools are simultaneously positioned between the local and national levels as well as between the family and individual levels. As a result, the academic trajectories of immigrant students are determined not only by their individual efforts but also by the social and education contexts within which they participate (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). In school, students experience various constraints and affordances (Nasir, 2004), which shape students’ access to certain teachings tools and credentials (Levinson & Holland, 1996). Although schools provide certain freedoms and opportunities to students, they also ironically bind those opportunities within dominant systems of class, gender and racial inequality, among other structures. As a result, schools are settings where many tensions and asymmetrical relations may arise. To immigrant students, these discordant relations can also give rise to disparities between home and host cultural values, therefore resulting in a type of “cultural” gap (Lee & Sheared, 2002).

Bourdieu (1977), in writing about schools in French society, reveals that embedded within them are power differentials. He suggests that schools form a cultural habitus that reproduces certain cultural values and competences, which foster the replication of particular

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10 Bourdieu (1977) describes three types of capital, i.e., symbolic, cultural and economic which form the basis of privilege and power. These three forms represent different means by which individuals can attain social mobility. However, he states that these forms are stratified and often result in power differentials between dominant and minority groups. He believes that schools are major sites for this cultural transmission and inculcation of these hierarchical social disparities.
social inequities, unequal social standings and antagonistic social encounters by validating and
distributing particular valued symbolic and cultural capital, therefore allowing dominant groups
to continue to have social and economic advantage over other groups (Levinson & Holland,
1996). Schools also reproduce values that carry symbolic, cultural and economic capital; these
structures are reproduced within the school system and carry with them rules for participation.
Resulting in modes of stratification through a combination of constraints and affordances, these
structures produce certain patterns of cultural competency and capital that lead students to
develop a “sense of their social limits” (Levinson & Holland, 1996). Sociologists argue that
achievement and underachievement are both products of a society that differentially structure
access to resources (see Freire, 1993; Giroux & Simon, 1989); they also argue that issues of
underachievement can only be addressed by implementing significant changes in societal and
school organization (Nasir, 2006). For example, Bowles and Gintis (1977) identified that upper
and middle-class schools prepared students differentially to take their place in society. Namely,
upper middle-class schools stressed autonomy, self-expression, and leadership, while lower class
schools fostered the following of orders. These results support the argument that schools do
indeed maintain social class relations and ratify existing power differentials. McDermott and
Varenne (1995) go so far as to say that failure is not something that students attain, but is instead
something that schools and cultures achieve in a grade-based system. In other words, it is the
confluence of several social positions that comes to locate minority students in marginal
communities and which creates a multiplicity of obstacles within and outside situations of
learning.

Cultural Deficits
As newcomers to America, immigrants contend with several issues that shape their newcomer immigrant status. Facing downward shifts in economic, social and racial positions in their transition from one country to another, immigrants often find themselves in social positions different from those they had maintained in their countries of birth. This downward progression is often tied up with underachievement at all educational levels. In attempting to gain access to higher education opportunities, many immigrants confront the challenges presented by the existing discourses of cultural deficits, which can lead to stereotypical assumptions about immigrant students. The cultural deficits approach conceptualizes immigrants, in particular those of ethnic minority backgrounds, as culturally deprived and lacking in the cultural models and knowledge appropriate for school success (Moll, 1995; Erickson, 1996). In other words, these students lack “cultural capital” (Bourdieu, 1997). This model also maintains that immigrant households are socioeconomic disadvantaged and do not value education in the same way as the dominant culture.

Such a model of cultural deficit attributes immigrants’ lack of educational success to characteristics rooted in their cultures and communities. This approach does so by ignoring the influences of oppression and stigmatization that exist within these cultures and communities. In this model, the culture of underachievement rests squarely on the shoulders of immigrant students, their families and their communities. In turn, the school plays a minimal role in affecting students’ academic performance, if any at all. Related to the idea of cultural deficits, many researchers argue that there is a discrepancy between ethnic minority students’ actual knowledge and capabilities (which stem from outside of school experiences) and the knowledge that is valued in the mainstream school setting that negatively affect students’ school experiences.
(Civil, 1994). Lisa Delpit (2006) describes this incongruity in her work with African American and Native Alaskan students and teachers.

Delpit’s (2006) work suggests that in classrooms, ethnic minorities, in particular, African-American\textsuperscript{11} students can be more at a disadvantage than their white counterparts in learning situations where teachers define literacy as verbal fluency. It follows that students become sidelined from gaining access to certain cultural capital and are mired in a system that distributes advantages on the basis of arbitrary cultural practices. However, for this kind of disadvantage to be examined, it must be placed in the context of values. It is easy to suppose that achievement is relative; however, the results of non-achievement are quite real. In fact, students’ future lives depend on their academic achievement, although it may not rest on reproducing a single-sided version of mainstream knowledge based on standardized tests. Instead, acknowledging these differentials means recognizing the advantages that white middle-class and upper-class students have because of the strong correlation of race and social class with both school achievement and future economic success. As such, if achievement is relative, then there is no need to provide opportunities for marginalized students to have access to better opportunities. However, schooling and achievement are value-laden and as such, should be examined in view of structural inequalities within which they occur. This includes being critical of the myriad difficulties that marginalized students (including immigrant students) and their families face in the school system.

Murrell (2002) argues that traditional explanations for the achievement gap are centered on why differential performance exists and on closing the gap. He argues that those arguments that misconstrue the historical embeddedness of educational inequities, for example, low student

\textsuperscript{11} The same can be said of ethnic minority immigrants who get incorporated into the ethnic category of African-American or Black.
funding, disparity and quality of teachers and unequal access to educational capital——may in fact further perpetuate the existence of this academic gap rather than eliminate it. This is primarily because such accounts are obscuring the historically rooted disparities embedded within the practices, policies, and existing politics of American education system. Along these lines, Murrell argues that the focus should be shifted from the achievement gap onto the interpretation of achievement for African-American learners\(^\text{12}\). He specifies that in order to do so, we must take a deeper look at learning, which must include a critical examination of the context of schooling and the aspects of identity central to student success (inclusive of race and ethnicity).

Murrell (2002) contends that even if contextual factors like teacher quality and access to educational resources are removed from the equation, race plays an important role in determining the academic potential of ethnic minority immigrant students (see Ogbu, 2003; Steele, 1997). He goes so far as to say that racism in America compromises the developmental integrity of the social and cultural contexts of school life necessary to ensure students’ personal and scholastic development. This makes ethnic minority immigrant learners particularly vulnerable to the adverse impacts of the ways in which race affects schooling practices and their academic socialization.

Furthermore, Delpit (2006) contends that teachers can reinforce students’ ability to subvert existing power relations by promoting opportunities for critical examinations of these power differentials, through shifting the focus away from dominant language and communication styles and providing tools for success without disparaging students’ home cultures. Martin (2000) also argues that individual agency is key to understanding the mathematical achievement

\(^{12}\) This view can be extended to include ethnic minority immigrants as well.
of African-American students, a point that can be extended to the ethnic minority immigrant students. For example, he argues that while African-American students are embedded within a social history and context of poverty, individual agency can help to mediate instances of oppression. In addition, research supports that family and family support play integral roles in fostering both relational and individual student agency.

In light of the ideas about the connections between race and education posited by Murrell (1994) and Delpit (2006), there seems to be much left unaddressed about the cultural deficit implications related to educational access for ethnic minority immigrants. More specifically, how do these troublesome implications play out for ethnic minority immigrant students in higher learning environments? Furthermore, given that ethnic minority immigrant students are double-burdened by the historically embedded inequalities of race/ethnicity and migration, which are wrapped up with educational, economic, social and political limitations, the question remains as to how these students can foster academic identities at the nexus of these troubling contexts.

Positive Orientations and Aspirations towards Education: Family, Peers and Obligations

Despite these formidable challenges, several studies report that immigrant students show positive dispositions towards education. Theorists subscribing to the optimism theory of immigration (Kao & Tienda, 1995) state that recent immigrants may have greater faith in the use of education to achieve upward mobility than their counterparts in the later generations (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991). In comparison to their native born counterparts, immigrant students typically have higher educational aspirations and stronger beliefs in the importance and usefulness of education (Fuligni, Tseng, & Lam, 1999).

Fuligni (1997) highlighted that regardless of socioeconomic background, immigrant students’ educational attitudes positively correlated with higher levels of familial and peer
support. In this study, first-generation students reported higher levels of schooling and education success, in addition to reporting that they expended substantially more time and effort on academic endeavors than third-generation students. However, St. Hilaire (2002), who examined the professed values towards and aspirations about formal education beyond junior and high school among 8th and 9th grade children of Mexican immigrants, found that length of residency is negatively correlated with educational aspirations. Still, fluent bilingualism in Spanish and English is positively associated with educational aspirations and expectations (beyond the 9th grade). The author concludes that while the influence of segmented assimilation on post-secondary aspirations appears to be inconclusive, a belief in education as a superior means of socioeconomic advancement, is a universally held value among immigrant students.

**Immigrant Students’ Coping Strategies**

Studies show that relational support—the help immigrants get from relationships with relatives and friends—influences students’ academic orientation and performance (e.g., see Fuligni, 1997). By making connections with others, immigrant students develop what is termed relational engagement, which is the extent to which they feel connected to teachers, peers and others in their school. Immigrant students who forge meaningful and positive relationships have a higher likelihood of adapting to school life. Moreover, building these kinds of relationships can provide students with a sense of belonging, with emotional support, opportunities for tangible assistance, information, guidance, role modeling and positive feedback (Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2009). Additionally, literature on relational engagement suggests that maintaining school relationships fosters socially competent behaviors, academic engagement, and even academic success. Newcomer and second-generation immigrant students’ adjustment to school and subsequent academic success is related to a range of factors that surround family,
school and the individual (Suarez-Orozco et. al, 2009; Han, 2008), which reiterates the importance of relational support in immigrant-origin students’ lives. In the collected student narratives, students described several instances of teacher and peer support, school environment. It was evident that peers, teachers and the school environment (resources, clubs, activities and projects) took a leading role in students’ academic lives.

Although this literature suggests that family serves as the most important force in immigrant students’ learning and development, peers and friends also play a significant role in their acclimation to their immigrant and school life (Han, 2008). They provide a sense of belonging and acceptance, in addition to homework help, language skills, language translation and school orientation. More important, peers and friends can help immigrant-origin students with feeling less lonely. Few studies have investigated the role that parental and peer involvement plays in post-secondary students’ college adjustment and performance. Relational support in school can also come from teachers, who act as proprietors of valuable cultural requirements (educational and otherwise). Han (2008) identified that as facilitators teachers often introduce newcomer students to new and culturally valuable knowledge, skills, opportunities and resources and information that may not be understood or known by immigrant parents.
CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter begins with a review of several bodies of literature that undergirds the theoretical framework of the study. The complexities that underlie the everyday educational experiences of immigrant students play a major role in determining their academic identities. Included in this overview are the relevant theories of funds of knowledge, cultural capital, the interconnectedness of learning and identity and culturally relevant pedagogy. Particular attention is paid to the works of Luis Moll and his colleagues in Arizona. The focus of this research (e.g., Moll et al. 1990, 1992) represents a shift in pedagogical practices towards recognizing that working-class immigrant households do have valuable resources. They suggest that this approach can provide a powerful counterargument to the deficit lens through which many culturally diverse students are viewed.

Culture and Education

The interesting idea behind culture is that all people have culture. However, the shortcomings of this broad statement is that not all people have culture in the same way, that is, people do hold and enact cultural values and behaviors that support their unique background, experiences and opportunities, inclusive of ethnicity, class, gender and so on. Also, cultural values, beliefs and “ways of knowing” are prone to being context-specific, value-laden, and legitimized in particular circumstances, such as within academic learning contexts, resulting in limited access to certain opportunities and circumstances for some groups of people. As such, the theory of culture is often lacking in its understanding of cultural diversity as a legitimate source of knowledge. Too often, learning practices and environments are too narrowly conceived, seen as ahistorical and disconnected from people’s everyday lives. Taking an expansive view of learning and development requires considering that the individuals develop expertise within and
across everyday practices. For students, this would include not only what they learn in formal schooling but also what they learn in participating in a range of practices outside of school (Gutierrez, 2008).

In cultural anthropology and sociocultural theory, to learn means to acquire the culture of learning (Holland et al., 1998). In other words, learning requires the student to appropriate the cultural values that exist in the particular context of learning. However, to acquire the culture of learning at the college level, students have to travel from their everyday life-worlds to the world of higher education found in their classrooms. For students of immigrant backgrounds, their everyday life-worlds traverse across neighborhoods, countries, languages and values. It is possible that the knowledge and values found within school environments are not always in line with those found outside of the school and vice versa. Jegede and Aikenhead (1999) contend that this apparent disconnect can place the students in danger of having their out-of-school knowledge delegitimized in the school context and replaced by acceptable ways of knowing. This can have a significant effect on student academic engagement and achievement. Ogbu (1992) states that school learning and performance are influenced by complex social, economic, historical, and cultural factors. As such, this disconnect in the classroom may lead to a loss of meaningful learning in higher education, and possibly a devaluing of knowledge stemming from outside of the classroom.

The goal is to have education connect with everyday knowledge without a sense of superiority of one over the other. For immigrant students, the border crossing into higher education learning can be a rough process, particularly when higher education is at odds with students’ everyday life experiences. Mismatched educational experiences tend to disrupt the students worldview by trying to force them to abandon or marginalize their cultural backgrounds
and experiences (Jegede & Aikenhead, 1999).

In order to understand ethnic minority immigrant students’ crossings into higher education, one has to question whether their cultural backgrounds, knowledge, values and beliefs are valued in college learning situations. In other words, it is important to understand learning contexts outside of the school environment, such as students’ homes and communities, and the role they play in shaping students’ college-going experiences. The conceptual tool that best supports this notion is provided by the approach of funds of knowledge. This theory has been framed from an anthropological perspective (see Velez-Ibanez, 1988) and also from an educational perspective (e.g. Gonzalez, Moll, Floyd- Tenery, Rivera, Rendon, Gonzales, & Amanti, 1995) and as such is useful for guiding the approach taken under in this current study.

**Funds of Knowledge**

Researchers in the social sciences have long held that home knowledge practices and school practices are connected, and they have argued that considering this connection may lead to changes in how students engage with school. Much of this advocacy has come out of a group of researchers from the University of Arizona, who conducted several anthropological research projects exploring the links between the home and school worlds of Mexican working-class immigrant children and families. Calling for a re-evaluation of the existing social interaction and exchange between teachers and immigrant households (Civil, 1994; Gonzalez, 1995; Gonzalez et al., 1995; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Moll & Greenberg, 1992; Moll, 1992; Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 1992), these researchers asserted that classroom activities often fail to take into consideration and reflect the cultural lives, knowledge and resources of working-class immigrant children, resulting in the creation of curriculum that is disconnected from the social worlds of these children. The studies conducted by the Arizona group aimed at revealing these
disconnects along with the creation of novel mediated ways through which to connect home knowledge with classroom knowledge. In order to do so, in these studies, teachers became engaged as researchers, to visit and analyze the homes of their students, to interact with these families and learn about their everyday lives, activities, practices and knowledge.

Working-class immigrant households were believed to contain funds of knowledge (Wolf, 1966), which are described as those historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge, including information, skills and strategies that underlie household and individual functioning and development, and well-being (Moll et al., 1992; Moll & Greenberg, 1990; Tapia, 1991; Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 1992). These types of knowledge are considered central to the everyday activities of immigrant children and their families. In terms of learning, these funds may incorporate information, ways of thinking and learning, and approaches to learning and practice skills (Hedges, Cullen, & Jordan, 2011). Some examples include knowledge pertaining to economics—like budgeting, accounting and loans, repairing household appliances and arts—like music and painting. Riojas-Cortez, Flores, Smith & Clark (2003) go so far as to include parents’ language, values and beliefs, ways of discipline, and the value of education into the scope of funds of knowledge. In a Vygotskian sense, this suggests that children’s informal daily interactions provide a bank of experiences from which to draw upon, and from which students could develop more formal, scientific and conceptual knowledge in school-based learning activities (Hedges et al., 2011).

In addition to finding information about the practical knowledge used by Mexican immigrant families, Moll and his colleagues discovered that central to the development of practical knowledge was the “social matrix” within which children acquire this knowledge and related skills (Moll & Greenberg, 1990, p. 326). In other words, it is primarily through these
social networks that family members obtain or share funds of knowledge. Moll and Greenberg (1990) also contend that these social relationships provide a motive and a context for applying and acquiring knowledge.

In terms of family networks, Velez-Ibanez (1988, p. 142) reveal that reciprocity is central to inter-household practices, that is, families attempt to establish a social relationship on an enduring basis, thereby fostering a sense of interdependence. Additionally, these reciprocal relations and inter-familial activities cultivate “serious obligations based on the assumption of ‘confianza’ (mutual trust)” (p. 74), which is bolstered and confirmed in every instance of familial exchange, therefore leading to the development of long-term inter-familial relationships, and allows for a social exchange of knowledge, skills, and opportunities. It is within these everyday household exchanges that learning takes place—making them spaces where individuals can have opportunities to participate in learning activities with people they trust (Moll & Greenberg, 1990). Velez-Ibanez (1988) goes so far as to describe confianza as the glue that holds community knowledge together between families, communities, and generations. In their research, Moll and Greenberg (1990) highlighted that funds of knowledge are manifested through events or activities, which ties into information from studies of immigrant education, which have shown that familial and community knowledge and values are passed on to children through mutual engagement.

The Arizona group, found that out-of-school networks made available through reciprocity and confianza were two abundant sources of cultural funds of knowledge, previously unknown to teachers. They contended that teacher-research within these immigrant households resulted in pivotal and transformative shifts in the relations between the school and those households involved, including those between teachers, parents and students, primarily by
informing teachers that households are sources of valuable information and skills. Additionally, this new perspective created lasting shifts in teachers’ beliefs and attitudes towards their students and their communities, which resulted in the preparation novel and classroom curricula representative of students’ interests.

Referring to funds of knowledge as an essential part of the Mexican-American household functioning and well-being, Gonzalez and colleagues (1995) were interested in understanding how families developed social networks (i.e., with other households) that would facilitate the social exchange of funds of knowledge. They found that reciprocity—that is, how their social relationships facilitated the development and exchange of resources, including funds of knowledge, was a central element in creating these social networks. Contending that funds of knowledge were plentiful and diverse and that within the Mexican-American families, they found that farming and animal husbandry, were major sources of information exchange among Mexican-American households’ of rural origins. In addition, these households also maintained knowledge about construction and building, expertise related to urban occupations, or knowledge about many other matters, such as trade, business, and finance, which they bring with them across the border and can utilize in their lives in the United States.

The study conducted by Gonzalez et al. (1995) also involved teachers-as-researchers, and they conducted home visits, used participant observation, open-ended interviewing, life histories method, and case studies to create inquiries about the household and community. These teacher/researchers found that Mexican-American families were interconnected family units that provide a resource of exchanges through social relationships that foster a sense of reciprocity, which is an “attempt of establish a social relationship on an enduring basis” (Gonzalez, 2002, p. 92).
As a counterargument to theories of cultural deficit, in which the prevailing perception is that working-class and immigrant families are somehow disorganized socially and deficient intellectually, the funds of knowledge theory posits an asset orientation (e.g., Gonzalez, Andrade, Civil, & Moll, 2001; Riojas-Cortez et al. 2003). It contends that immigrant households contain useful and ample cultural and cognitive resources that can be used for the creation of novel classroom instruction that is more reflective of students’ lives. This concern for immigrant students lived experiences provides a means by which to identify sources of knowledge and learning which can function as rich resources for enhanced and expanded learning and more importantly, the development of learning identities within academic learning settings (Zipin, 2009). A funds of knowledge approach fosters a type of education that goes beyond the rote-like instruction that immigrant children are familiar with in schools (Moll, 1992), by “transforming students’ diversities into pedagogical assets” (Moll & Gonzalez, 1997, p. 89), which can promote educational development (Kiyama, 2010; Moll & Gonzalez, 1997; Sugarman, 2010).

**Funds of Knowledge and the Possibilities for Learning Practices**

One of the goals of funds of knowledge research lies in creating “zones of possibilities” (Moll & Greenberg, 1992, p. 327) for home knowledge to be brought into the classroom. More important, this research underscores the idea that learning does not only reside within academic settings, but exists in a variety of settings like work, in everyday social interactions and the ongoing engagements within communities (Gutierrez, 2013).

Several researchers have attempted to examine realistic methods through which this transfer can take place. Civil (1994) examined how mathematics classroom-teaching situations can be created using resources and experiences of students and their families. She argues that success within the school culture often has little bearing on the performance of students
elsewhere and that this is certainly the case in mathematics tasks that take place in the classroom contexts versus those that take place as part of everyday experiences. These authors define funds of knowledge as “the essential bodies of knowledge and information that households use to survive, to get ahead, or to thrive” (Moll, Velez-Ibanez, Greenberg, Andrade, Dworin, Saavedra, & Whitmore, 1990, p. 2).

Using home visits, teachers uncovered familial funds of knowledge by finding out about household activities, family structure, labor history, and parents’ views on child rearing and schooling. The outcome of which is that these teachers will come to know more about the types of cultural knowledge that exist within these immigrant households. Consequently, through their investigation of these households, the teachers developed a better understanding of the existing knowledge within them, and as such, they began to change the way that they viewed these students, their families and their potential. As such, they began to shift from seeing these immigrant households through a lens of cultural deficit, to seeing them as having cultural assets.

The teachers used this information to create two teaching projects; the first, a module on games in a fifth-grade class that involved examples of construction, money and clapping games. Children were also involved in creating their own game that they would then show to other students in their school. They began by webbing (mental mapping) the word games, which included a conversation about games and math. Students were also asked to interview someone in their family to find out what games he/she played at their age. Also, they were asked to explain a game they knew how to play. Students were then asked to play games and analyze them (like the game NIM and its variations, probability based games, variations of Tic Tac Toe). In addition, after spending a few sessions looking at and analyzing games, students were asked to create their own games. Students created four games called, Wings, Goof Off, Tip Over and
Slam Dunk. In creating these games the students drew upon several resources, those in school and reference book, but they did not draw upon many home resources in creating games. Both English and Spanish were used in the presentation of games. However, the games mainly reflected students’ interests (sport, planes) or their experience with other games (games of life, board games in general) and were less mathematical than expected. In a second project, students were engaged in becoming part of the “making of mathematics.” The goal of which was to develop a working atmosphere in the classroom that reflected some characteristics of out-of-school life. This project consisted of: discussions about open-ended problems, and the development of a math class community series of collaborative activities, created to promote cooperation and dialogue in math, they involved an exploration of activities with the calculator and an investigation task on writing numbers as the sum of consecutive numbers. These activities encouraged students to verbally explain processes and to role-take in math learning. Studies that attempt to create funds of knowledge typology often face certain difficulties. A main issue being, that while students may be engaging with or enacting certain knowledge, deciphering whether these actions are examples of particular cultural funds proves to be difficult task. Additionally, in examining funds of knowledge as a means of cultural congruence between home contexts and school contexts, traditional research has found it difficult to demonstrate real-life incidences of knowledge transference. For example, Civil (1994) reported it was difficult to identify the type or types of knowledge that students were learning and using while participating in the chosen activities. Second, the author further contends that when it comes to mathematics learning, there remains some kind of disconnect between the types of mathematics required in the classroom and those found in students’ everyday experiences. However, a question remains about whether drawing on students’ funds of knowledge is about mapping out-of-school knowledge unto
academic knowledge, or whether it should instead be seen as a bridge to developing this kind of knowledge, a springboard of sorts.

Recently, several studies have explored the concept of funds of knowledge in the field of education. Like traditional funds of knowledge studies, these studies depict funds of knowledge as those historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being (Moll et al., 1992). These studies examined funds of knowledge among Latino college students (Kiyama, 2010; Rios-Aguilar & Kiyama, 2012), Mexican-American families (Kiyama, 2011), Latino college freshmen (Ramirez, 2012) and science students (Basu & Barton, 2007). What is significant about these studies is that they continue the tradition of exploring cultural knowledge as assets among non-dominant populations. However, like traditional funds of knowledge research these approaches have primarily examined Latino/Mexican-American families. Also, these studies have examined immigrant families and students in the K-12 school population, and do not explore the experiences of college-going students.

Kiyama (2010) examined the funds of knowledge present among Mexican-American families that are influenced by their life experiences. This study identified college knowledge as embedded within social networks and academic symbols available in the everyday lives of immigrant families. Using a multiple case study design, semi-structured interviews and open-ended oral history interviews, observations of family homes, communities and neighborhoods, this study examined the experiences of six families from a Parent Outreach program. The study revealed several themes highlighting the importance of educational practices within Mexican immigrant households, extended families and social networks, which supported existing family knowledge about the college going experience. Kiyama (2010) found that Mexican-American
parents placed a high value on education and held culturally relevant college choice ideologies. Although family knowledge about college was limited to local institutions, all the families in the study wanted their children to attend the most prestigious schools. The findings show that these families’ notions of social networks and cultural symbols played a major role in their perceptions of the culture of education, aspirations and limitations, perceptions about the education process, anticipated financial barriers and potential limiting factors. She also found that families were aware of several sources of college information. The findings illustrated that these immigrant families were involved in their children’s education, in terms of the formation of both helpful and limiting ideologies, holding certain beliefs regarding the college going process, and the nature of college information drawn from social networks and academic symbols and the development of college going realities. Findings also suggest that a shift in how researchers and practitioners understand and incorporate families in educational programming must take into consideration that families have knowledge both about education in general and college specifically.

In examining the social relationships aspect of the funds of knowledge approach, Basu and Barton (2007) studied how the incorporation of funds of knowledge could lead to more authentic and engaging form of education for students. They worked with urban, minority youth in an after-school science program that “focused on invention and exploration” (p. 472). They investigated the types of support that students would need to sustain their interest in science. In this study, sustained interest was defined as students’ ability to complete more than the required tasks of the classroom, or students’ ability to create an “enduring disposition” toward science learning. They used life histories to examine the experiences of students participating in an after-school intervention program. In these life histories, students were asked about their families,
schooling, friendships, personal philosophies and interests. Additionally, everyday school contexts and schoolwork were examined. These researchers found that sustained science interests were impacted by whether science experiences were connected to students’ envisioned futures and the role social support played in shaping these learning environments. They also discovered that participating in science activities fostered student agency in creating purpose in student science learning.

Ramirez (2012) used the theoretical frameworks of funds of knowledge, cultural wealth theory (e.g., Yosso, 2006), and situated cognition (e.g., Rumelhart, 1980) theory to examine the cultural knowledge used by Latino college freshmen as they encounter culturally relevant texts. Cultural wealth theory, like the funds of knowledge theory, helps to combat deficit thinking that is often associated with Latino students, by stating that immigrant households maintain many forms of knowledge capital. The situated cognition theory states that knowledge is bounded up with the particular situation in which the knowledge is learned. The researcher posited that experiential knowledge is important in students’ comprehension of cultural texts. In a descriptive study, the researcher examined how second language students’ used verbal “think alouds” to help them understand historical texts written in English. In a think aloud, the student puts forward what information that comes to their minds as they are reading a particular document. An analysis of these “think alouds” showed that students filtered their understanding of these texts through the use of their cultural connections. The researcher generated list of the forms of cultural funds of knowledge used by the students in reading and comprehending the relevant texts. These themes were similar to those concepts in the traditional research on funds of knowledge. Examples of the cultural funds used by students were: strong family bonds, respect for elders, religion, bilingualism, knowledge of machismo, travel/ethnic discrimination, poverty
and class-consciousness and social activism. The researcher also found that student-reading levels had no negative effect on the amount of cultural connections they made with the literary texts.

**Limitations of the Funds of Knowledge Approach**

The funds of knowledge approach is not the panacea for all of the problems related to immigrant students’ educational attainment and engagement, but it does provide a good vantage point from which to examine these issues. However, an examination of the theoretical and empirical literature shows that the funds of knowledge approach is not without limitations. To date, several studies have presented a host of accounts of the processes related to the development of and acquisition of funds of knowledge. However, questions still remain about who benefits from learning about household knowledge and what are the processes related to how, when and by whom funds of knowledge are negotiated, activated, and expanded upon. After reviewing the literature on funds of knowledge, several questions still remain unaddressed. For example, what kinds of funds of knowledge do students develop in relation to learning practices and activities? In terms of learning and identity, how do students themselves recognize, draw upon and/or activate their funds of knowledge as a tool for learning? In the sub-sections below, I examine the four main limitations of the funds of knowledge perspective that informed the current research study.

**Transformational shifts.** First, traditional funds of knowledge research identify teacher/researchers as the recipients of transformation or change, primarily because, by investigating immigrant households, they come to understand that these are places of cultural wealth and knowledge. In early funds of knowledge studies, the teacher acts as an intermediary between home and school, the end result of which was the creation of novel teaching modules
prepared by these teachers to extract students’ cultural funds. Gonzalez et al. (1995)
acknowledge that extracting the potential usefulness of household knowledge for teaching is an
intricate process and the creation of realistic, tangible and systemic links to the practices of the
classroom may be limited. However, it is questionable whether these novel teaching modules
inadvertently reproduce the existing social standards for classroom learning, or if they succeed in
generating activities where students can genuinely learn by engaging their funds of knowledge.
Based on these traditional studies, it is unclear how teachers’ shifts in perceptions were
realistically translated into learning activities that were not co-opted into power relations and
conventions in the classroom and the school environment at large, that is, beyond the teacher-
student relationship. Is it possible to have other factors that legitimize immigrant students’ funds
of knowledge, beyond the teacher-student dynamic?

   It is arguable that rather than positioning teachers as the sole elicitors of cultural
knowledge from students, the real focus should be on getting students to elicit these knowledges
for themselves. That being said, the focus of this kind of research would be on ascertaining
students’ ideologies, beliefs and values related to learning, by getting them to see for themselves
that they are knowledgeable people. In this way, it may be possible to extrapolate students’
knowledge about what learning means to them, including what it takes to learn, the purposes of
learning, including the social relationships and exchanges that are relevant to their constructions
of their own educational ideologies and dispositions.

   As such, the notion of transformational shift should be revised to include those shifts that
occur among students themselves, a concept that is not addressed in the traditional literature on
funds of knowledge. The current research principles fit well with the funds of knowledge tenet
that the more immigrant students can engage in and identify with the topic matter, the more
interest and motivation is generated (Gonzalez & Moll, 2002). However, it also posits that funds of knowledge should be engaged rather than elicited, and fostered in order for it to be legitimized. In order to do so, the teacher-student dynamic must become a space where students not only recognize their funds of knowledge for themselves but where they can take ownership of this knowledge for themselves, therefore becoming agents in their own knowing.

**Funds of knowledge beyond k-12.** Second, a point more central to my current research project is the following. Because traditional funds of knowledge studies have limited the examination of cultural funds to immigrant students and parents from within the K-12 school range, it has left unaddressed the situation of adult learners (with the exception of Kiyama, 2011). As the population of immigrant students grows up and heads towards college and beyond, it becomes imperative to shed light on their immigrant and educational experiences at the college level.

**Expansion of funds of knowledge beyond the idea of households.** For the notion of funds of knowledge to be introduced into the field of higher education and used as a lens through which to view academic learning and identity development at this level, the idea of everyday households-related knowledge becomes quite limited. It seems that there is a need to re-conceptualize the boundaries of the households. Along these lines, the funds of knowledge notion of households must incorporate the varied contributory social exchanges that take place outside the primary household setting, in particular those located within the broader immigrant community, for example, work and community groups. This reconceptualization should also include collegiate spaces. For example, learning communities, student groups, cultural organizations, fraternities and sororities, transition and retention programs - namely, places where students feel a sense of community should be considered. Expanding this boundary allows
us to understand how immigrant students draw upon and leverage their cultural funds of
knowledge across multiple everyday settings.

Incorporating diverse populations into studies of funds of knowledge. Fourth, as the
population of immigrants in general, and New York City in particular continues to rise, it
simultaneously becomes more diverse. Most funds of knowledge research has been focused on
the experiences of Mexican-American students and families in Arizona schools. Although much
has been learned from this community, it is important for the continued development and
relevance of this theory to learn about other groups of immigrants, including those from various
ethnicities, nationalities and classes. In order to do so, the funds of knowledge would need to
incorporate the experiences of ever-growing and diversified groups into future research.

Conclusion about funds of knowledge. Despite many theoretical recommendations to
integrate home and school worlds, thereby uniting home and school knowledge, including those
found within the funds of knowledge approach, there is a gap in the literature when it comes to
programs and activities that utilize comprehensive ways of incorporating students’ own
understandings and activation of their funds of knowledge. What is clear about this theory is that
eliciting funds of knowledge means that they have to be legitimized. Yet, what can be taken
from this literature is that funds of knowledge “serves as a basis for teachers to re-think what is
useful knowledge for under-represented students” (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011, p. 177). Yet, what
is not understood is whether the teachers alone hold the key to this recognition or, can
recognition come about via others social relations. If so, what are these situations? Also, within
this framework it is still unclear how the students themselves come to recognize for themselves
that they are holders of valuable knowledge.

Cultural Capital
Concepts developed by Bourdieu can also be called upon to understand the way in which immigrant students’ household learning experiences are more fitting with those of school than others. Cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1990) is a concept that refers to the cultural knowledge, skills and experiences that people accrue throughout their lives. Cairney (2003), Sullivan (2001) and Zipin, Sellar and Hattam (2012) illustrate the nature of capital as it is instanced in everyday experiences in households and suggest that many schools do not recognize or build upon this capital in satisfactory ways. A limitation of early funds of knowledge theorization is that all immigrants were positioned as having funds of knowledge in more or less the same way, that is, with the same capital. Zipin (2009) contends that changes cannot always be made to incorporate funds of knowledge into academic learning spaces, because the structure of processes in schools continues to regulate traditional cultural capital exchanges. Yet, Zipin does put forward the idea that incorporating funds of knowledge into classrooms presents the opportunity to interrupt the traditional exchange-value process thus changing what type of knowledge has value within them. Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama and Moll (2011) present a similar argument. They determine that linking funds of knowledge to notions of capital can be useful in the field of education because it can provide insight into the processes that convert or transform various funds of knowledge into other more tangible kinds of capital, for example, better grades, higher college enrollments and higher civic participation. They contend that examining funds of knowledge from a cultural capital view can elucidate the power dynamics situated in educational settings, especially within those settings touted as educational opportunities for non-dominant groups. In this way, traditional funds of knowledge approaches need to be expanded to incorporate these concerns.

It is arguable that recognizing funds of knowledge alone cannot erode the power differentials in classroom (and other real-world) settings. Rios-Aguilar et al. (2011, p. 176)
contend that, “institutions and institutional agents intentionally misrecognize the funds of knowledge of students and families.” This means that in order to perpetuate existing cultural values, some institutions work to de-value those of under-represented groups. However, these authors do hint that it is possible for these power differentials to be counteracted by getting students to recognize their own funds of knowledge, and providing them with access to forms of capital, converting their funds of knowledge into forms of capital and activating/ mobilizing their funds of knowledge and/or social and cultural capital (Rios-Aguilar, 2012). In doing so, students’ resources can be acknowledged as legitimate, thus providing enhanced opportunities for educational advancement.

**Conclusion about Cultural Capital**

Given these ideas, the broader goals of this study are grounded in understanding the interactions between out-of-school, household and academic environments that constrain and afford learning opportunities for ethnic minority immigrant college students. Along these lines, this study maintains a focus on the nuanced and intersectional nature of immigration, culture and ethnicity in students’ development of learning identities. Additionally, this research maintains that taking students’ cultural knowledge seriously involves seeking out the learning assets already available in their cultures. In recognition of the co-constructed nature of identity and learning processes, this study will investigate how ethnic minority immigrant students agentically draw upon their funds of knowledge in school situations while constructing their learning identities.

Collectively, the above works maintain that students from culturally diverse backgrounds do possess knowledge, including beliefs and values about learning, which is often not recognized within the school environment. However, the main shortcoming of the funds of knowledge
approach is that change, in the form of learning, lies in the hands of teachers. Therefore, it is up to the teacher to legitimize students’ cultural knowledge. I argue that in order for cultural knowledge to be useful in school contexts, students must recognize its usefulness for themselves.

When a student’s prior knowledge is not activated nor utilized within the classroom (and extending school environment), his or her performance does not accurately reflect their ability or potential. It is also clear from the above literature that if teachers learn about students’ existing funds of knowledge then this can assist them (teachers) in creating culturally relevant teaching practices. However, the main potential of cultural knowledge lies in the students’ own recognition and agentic activation of their particular cultural funds, which can then act as a novel form of their cultural capital, to shape new and important ways for them to position themselves in relation to learning, therefore creating novel avenues of persistence and engagement. In turn, learning can become a meaningful life pursuit.

**Learning Identities**

In the present study, learning is referred to as the “process by which learners take up new information, acquire and deepen conceptual understandings [of themselves] and of a subject matter, and come to understand the natural and social world in new ways” (Nasir et al., 2012, p. 286). In this way, learning is related to but not synonymous with academic achievement. Nor is it limited to markers of success like academic scores or GPAs, and it is not constrained to academic settings or values. In line with the previous theories, I argue that immigrant students bring to the classroom many unique, rich and, more importantly, useful knowledge, beliefs, values and resources, that are reflective of their cultures, and which are central in shaping their dispositions towards learning—and their engagements with learning practices. Taken together, I
argue that what students bring with them influences their participation in learning practices, including the perceptions of learning and its purpose and the creation of learning goals.

Psychological research suggests that culture influences learning practices, including the development of beliefs, values, behaviors, goals and orientations towards learning. For example, Li (2004; 2005; 2006) investigated the impact of cultural values in shaping Chinese students’ development of cultural learning beliefs. Li found that Chinese students held particular cultural understandings based on the Confucian virtue of ren, through which they viewed learning as a lifelong striving for becoming (Li, 2005). She asserts that this striving was central to students’ self-concept (Li, 2006) and therefore influenced their orientations towards learning, their development learning goals, their learning outcomes and their sense of agency in learning (Li, 2005).

In order to map out the importance of the culturally based learning resources that immigrant students bring with them to the academic setting, I draw upon several sociocultural theories that underscore the importance of culture and ethnicity as critical elements in the learning development. More specifically, I contend that if students can agentically utilize and leverage their cultural knowledge in learning spaces which validate these funds, they can then negotiate particular identities in relation to learning. In doing so, I explain the sociocultural underpinnings of the interconnectedness of learning and identity, and highlight its importance in shaping potential learning identities through cultural and social capital, funds of knowledge and agency.

Wenger (1998) describes learning as a situated social process that involves an individual becoming part of a community of learners through participation in social practices relevant to that community. The author also asserts that learning is not simply an accumulation of skills and
acquisition of information, but a process of becoming defined through an identity of participation that incorporates one’s history and trajectory of participation. Lave also contends that learning is “neither wholly subjective nor fully encompassed in social interaction, and is not constituted separately from the social world” (Lave, 1991, p. 64). Furthermore, learning involves the transition of the learner from legitimate peripheral participation towards central ways of participating; such a transformation occurs as learners become more adept at the use of tools and social practices located within particular communities. In other words, students are constructing identities and creating particular ways of being in the classroom as they engage in activities and tasks and relate with teachers and fellow students. Therefore, to move towards a full sense of membership requires that students to develop “an increasing sense of identity as a master practitioner” (Lave, 1991, p. 111).

Learning as a Sociocultural Practice

Sociocultural approaches have increasingly been used to understand the connection between learning and development. The sociocultural theory (see Vygotsky, 1978) posits culture as a core component of learning, unlike other psychological approaches that discount the role of culture in learning in limiting it to cognitive acquisitions. This framework views social and cultural processes as central to learning and local activity settings as vital to people’s learning. From this perspective, understanding learning requires a focus on how individuals participate in particular activities, and how they draw on artifacts, tools and social others to solve local problems (Nasir, 2004, 2006), in addition to understanding how individuals author themselves in relation to these practices through participation (Holland et al., 1998). In understanding the unique situation of ethnic minority immigrant students, taking a sociocultural approach would be quite useful, mainly because it could allow us to better understand how existing cultural
dynamics, including societal forces, impact the local environment where learning takes place and how students come to figure and author themselves within these spaces.

Several lines of sociocultural theory underscore the importance of participation as a means of human development (see Lave, 1991; Rogoff, 1994, 2003; Wenger, 1998). This view is based on the theoretical perspective of transformation of participation, which takes as a central premise the idea that learning and development occur as people participate in the sociocultural activities of their community, transforming their understandings, roles, and responsibilities as they participate (Lave & Wenger, 2002; Rogoff, 2003). In this way, knowledge is enacted in a continual manner, as individuals participate in the practices of an environment. From this perspective, learning goes beyond the acquisition of information, and moves towards changing one’s participation in culturally valued activities using complex repertoires of practice (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003).

Wenger (1998) warns that in examining learning as participation, one should consider that both participation and nonparticipation are possible forms of action, the combination of which can determine the varied dispositions of participation we find among individuals, for example, marginality or peripherality. Wenger describes these learning dispositions as engagement, imagination, and alignment. Engagement refers to how one participates in a community of practice, in the case of students how to participate in the community practices of academia. Imagination refers to how one sees oneself as being connected to a broader community of doers. Alignment refers to how actions within the community come to be aligned toward a broader common purpose. Wenger also highlights that the process of identity development is comprised of both identification and negotiability. In the process of identification, “modes of belonging become constitutive of her identities by creating bonds or
distinctions in which we have become invested” (p. 191). In this way, identification is the process of identity construction and becoming a member of the community practice (Nasir, 2002). Negotiability, however, depicts “the ability, facility, and legitimacy to contribute to, take responsibility for, and shape the meanings of matter within social configuration” (Nasir, 2002, 197). In other words, negotiability gives a sense of ownership and agency that acknowledges the mutual formation of individuals and practices. Together, identification and negotiability allow for the intermingling of both social structure and agency in everyday practice.

Furthermore, learning involves the active reorganization of one’s way of participation (Wenger, 1998), which involves shifts in uses of artifacts for problem solving, sense making, or performance (Nasir & Cooks, 2009). Consequently, learning serves to “transform our identities: it transforms our ability to participate in the world by changing all at once who we are, our practices and our communities” (Wenger, 1998, p. 227). Moreover, identities can be enacted, constructed and/or ascribed by others and therefore are fluid; they develop within households, schools and communities (Gonzalez, 2005) that is, all places and contexts where individuals participate. The question remains, how can becoming a legitimate participant in academic learning incorporate practices found within non-academic spaces?

**Interconnectedness between Learning and Identity**

Drawing on the work of Vygotsky (1978), identity development can be understood to encompass two levels of functioning by individuals. First, at the social level, the individual is affiliated with certain cultural groups and engaged in relevant social practices. Within these practices, the individual is positioned by and within the realities and affordances of particular shared practices. Second, at a personal level the individual positions himself or herself in relation to socially relevant activities that are afforded within larger social practices, which constitute and
mutually inform one another (Cole, 1996a). Therefore, to learn in that community means to become “a different person with respect to the possibilities enabled by these systems of relations” (p. 53). Taking a sociocultural view of identity means that individuals construct identities as they actively participate in cultural activities. In turn, identity is experienced through the capabilities established in sharing a common enterprise, values, assumptions, purpose and rules of engagement and communication (Nasir, 2002; Solomon, 2007). Drawing on the work of Wenger (1998) and Holland et al. (1998), identity development can be highlighted as a process where the individual participates in everyday cultural activities:

…a fluid construct, one that both shapes and is shaped by the social context. Indeed identity is not purely an individual’s property, nor can it be completely attributed to social settings... identity develops both through individual agency and through social practice. Further, the development of identity, or the process of identification is linked to learning, in that learning is becoming as well as knowing. (Nasir, 2002, p. 219)

The identities that students construct while participating in learning practices represent a critical component in understanding learning itself. In several areas of research including psychology, anthropology and sociology the study of identity has been primarily limited to conceptualizations of the construct as an individual phenomenon, as closely related to the self. In these fields, identity is often seen as a consolidation of the self-concept, self-understanding, and evaluating oneself in relation to others (Nasir, 2002). Taken in this manner, identity is seen as stable and enduring across social situations. Although it is possible for identity within this view to be influenced by the social environment, such influences are framed as being distinct variables separate from an individual’s identity, which is understood as located inside the person.
However, recently there has been a shift among psychologists and other researchers to view identity as a more dynamic construct, one that is fundamentally tied to the social world (Nasir, 2002). Taking this view, culture provides trajectories of engagement that an individual can take up. This view of identity is based on the premise that individuals take on varied identities, sometimes called hybrid identities within the various activities within which they participate. Along these lines, social action produces situated identities, which can change according to settings, rules and practices. Although this view of identity maintains a social focus, it does not preclude the idea that identity has an internal component.

Anthropologists Holland et al. (1998) have examined how identities play out in social and cultural worlds. Their depiction of identity focuses on how developing identities are fundamentally tied to human activity, affiliation, and meaning system. These scholars have examined the development of identities in several cultural worlds among adults and children and they have shown how identities develop in relation to what they term “figured worlds.” In these figured worlds, the process of identity construction takes on particular cultural meanings, while simultaneously being a process in which the individual enacts considerable agency. They describe a figured world 13 as a “socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation” (p. 32), a context that has its own set of cultural resources, and ways of being and doing through which individuals can be “identified as belonging there” (Tonso, 1999, p. 277). Within these figured worlds, social discourses become major cultural tools used by agentive actors who orchestrate their own selves (Vianna & Stetsenko, 2011).

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13 Similarly, situated learning theory (Lave, 2001) posits the ‘community of practice’ as the context in which an identity is developed in practice including values, norms and relationships and identities appropriate to that community.
Stetsenko (2008) contends that learning is about collaboratively contributing to practices of humanity while simultaneously transforming them (p. 489). Taking this view allows us to understand the importance of using funds of knowledge in a new light, namely as part and parcel of the learning process, to which students actively contribute. Transformation in this context is defined as being directed by an agenda such as that of social justice and points towards the need for education to allow students to engage not only in the contradictions of immigrant life, but being able to place their current struggles within the larger social context. More important, learning and teaching practices should be about providing students with the opportunity to acquire and construct tools that are useful for them in their life pursuits, as well as to allow them to develop a critical and active stance in the transformation of society and their community practices (Stetsenko, 2008, 2010). Grounded in the notion of identity as a continuous project of becoming (Stetsenko, 2009, 2010), learning and identity in this dissertation are conceptualized as mutually constitutive as well as transformative processes.

In their article on selfhood, Stetsenko & Arievitch (2004) contend that personhood does not come on top or on the side of being human, as if it were a coherently developed narrative. Rather it is the enactment and embodiment of being a continuous process within our material forms of life to which learning contributes and is part of. This conceptualization of the relationship between learning and identity is defined here as an active process of becoming (Nasir, 2008), which moves beyond descriptions of identity as personality, or based in a biological foundation; equally important, it is not limited to an intangible postmodern story that merely follows the person (Stetsenko & Arievitch, 2004). Furthermore, to conceptualize learning as an identity transforming practice moves beyond a concern with what students know and have learned to do, to considering how students view themselves in relation to learning and the extent
to which they have developed a commitment to and see value in learning itself. In other words, engagement in the practice of learning is relevant to who students want to be and become (Stetsenko, 2010). Embracing this perspective means that educational paradigms should be focused on students goal-directed activities, thus shaping an understanding of learning that is also being directed by the active stance of the student.

**Learning Settings**

Nasir (2002) contends that learning settings afford the ways of becoming or not becoming something or someone. She asserts that learning settings contain histories, direct learner’s goals and actions, and influence learner’s afforded ways of becoming (Nasir & Cooks, 2009). She further argues that examining the settings in which learning takes place is central to understanding the connections between culture, race and learning. Drawing on Wenger, Nasir et al. (2012) posit that learning processes are intrinsically linked to social and cultural processes and identities within the learning settings, which they define as individual and institutional settings, classrooms, schools, and out of school contexts. These authors posit that learning “requires engagement which is facilitated by students’ identities within learning settings” (Nasir et al., 2012, p. 286). However, also present within these learning settings are racial stereotypes and storylines that get enacted by individuals in social interactions within learning settings, as they are positions (and position themselves) as learners. More important, as these racialized storylines get engaged, particular identities are “made available, imposed, or closed down” (Nasir et al., 2012, p. 286) to individuals within that setting, and in turn influence the types of relations, orientations and dispositions students develop with respect to learning (in school settings).
Taking a somewhat different approach, Gutierrez and Rogoff (2003) explore the contextual nature of learning. They contend that maintaining a cultural-historical approach to learning means examining the patterns of people’s approaches to given situations without reducing the explanation to a claim that they do what they do because they are from a particular group (like migrant farm workers or English-language learners). They emphasize that the cultural-historical repertoires available to individuals in conjunction with their contributions to learning practices and other activities in which they commonly engage play a much more important role in shaping their dispositions towards learning (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003). In this way, the repertoires of practice that people develop are based on their prior cultural activities (Rogoff, 1997) and on their familiarity with engaging in particular practices on the basis of what is known about their own and their community’s history. The value of these repertoires lies in individuals’ background experiences, together with their own interests. The importance of these cultural features lies in their ability to prepare individuals for knowing how to engage in particular forms of learning, for example, language and literacy activities, test formats and so forth (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003).

More importantly, these varied repertoires highlight that people can hold a sense of dexterity in their ways of knowing, related to given circumstances (Rogoff, 1997), which allows them to move between learning approaches within varying learning settings. This view suggests that when a person learns, they construct their own knowledge and meaning according to what they already know, within the social, historical and linguistic contexts of their learning (Alfred, 2003) as if using their cultural knowledge as a filter through which to make sense of novel experiences.
Taking such an approach underscores that in academic spaces, there are several contextual factors at play, like history, culture, institutional structure, race, class, gender, sexual orientation and so on, which impact the goings on of everyday classroom practices including curriculum and learning activities (Alfred, 2003). Moreover, academic learning spaces often confine learning to the boundaries of the formal and informal or the in-school and out-of-school contexts. Gutierrez (2003) warns that viewing what students do and know as dichotomies is in reality quite unproductive, since these conceptualizations do not help us understand what students have learned across the various activities that make up their daily life. However, Gutierrez and Rogoff believe that students should be able to take on an adaptive expertise (see also Hatano & Inagaki, 1986; Nasir, Roseberry, Warren, & Lee, 2006).

In other words, the learner develops flexible knowledge and dispositions that facilitate their effective navigation across varied settings and tasks. Nasir et al. (2006) contend that developing an adaptive expertise is particularly important for learners from non-dominant groups who typically face limited opportunities and, must be able to navigate extreme societal challenges. A cultural view of learning also means challenging the normative view of learning that typically dominates educational thinking and practice. Taking this approach allows us to view learning as “repertoires of practice” in which people routinely participate as they go about their daily lives. It further allows us to unpack those everyday practices that connect with academic learning practices. Also, it allows us to reveal those repertoires of practice that can be recruited to create meaningful opportunities for students in academic learning.

Evidence supporting the connections between learning and identity can be found in the area of science education. Researchers in science education argue that understanding how students engage in science learning requires considering who students think they must be in order
learn or participate (see Calabrese-Barton, 1998; Carlone & Johnson, 2007). Research in this field also points to a mismatch between what is involved in participating in school science and students’ self-image and aspirations as a main reason for the unpopularity in choosing science education among minority students (see Barton & Tan, 2008). Carlone and Johnson (2007) conclude that in most academic learning spaces, only a limited number of science-related identities are available, and of those available fewer are realistically achievable or even of interest to students (Carlone, 2004).

Cowie, Jones and Otrei-Cass (2011), in a study of Maori and Pasifika students’ science identity development in New Zealand, contend that identity acts as an organizing concept in student participation, engagement and achievement in science learning. They argue that few students align themselves or feel connected to the worldview of science conveyed in school, and for some to become a successful science person requires major identity shifts and compromises that they may not be prepared to make. This becomes very relevant in the case of students from other cultures, who may be marginalized in science education (and by extension, all education) because they hold worldviews that are different from science worldviews, or because they maintain different cultural background and identities, or because school science disavows presenting multiple or contested views. These authors suggest that a focus on identity (including participation, engagement and achievement) shifts the focus from individual or community deficits to what it means to engage students in science learning. This starts with considering the range of science identities that teaching makes available and includes recognizing how individual, shared and worldviews understandings can be constructed without marginalizing students lived cultures (Cowie et al., 2011).
In examining the gendered experiences of minority women in science, Carlone, Cook, Calabrese-Barton, Wong, Sandoval and Brickhouse (2008) discovered that in enacting their learning selves that students take up, resist or transform existing learning practices and identities, by their own use of physical tools, representational means and talk. In this way, students enact their identities-in-learning through the way they talk, think, use tools, act, value and interact in ways that make their actions recognizable to others (Gee, 2000). However, this author warns that students cannot readily assume an identity that is not recognized in the learning community, but they also state that this does not mean that students do not act without agency. In another study, Calabrese-Barton and Tan (2013) examined science identity trajectories among female science students from 6th to 8th grade. They investigated the role that social others play in recognizing the value of non-science knowledge for novel science activities. These authors posit that by supporting and legitimizing certain kinds of expertise within science activities, social others support, position, and legitimate students’ identities as “science persons.” The type of identity work these middle school students engaged in at an afterschool science club reflected the opportunities they had to participate in and with science. The particularities of these opportunities were key in affording students the room to create a sense of identity that could bridge two different knowledge worlds, science and non-science knowledge.

Out of School Learning

Research on learning outside of school, although not explicitly related to issues of immigration or ethnicity, has also shed light on the connection between culture and learning. Several studies have examined a number of activities, including carpet laying (Masingila, 1994), farming (deAbreu, 1995), construction work (Nunes-Carraher, 1986) and candy selling (Saxe, 1988), as meaningful “ways of knowing” linked to the cultural practices within which they
occur. Central to these theories is the notion that learning is a social practice. The socio-cultural perspective takes cultural practices as its unit of analysis, and culture is viewed as unfolding within situated activities. An important finding in these studies on out-of-school knowledge is that learning occurs as individuals pursue goals in the course of everyday activity. In terms of mathematics, for example, people use math to save money at the grocery store. However, in these everyday situations these activities in themselves may not seem inherently mathematical or educational, and may not be considered useful within school contexts. Yet, these studies also show that, “schools and classrooms [are also] cultural spaces, where the cultural practices and repertoires that [individuals] encounter outside of school can be important to the learning process in school” (Nasir, Snyder, Shah, & Ross, 2012, p. 286).

However, without an analysis of how individuals develop identities as members of the communities of practice of which learning is a part (in particular, academic learning), it may be difficult to understand how academic achievement can be unevenly distributed across ethnic groups. As such, a better understanding of the links between culture, identity and learning in practice can offer an important analytical tool and for both understanding ethnic minority immigrant students learning as occurring within everyday cultural practices, and thinking about how to link these practices.

**Learning Identities and Agency**

The concept of identity, as I have been discussing it, also holds a potential for “agency.” According to Brickhouse (2000), identity accounts for ‘‘individual agency as well as societal structures that constrain individual possibilities’’ (p. 286). Taken in this way, identity can allow us to see who people are and who people become across time and contexts (as an agentic concept; Gee, 2000; Holland et al., 1998). Urrieta (2007) states that:
Identity is also very much about how people come to understand themselves, how they come to “figure” who they are, through the “worlds” that they participate in and how they relate to others within and outside of these worlds. (p. 107)

The construct of identity is different from the construct of self-concept. Self-concept refers to the set of meanings we hold for ourselves when we look at ourselves, that is, our self-evaluations. However, other parts of the self are defined by the different positions we hold in society. They are the meanings one has as a group member, the role-holder, as a person. In this way, identity is embedded in social experience, symbolic communication, and reflection of institutional practices, but is also under agentic control (Varelas, 2012). Therefore, the study of identity and identity construction should focus on understanding a learner from a relational perspective. In other words, identities shape, and are shaped by, inclusion and exclusion exchanges that occur within a social structure where the relations of alliance, dominance, or subordination exist. As learners, people find themselves becoming part of social practices and can develop what Côté (2002) calls identity capital, that is, capital associated with identity formation, mainly the resources that become employed as people define themselves and as others define them in social contexts.

Understanding the everyday experiences of ethnic minority immigrant college students means exploring the ways in which these learners navigate various contexts of learning, including how they appropriate tools and resources in the development of new learning goals and activities. This requires emphasizing how resourceful and agentic these learners are in creatively exploiting the affordances that may become available within these various learning contexts (Nasir, 2006). Central to this idea is the understanding that learners’ identities are a powerful mediator of learning activities. In a similar way, this approach gives us a view of individual
learning styles. One cannot account for the diverse ways in which students learn without making reference to their personal work ethics, values, principles, priorities, preferences and commitments which in turn appear to relate, not only to students seemingly non-academic knowledge, but also to their sense of who they are and who they might become (Holland et al., 1998).

To get a broader sense of how these learners act agentically to negotiate their identities across varied contacts, one must understand how identities become mediators in the act of learning itself. Mediational means “can be seen as resources which turbo-charge performance and people learn to use them with the help of others” (Edwards, 2005, p. 171). For example, a child learns that a picture can help her attend to a particular set of words (Black, n.d.). Eventually these artifacts turn into, as Leontiev put it, “internal resources through the process of ingrowing” (1997, p. 22). Through which learners begin to take control of and use them for their own purposes—or as Vygotsky (1978) describes, internalization. For Vygotsky, taking control of these mediational means, causes a change in mental processes themselves, and leads to the development of new concepts, and new ways of being. In terms of learning, this approach implies a need to consider participant interests, identities, and subjectivities in addition to the goals and continuities of social practice including the possibility of individuals’ active role in remaking these very social practices (Billett, 2006; Eteläpelto, Vähäsantanen, Hökkä & Paloniemi, 2013).

Agency

The concept of agency has become increasingly popular in the field of education and the social sciences. Agency is posited as central to our becoming something—or someone that his not entirely determined by our social circumstances. Although the concept is still seemingly
obscure, several researchers have lent support to the centrality of agency (see Billett, 2006; Archer, 2000; Eteläpelto et al.; Holland et al., 1998). Typically, agency is seen as connected to individual autonomy and self-fulfillment, and acts as a force for change or resistance to structural power (Eteläpelto et al., 2013). In other words, agency is needed for an individual to become someone, who is not entirely determined by their social environment or their social circumstances. From a socio-cultural approach, agency takes into account both social and individual developmental perspectives. This approach values the role of social cultural contexts, including the use of tools and objects in mediating human activities, of which language is considered to be the most important psychological tool.

Billett (2006) argues that a relational interdependence between the individual and the social exists. He contends that individuals practice agency in choosing problems they engage in, and do so with different degrees of engagement, through which they change and learn. In these accounts of learning, an individuals’ role as an actor determines what problems get solved and how a solution comes about. More important, having agency suggests that individuals have the capacity to shape their development and remake cultural practices in transformative ways. Billett (2006) further suggests that agency refers to individuals’ *making something of their own* from their encounters in the social world. Billet (2006) asserts that:

Human agency operates relationally within and through social structures, yet is not necessarily subjugated by them… Through these relations, individuals are always socially related, albeit through their subjectivities or more immediate experiences... Therefore, any action that individual agency initiates, including action to transform society, always occurs from a social basis, albeit through an interdependency that is relational.
To elaborate on this argument, I draw heavily on the work of Holland and her colleagues (1998), whose depiction of agency posits it as intrinsically related to identity, and as dynamic and ever changing. Holland et al. (1998) propose a practice theory account of identity formation that emphasizes the agency of individuals. They introduce five interrelated concepts: history and person, identity and practice, figured world, the space of authoring, and making worlds. They suggest them as conceptual tools for understanding new opportunities for identity formation through active participation in learning environments. In combination with theories that support the collaboration of learning and identity, Holland et al.’s (1998) theory suggests that involving ethnic minority immigrant students in a collaborative project might help these individuals take control of their own life trajectories or at the very least play an active role in designing their own social futures. This type of work is grounded in ethnographic case studies of situated practices and diverse contacts. Their seminal study depicts practicing members of Alcoholics Anonymous reconstructions of their identity as nondrinking alcoholics through the ritualistic rehearsal with others of a nondrinking identity. This example illustrates how individuals are capable of establishing new social practices within what Holland and colleagues called figured worlds, to support the emergence of new selves through dialogue and practice with others.

Agency, Identity and Figured Worlds

The notion of the figured world is pivotal for understanding the relationship between identity and agency. Figured worlds emerge as a result of collective human activity and are inherently social rather than products of a single human imagination. Holland et al. (1998) assert that a figured world is “peopled by the figures, characters, and types who carry out its tasks and who also has styles of interacting within, distinguishable perspectives on, and orientations towards it” (p. 51). Figured worlds are viewed as imagined communities that function both
dialectically and dialogically in “as if” worlds, which are defined by both power dynamics and
spaces of agency and improvisation (Holland et al. 1998) as well as that ways in which
individuals participate within these figured spaces. Figured worlds can include academia, the
factory, and romance, environmental activism, games of Dungeons and Dragons and so on.
According to Geertz, these shared spaces are made up of “webs of meaning” and give shape to
the co-production of activities, discourses, performances and artifacts found within them (as
cited in Holland et al., 1998).

Figured worlds are configured in particular ways; they are historical and socially
organized and reproduced spaces into which people are recruited or into which they enter.
However, they are also spaces that are generated through the participation of their participants.
Holland et al, 1998 remind us that figured worlds are “not so much things or objects to be
apprehended, as [much as they are] processes or traditions of apprehension, which gather us up
and give us for as our lives intersect with them” (p. 41). In contrast, there are figured worlds that
“we may never enter because of our social position or rank; some we may deny to others; some
we may simply miss by contingency; some we may learn fully” (p. 41). This notion lines up with
Wenger’s concept of figured worlds in terms of participation and non-participation within
communities of practice.

In these figured worlds, the identities we gain are specifically historical developments
that emerge through continued participation in the positions defined by the social organization
found in these figured worlds. That is, within social encounters…participants’ positions matter”
(p. 41). Additionally, “figured worlds distribute ‘us’ not only by relating actors to landscapes of
action (as personae) and spreading our sense of self-activity, but also by giving the landscape
human voice and tone” (p. 41). Therefore, within figured worlds, the identities that individuals
develop are historical in nature and are cultivated through their continued participation in the situated positions established within that particular world’s activities.

As a social practice theory, the figured worlds approach also emphasizes the notion of cultural production that is, the ways in which cultural meanings are produced in everyday practice, which reflect on or counter larger societal structures (cf. Eisenhart & Finkel, 1998). Holland et al.’s (1998) identity production is critical in conceptualizing the agency that ethnic minority immigrant students enact within their own figured worlds of immigrant life and academic life. This theory also places emphasis on the everyday lived experiences of ethnic minority immigrant students rather than the broad stages of the lifespan. Accounting for the everyday lived experiences of ethnic minority immigrant students is important because it allows us to reveal sites of agency within commonplace interactions and, which emphasizes that agentic potential in the everyday. Therefore underscoring the complexity, positioning and negotiation of the lived experiences of ethnic minority immigrant students.

Holland et al. (1998) also posit that structures within the figured world can also take on an element of rank and status. In this way, Bourdieu’s notions of habitus and field can help to elucidate this point. Bourdieu sees fields as a separate social universe having own laws of functioning independent of those of politics and economy” (p. 58). However, a field is also seen here as structure-in-practice, meaning that this is a world of relationships and containing social positions that can only be defined in against the other. Meaning that it is a “peopled world,” where structured practices determine “who” and “what” takes place there. In other words, figured worlds supply “the contexts of meaning for actions, cultural productions, performances, disputes, for the understandings that people develop to direct their own behavior in these worlds” (p. 60).
Since the underlying assumption about identity in this theory is that people are formed in practice, we can ask questions like: what does it mean to be an ethnic minority immigrant college student? From this perspective, these meanings are context dependent, formed in local practice and draw up on histories of practice within schools, communities and households. Additionally, they draw on the identity outcomes related to social practices like ethnicity, race, economic and gender, which are shaped by the larger social structures. However too much focus on structure without the individual points to an overly structurally deterministic explanation for what happens in schools and within diverse learning settings. These theorists argue for recognizing the dialectic between agency and structure as a means to understand how people form identities in, through and across social practices.

In addition,

Inden (cited in Holland et al., 1998, p. 42) defines human agency as:

… the realized capacity of people to act upon their world and not only to know about or give personal or intersubjective significance to it. That capacity is the power of people to act purposively and reflectively, in more or less complex interrelationships with one another, to reiterate and remake the world in which they live, in circumstances where they may consider different courses of action possible and desirable, though not necessarily from the same point of view.

Because figured worlds “rest upon people’s abilities to form and be formed in collectively realized ‘as if’ realms” (Holland et al., p. 49), as individuals construct identities they are informed of the appropriate content and practices available within them. With respect to learning, participants are given a sense of what is possible, right and acceptable for learners to do in these spaces. The figured world of academic learning is constructed through interactions
between learners, teachers, friends and other relationships that support local understandings about what learning is, what appropriate and acceptable ways of doing learning are, and what does it means to be a “learner.” In the context of college, the figured world of learning can enable or constrain learners’ abilities to experiment with definitions of learning, and explore the boundaries of what constitutes learning itself (Rahm & Gonzalves, 2012). However, figured worlds also overlap, so that the figured worlds of academic learning and immigrant life can become intermingled in complex ways that can constitute ethnic minority immigrant students’ positioning of themselves. In light of this, identity construction focuses on the various ways that the students engage in *self-authoring* (Holland et al., 1998).

Holland et al. (1998) underscore that an identity involves an individual acting with agency to author him or herself, while being simultaneously acted upon by social others. Viewing identity and agency as transformation (within practice) means seeing the self as “bringing about a new sense of who we are” (Urrieta, 2007). Along these lines (as influenced by Holland and Bakhtin), change also happens for the society, in terms of how new identities are created and transform out of “figured worlds.” Likewise, joint activity with others can cause a shift in meaning, for example, of an object, motive or goal, therefore resulting in the construction of new meanings. This also involves a re-making of oneself and one’s behavior, which according to Holland allows for feedback from the social world, or what is described as world making.

At this level, identities are described as multiple in nature, ever-shifting and derived from the figured-worlds people engage with, rooted in social activity and the relations between them. Drawing on Bakhtin’s notions of heteroglossia and polyphony (multiple voices) allows Holland and others to explain the idea of multiple identities. These identities are orchestrated within text and speech, as one tells others *who they are*. According to Holland et al. (1998, p. 3), “they tell
themselves and then try to act as though they are who they say they are.” Holland et al. (1998) explain this as heteroglossia. In other words, words we use to explain ourselves are already in use by others, for their purposes, which we appropriate and use for our own intentions in a complex process of (self) orchestration. We author the world and ourselves through our ongoing use of speech genres in an ongoing dialogical process of addressivity, in which we expect a response from others (within the figured world(s)). Our awareness of others and our use of genre are what underpin our agency and choice.

In the field of mathematics learning, Solomon (2007) uses the concepts of self-authoring and the orchestration of multiple voices to understand how women account for who they are in relation to mathematics. More specifically her study examines how students use and address the issues of struggle both as themes in their accounts of schooling. In her research, students create figured depictions (reflexive accounts) of selves as “mathematics learners against the odds,” therefore orchestrating these odds into a single voice, which Solomon portrays as their source of personal agency.

In a similar way, identities can be seen from Leontiev’s perspective through the multiple motives and subjectivities we encounter through engagement in a multitude of everyday activities. In this approach, the organization of “self” happens through prioritizing one’s activities as “leading” on the basis that they are more developmentally significant than others (Urrieta, 2007). Along these lines, agency is a capacity to identify the goals at which one is directing one’s action and to evaluate whether one had been successful (Black, 2010).

Black et al. (n.d.) presents the example of how the ‘energy’ to persist with mathematics may be manifest in a developing of a “leading” identity (Stetsenko, 2004), which enables the individual to ‘see’ mathematics activity as relevant to their adult life beyond the school walls or
to their social life beyond mathematics. Outlined in this statement is the idea that maintaining a reflexive awareness of one’s identities can evoke change or a ‘refiguring’ in line with a leading identity (self-regulation). Black et al. (2010) examined statements made by mathematics students about new and changing motives towards math learning. They found that students’ personal meanings about the purpose of mathematics influenced their self-understandings as math learners. The findings showed that some motives and activities were more important to these students than others, and that a shift in identity comes about when the individual reflects on their new leading activity and the implicated motives. The researchers posit that it is these hierarchized motives that then become a driving force behind students’ explorations of new mathematics learning experiences and the development of mathematics-related goals. This in turn shapes how students develop new motives for engagement in these and other new mathematics-related activities, thus creating a novel type of self-directed learning trajectory.

**Refigured storylines.** Figured worlds are continuously constituted by the prevailing storylines and images of how to appropriately perform and be recognized as an acceptable or “good” student (Gonzalves & Seiler, 2012). Figured worlds are the “socially and culturally constructed realms of interpretation in which particular characters and actors our recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 52). Gee (2000) contends that figured notions can be likened to those taken-for-granted theories about the way things are, and allow us to construct conventional pictures or stories over time as we participate in various contexts, activities, use language, and material objects, which we mobilize to help us understand or act in a given situation.

When asked to describe themselves, people often recount their experiences, ideas, feelings, values, dreams, and so on and construct the self they perceive themselves to be, as well
as the self they think others perceive them to be, in addition to the self they hope to become. They narrate depictions told from their own points of view and while also attempting to entertain, inform, invent, defend, confirm, or challenge certain ideations. These narrations tend to fall in line with accounts of the past, present, or future and are like fragments strung together for the purpose of reflecting on their lives. In telling these stories people communicate to others who they see themselves in the moment. Also, people tell and retell accounts in an effort to form and reform a meaningful self in the telling (Kane, 2012). People tell many different stories about themselves, which are populated by an array of actors are characters who take on specific roles, assert particular values and locate themselves within “as if” worlds (Holland et al., 1998). Kane (2012) believes that the stories and narratives people tell become the context in which to construct their identities. In these accounts people make sense of themselves and are made sense of by others in a relationship to the particular people, places, events, material objects and semiotic systems. Stories allow people to create multiple identities by dialogically positioning themselves within storylines (Davies & Harre, 1990).

Moreover, when people tell stories, they are told for a particular audience in order to make meaning of the selves within a particular context and for a particular purpose. In this way, listeners are actors involved in hearing, responding, asking questions and assisting in the co-construction of stories as well. In the telling, both the teller and the listener shape and are shaped by the stories (Kane, 2012). As participants within figured worlds we create relational identities, positional identities and figurative identities, which are “claims to and identification with social categories and positions of privilege relative to those with whom we are interacting” (Holland et al., 1998, p. 127). Relational identities “have to do with how one identifies one’s position relative to others” and are filtered through one’s notions of feeling comfortable or constrained. Positional
identities “have to do with the day-to-day and on-the-ground relations of power, deference and entitlement, social affiliation and distance—with the social interactional, social relational structures of the lived world” (Holland et al. 1998, p. 127). Comparatively, figurative identities “have to do with the stories, acts, and characters that make the world a cultural world” (Holland et al. 1998, p. 127).

The way in which individuals negotiate subject positions is referred to as positioning (Davies & Harre, 1990), which is described as the discursive process whereby identities are embedded within joint conversations and are produced within participants’ co-constructed storylines. When people are positioned and position themselves, they do so by accepting, rejecting, negotiating, or modifying/inventing the subject positions on offer (Holland et al., 1998). This work is done when individuals make a bid to be recognized as a certain kind of person, thus taking up the storyline of the learner in an appropriate and acceptable way (Gee, 2005).

In Gee’s (2000) terms, a successful bid to be recognized as a certain kind of person, in this case a learner, by meaningful others, is a means by which students begin to think of themselves as learners and then make choices to pursue this kind of subject position in the future (Gonzalves & Seiler, 2012). Carlone and Johnson (2007) have examined the notion of recognition in their study of the intersections of competence, gender and science identities. They argue that a key concept of science identity is that students’ performances be recognized as credible by both the individual doing the performance, and the social others in the social field who recognize these performances as legitimate acts of science.

The social practice approach (1998) also allows us to focus on the dialogic relationship inherent to positioning and subjectivities, in particular, how subjectivities are created in response
to available positions. Both Nasir, Snyder, Shah and Ross (2012) and Nasir and Cooks (2009) consider the mediating role of cultural resources in shaping positionality and agency within figured worlds. This includes relational resources, amounting to the interpersonal connections to others in the setting and ideational resources, referring to the “ideas about oneself and one’s relationship to and place in the practice in the world, as well as ideas about what is valued and what is good” (Nasir et al., 2012 p. 44). Taking identity in this way allows us to explore the manner in which cultural tools (including story-telling) are picked up or ignored and hence constitute students’ identity work. Also, identity work is grounded in learners’ histories and figured worlds and the kinds of meanings that learners have constructed of their worlds given their past and current experiences. In the life course perspective, agency is also seen as the dynamic interplay between past influences and experiences, engagement with the present, and orientations towards the future (Ecclestone, 2007). In other words, agency is rooted in past achievements, understandings and patterns of action and is something that people “do” in varying contexts. These contexts can be historical, socioeconomic, as well as institutional.

**Conclusion about identity.** Drawing together these approaches, seeing agency as interconnected with identity and learning is a clear way to understand how thinking, acting and learning are always imbued with sociocultural dimensions, and also constrained by their social and cultural contexts. Therefore, when we examine agency we must take into account the way people enact agency within sociocultural practices inclusive of discourses. These views are important to this study, placing emphasis on the necessity of creating a collaborative space (figured world) where ethnic minority immigrant college students can bring into and leverage their cultural ways of knowing in shared activities and dialog where they can potentially foster novel means of authoring themselves and their learning identities.
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN

This dissertation sought to gain a better understanding of ethnic minority immigrant students’ perceptions of their cultural funds of knowledge in relation to learning in college and to explore how students draw upon and leverage their cultural knowledge as resources in developing potential learning identities. This section will review the methods used to explore the research questions. It will then offer an overview of the study with attention to the data collection and data analysis procedures used. Also included is my rationale for seeking an activity-based method like Photovoice, information about the study setting, the participants and methods of recruitment, early study planning, the Photovoice method used in data collection (including group discussions and one-on-one interviews), my early research attempts and gaining informed consent.

This study utilized a qualitative research design. In this approach, the goal is to understand the meaning people have constructed of their world and their lived experiences and to examine the social situation and practices that make up the figured worlds of the participants. In doing so, the goal is to achieve a holistic rather than a reductionist understanding of everyday experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 1998, 2009; Patton, 1990; Schram, 2003; Schwandt, 2000). In qualitative research, eliciting participants’ emic views (insider perspective) (Wilkin & Liamputtong, 2010) is of central importance. The emic view is about the personal interpretations of his or her reason, value or beliefs ands. This is opposed to the etic view (outsider perspective) where the researcher interprets this belief. Beyond these reasons, values and beyond these two views, the researcher listens to, values and empowers the perspectives of participants in research in taking a participatory approach. This approach is appropriate for this study because it allows for elucidating the complexities of the everyday
experiences and meanings that ethnic minority immigrant students bring to school from the contexts of home and community. Drawing on participants’ own perspectives and reflections is central to this study. Not only do their perspectives become a major source of data, but also through constant dialogue, participants become a source of verification for their own interpretations of the data. Such a participatory approach privileges the beliefs and values of the participants.

In considering an appropriate research method to elicit participants’ views about their everyday immigrant and educational experiences and their funds of knowledge, the following principles were employed:

1. Find an activity or activities that would allow students to actively tap into their cultural knowledge, values and beliefs in a way that was not heavily structured, or felt like course work.
2. Include students as producers, interpreters and doers of knowledge, as researchers, and analyzers of each other’s work.
3. Find an activity that would allow students to reflect on their everyday experiences as immigrants and students, and which would also allow them to express themselves, their opinions and creativity.
4. Find an activity that could link together the principles of funds of knowledge and identity development.
5. Allow participants to see the figured world of learning in a different way, because they were not constrained by the rules and norms of this context.

The purpose of this study was not to teach students how to take photographs or short videos but to provide them with the opportunity to take the types of images they perceived to be
representative of their life stories and experiences. As an educator, familiar with the everyday responsibilities of the college students at Hostos Community College, I wanted to find an activity and a means of data collection that would not replicate the classroom experience per se. As such, Photovoice was chosen for the purpose of getting to this knowledge by allowing students to see themselves as participant researchers, in a way that is not only creative but would allow them to construct new reflections of their everyday experiences, which they could share with others in a space that would value their unique perspectives. This is a concept that is left unaddressed in both the traditional and current literature on funds of knowledge. Using the Photovoice method, data were collected via three main techniques: digital photography with captioning, group discussions and in-depth interviews.

The Photovoice Method

Photovoice is an innovative means of understanding participant’s point of view. Developed by Wang and Burris (1997) in their study of Women’s reproductive health issues in Yunnan, China. Photovoice is a community and participatory action research methodology that has been used in a variety of community health projects in the United States. This methodology draws upon several theoretical approaches including community-based participatory research, critical education theory, feminist theory, and documentary photography by using participants’ authorship in representation and documentation of issues, by giving a “voice” to members of communities via camera use (Wang & Burris, 1997), whose perspectives may not typically be represented in official decision-making (or texts) so that they may have a say in recording and representing “their community’s strengths and concerns” (Chio & Fandt, 2007).

This approach elicits participants’ existing knowledge and experience in a way that legitimizes and values their knowledge and experiences. In some way participants are always
‘doing’ research, and in a participatory sense they are, along with researchers, constructing the meanings that are interpreted and turned into ‘findings’ (Wilkin & Liamputtong, 2010). Wang (1997) depicts several distinctive contributions of the Photovoice method for research. As a method, Photovoice enables researchers to perceive the world from the viewpoint of the people who lead lives that are different from those traditionally in control of the means for imagining the world. As a participatory method, Photovoice values the knowledge put forth by people, as a vital source of expertise and values that the community thinks is important. It uses visual images as a way to assess people’s needs, opinions and stories.

The process of Photovoice can also affirm the ingenuity and perspective of often-marginalized groups. Photovoice is accessible to anyone who can learn to handle a camera (or in the case of this study, a smart phone), and it does not presume the ability to read or write. This method facilitates the sampling of different social and behavioral settings. Participants can record different settings, moments, ideas that may not be available to researchers. Also, cameras (smartphones) can act, as an unusually motivating and appealing tool for participants. Using them in this way can be a source of individual and communal pride and ownership. Included in this method is the ability to gain feedback about the very process of data collection from participants themselves. This method also allows participants to bring the explanations, ideas, or stories of other community members into the storytelling process. More important, Photovoice allows for the establishing of relationships between the participants and the researcher and, participants and their community and families, including neighbors and friends. Likewise this method enables people to detect not only their community’s needs but also its assets. While photographs can represent moments of loss and grief, they can also represent moments of celebration and strength and can elicit stories about a community’s imagination, resources and
capabilities. Finally, drawing on a Freirian perspective, (e.g., Freire, 2000), the photographs produced, and the issues discussed can be used to stimulate social action. Photovoice can be a tool to reach, inform, and organize people in the community to prioritize their concerns and discuss problems and create solutions. Along these lines, Photovoice goes beyond the conventional role of needs assessment or data collection by inviting people to become advocates for their own and their community’s well-being.

Using group discussion, the Photovoice method gives participants a forum to share their experiences with others and by extension the wider community by displaying and discussing and reflecting on their images. More important, Photovoice allows participants to bring themselves to a novel experience. Photovoice is a method of research that involves participants taking photographs, which are then used as a basis for group discussions and interviews. The discussion of the photographs allows participants to give understanding and interpretations to their own images (Wang, 1999) without participants’ understandings being distorted as a result of fitting data into a pre-determined paradigm. In this way, we hear and understand how people make meaning and construct what matters to them (Wang, 2005).

Wang and Burris (1997) presented four goals of the Photovoice method. They are to:

- Encourage discussion around the topic.
- Create a safe environment for the discussion and reflection.
- Help mobilize people to recognize a need for action in certain areas of their lives or communities.
- Allow their ideas to be disseminated to wider community to facilitate change.\(^\text{14}\)

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\(^\text{14}\) This study employs the first three of the above four goals. In an attempt to maintain participant privacy and confidentiality the photographs collected will not be disseminated to others outside the study group.
Uses of the Photovoice Method: A Literature Review

The Photovoice method has been used for several purposes, including in the study of health issues, marginalized communities, indigenous peoples, women and immigrants. For example, Booth and Booth (2003) used Photovoice with a group of mothers with learning disabilities. Heery (2013) used Photovoice to examine the recovery process of individuals addicted to narcotic substances. Freedman et al. (2014) used Photovoice with a grounded theory approach to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about the sociocultural factors that facilitate or hinder a healthy community environment. Several recent studies have attempted to utilize the Photovoice method with immigrant populations (Streng, Rhodes, Ayala, Eng, Arceo, & Phipps, 2004; Cushing & Love, 2013); these studies along with several others have attempted to extend the purview of Photovoice into the area of education (Fleer & Quinones, 2009).

In terms of the immigrant experience, Streng et al. (2004) found Photovoice to be an appropriate method in documenting the immigrant experiences of Latina adolescent students (Project Realidad Latina). Adolescent students were asked to participate in a Photovoice project that involved four photo assignments. Each assignment was guided by a series of questions related to students’ perceptions, experiences, and ideas about solutions, regarding their experiences as immigrant high school students. The researchers were able to identify several themes that were of particular interest to the students. The method allowed adolescents to discuss how being an immigrant represented to them a limited future in the pursuit of higher education, academic achievement and opportunities to compete for good jobs. In addition, they felt a sense of rejection and reported feeling poorly treated and rejected by school administrators, teachers, non-Latino classmates, and the community as a result their limited English skills, their ethnicity and, the amount of time they had lived in the United States. The project resulted in students
creating an exhibit of their photos, which raised an awareness of these issues among the parents of these Latino students, local community leaders, service providers, schoolteachers and school administrators.

Cushing and Love (2013) used the photovoice method, including digital story telling as a means of engaging Latino immigrant students in a service-learning college course in a majority Euro-American university, over a three semester period. They introduced these digital photography techniques to give these young people the opportunity to use familiar technology—digital cameras, group discussions, narrative videos and photo/video editing—which would provide them with more options through which they could capture and share their experiences. They asserted that these techniques would empower youth to contest the dominant social stereotypes by relying on insider knowledge of their lives (Messias et al., 2008). These researchers found that student engagement in this service-learning course did improve. They also concluded that developing courses that explicitly focus on how culture and ethnicity impacts learning, and that courses should be designed to enable students to develop the skills that enable these experiences to be effective and meaningful.

In assessing the uses of informal knowledge in the classroom, Fleer and Quinones (2009) used Photovoice techniques to examine children’s everyday academic concepts of technology with a view to gaining insights into the funds of knowledge of technology available within children’s home and community. Children participated in a series of walkabouts to photograph examples of technology around their home and community, and school grounds in school, home and community. Students were subsequently interviewed about their photographs. Children’s photographs displayed a range of technological knowledge and artifacts and, the majority of photos were taken in the home.
A study of high school female-students’ conceptions of mathematics and learning mathematics using Photovoice with four creative high school girls struggling with mathematics (Harkness & Stallworth, 2013), addressed the following questions: 1) What is mathematics? 2) What is your ideal learning environment? 3) What things impede your learning of mathematics? Using within-case and cross-case analyses of the photographs and interview responses, analyses were conducted using feminist theory (“Women’s Ways of Knowing,” Belenky. (1986)) that described student’s identity positions occurring in some relative degree of disconnection from learning. The authors revealed that each student understood himself or herself to be in relation to mathematics, particularly in relation to level of disconnection; for example, silenced knower, received knower and “fragily” subjective knower. The photovoice method was useful in showing the types of relationships that struggling students have with mathematics.

Using the same premise, photovoice can be used with ethnic minority immigrant students at Hostos Community College to provide insight into shared immigrant experiences and how they position themselves in relation to learning at the college level.

**Limitations of the photovoice method.** When data is subjective there will always be limitations. In her 2000 study of community action among homeless people, Wang stated that it could not be ascertained whether the individual’s experiences represented those of others in the community. However, one of the main focuses of this study is to present individual perspectives about communal experiences, because this view values immigrant students’ perspectives of their everyday life experiences. In addition, Wang mentions that another she faced in using Photovoice methods is that there may be limits as to what is observable, with respect to “missing” picture content. Wilkin and Liamputtong (2010) also state that sometimes when photographs are presented at group discussions, there is a possibility that very little discussion
will take place regarding what was not displayed in the picture. As a result, discussions can be limited to what pictures visualize instead of what they do not. These authors argue that this can be overcome by letting interviews (and in this case, group discussions) be unstructured and by exploring participants’ perspectives beyond just what was photographed. Therefore, they contend that a picture is only a small part of the scene. Yet, they also state that this problem can be resolved through engaging participants in in-depth narratives. In turn participants’ stories and pictures can fill in those parts of the scene, which are not photographed.

**Rationale**

Using Photovoice techniques followed with the original funds of knowledge research conducted by Gonzalez et al. (2005). This original study utilized an ethnographic approach with oral history interviews. The guiding interview questions and Photovoice activities for the current study were inspired by the questions used in the original funds of knowledge study. However, the key difference between the two studies is the unit of analysis. The original study focused on the families of K-12 children of classrooms, and the teacher functioned as the researcher. However, this current study addressed these issues among adult learners, an unexplored population in the original work. Additionally, this study attempted to go beyond the original funds of knowledge research by attempting to actively engage students themselves in recognizing and using funds of knowledge, and shed light on the role that these enactments play in their constructions of learning identities (through the use of Photovoice activities, that is leveraging their funds of knowledge within different learning spaces. By ideologically maintaining the same ideology of the original funds of knowledge research, this study aims to contribute to and extend the original theory.

**Early Research Attempts**
My early research attempts and interests have heavily influenced my current research approach. My initial attempts at studying the concept of learning identity started with a small project conducted with first-, second- and generation 1.5 British West Indian graduate students. Using a snowball technique of recruitment, I recruited 6 graduate students (five women and one man). In terms of nationality, 4 of the participants were from Jamaica, one was from Guyana, and the other participant had a parent from Trinidad and Tobago. The students ranged in ages between mid-twenties to mid-forties and they had lived in New York City for an average of 11 years. Additionally, the students held several major areas, including Biology, Chemistry, Forensic Health and Psychology.

During this extended conversation, I piloted several open-ended questions about the topic of cultural learning beliefs. The purpose of piloting these open-ended questions among this sample of immigrant students was a way to explore what ideas and knowledge British West Indian immigrant students held about learning, including its purpose and value. This study revealed that within students’ concepts of learning were several embedded cultural values. There were several parallels between this study and the current one. Primarily, in both studies, student beliefs about learning were intersected with notions of family history, familial expectations, reciprocity, redressing limited educational opportunities in their family and maintaining a drive to succeed. In regards to immigrant identity, participants spoke about their acculturative experiences, namely—the loss of culture, being hard-working immigrants, and having new opportunities in America.

15 Second-generation immigrant describes someone who was born in the U.S. but who has at least one parent who was foreign-born. Generation 1.5 describes those children who arrived at age 6 or later (but prior to adolescence.
This pilot study also shed light on the notion of *confianza*, which is the mutual trust and connectedness that immigrants perceive as members of immigrant communities—which allows them to engage in acts of social exchange (and dialogue). This concept was examined further in the current study. More important, the findings from this study allowed me to generate a series of open-ended and semi-structured questions for use in the current study. Furthermore, in both studies, participant narratives depicted the impact of race in the immigrant educational experience.

This pilot study had several limitations. Mainly, it consisted of one extended focus group (a conversation that lasted for approximately 4 hours), and the information gathered can only be representative of this particular group of students. In addition, this study only included one ethnic minority immigrant group.

In 2013, I piloted a mini-survey based on themes drawn from the focus group study conducted in 2010, along with new information gathered from the literature on immigration and funds of knowledge (see Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2009; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 2005). This mini-survey was conducted online using the service Survey Monkey. It was piloted with 47 community college students from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds. I used this survey to assess the salience of the relevant topic among this student population, to evaluate the effectiveness of the questions, and to identify any issues with the survey questions used, such as, readability and ease of comprehension. I found this process quite useful in helping me to construct the format of the present study, and it led me to finding the literature on the Photovoice method. I found these survey measures limiting, primarily because they did not engage students in reflecting on their cultural knowledge. These measures did not present students with an opportunity to actively engage with and creatively express their beliefs.
and values about learning, nor did they provide them with an avenue through which they could construct notions of their learning identities.

The Setting

Community Colleges play an important role in educating disadvantaged, less academically prepared students, including racial and ethnic minorities, low-income students, first-generation college attendees, and adult learners. In America, community colleges serve nearly half (43 percent) of all U.S. undergraduates (Kim & Diaz, 2013). By virtue of their open-access policies, affordability, proximity, and wide range of course offerings, including English as a second language (ESL), these institutions play a crucial part in educating America’s newcomer immigrants (Szelenyi, 2002). New York is currently one of the top five states in terms of the number of first- and second-generation immigrant immigrants (Batalova & Terrazas, 2010). The City University of New York (CUNY) reports having had a continued increase in the number of immigrant students across the various campuses among the foreign-born immigrant student population. In 1990, 33 percent of CUNY’s entering student population was foreign born; by 1997 this population had increased to 48 percent. In general, the foreign born population was no more likely to enroll in two-year programs than the native born population, but when the data are disaggregated by region of origin, significant differences in enrollment can be seen. For example, students from Asia and Russia were more concentrated in the bachelor’s degree programs, whereas entrants from South and Central America and the Caribbean were slightly more represented in associate degree programs. In addition, this data revealed a distinction related to whether a student graduated from a high school program in the U.S. or a foreign country. Students who held foreign high school diplomas were more likely to be enrolled in two-year programs, while those who attended high school in the U.S. had higher rates of enrollment in
bachelor’s programs (Teranishi, Suárez-Orozco, & Suárez-Orozco, 2011).

Although much literature on the immigrant student population focuses on enrollment patterns, there is less available information on students’ educational attainment. However, research shows that immigrant students primarily use community colleges as a stepping-stone towards a four-year institution. For immigrant students with language proficiency challenges, the community college acts as an integral place to strengthen their language skills. Bailey and Weininger (2000) suggest that once students develop these skills they are able to accumulate credits and are more likely to earn degrees.

Located in New York City, María de Hostos Community College is one of the 24 colleges within The City University of New York (CUNY) system. It was established in 1968 when a diverse group of community leaders, students, educators, activists and elected officials demanded the creation of a higher education space to meet the needs of the South Bronx. Its founding constituted the first occasion in New York that a two-year, public, open admissions, transitional language learning college was deliberately sited in a neighborhood like the South Bronx, then, as now, the nation’s poorest congressional district. Hostos offers twenty-seven degree options and certificate programs, including academic transfer, and career/technical training, as well as numerous non-credit continuing education offerings. Student enrollments at Hostos and by extension the CUNY system, tends to reflect the demographic makeup of New York City’s larger population. According to the fall 2012 student enrollment data, Hostos’ unduplicated headcount was 6,455, with 4,452 full time equivalent students. The number of adult and continuing education students was 10,986 in 2012. Students at Hostos are ethnic minority immigrants who are predominantly Hispanic and Black, and upwards of 90 percent of the students report speaking a language other than English at home.
In fall 2012, one hundred and twenty countries and territories and 78 languages were represented on the campus. Hostos is increasingly serving incoming students who are generation 1.5 and second-generation immigrants. Still, many students who enter Hostos hold GEDs and foreign high school diplomas. Nearly all students require remediation or developmental education in reading, writing, or math, and one third require it in all three areas. Within CUNY, Hostos has the highest percentage of remedial or developmental students, and educates about half of CUNY’s triple remedial or developmental student population. Additionally, Students at Hostos face serious economic and educational challenges in their pursuit towards gaining higher education. The large majority (over 70 percent) of the student population has a household income below $30,000 and qualifies for financial aid. These tremendous hurdles to higher education are significant—about 35 percent of Hostos students drop out after their first year.  

Over the years Hostos has steadily graduated an increasing number of students. In the 1997-1998 period, the school graduated 416 students, of which 151 or 36.3 percent were Black, 227 or 54.6 percent were Hispanic and 22 or 5.3 percent were White. Of these students, 79.6 percent were female, 14.4 percent held a foreign high school diploma, 24 percent held a U.S. high diploma and 25.7 percent held a G.E.D. Interestingly, 35.8 percent of these graduates were listed as having “unknown” graduation background. These graduates maintained an average GPA of 3.03 and took an average of 4.325 years to graduate (but these years do not imply continuous enrollment).

During the 2012-2013 period, the school graduated 820 students, of which 252 or 30.7 percent were Black, 477 or 58.2 percent were Hispanic and 46 or 5.6 percent were White. Of  

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these students 68.3 percent were female, 21.3 percent held a foreign high school diploma, 58.8 percent held a U.S. high school diploma and 15.4 percent held a G.E.D. Also, of these graduates 14.1 percent had taken an ESL course, 37.4 percent had taken an English remedial course, 59.1 percent had taken a mathematics remedial course and 15.7 percent had taken a course in Spanish.

For the purposes of the present study, the setting is ideal because it specifically considers the target population noted in the literature review and the overall goal of the project with this specific group—having ethnic minority immigrant college students themselves identify their cultural knowledge that are relevant to learning in college, how they leverage these funds of knowledge in academic learning, and create learning identities. In light of the assumption that immigrant households hold valuable resources and knowledge that can be leveraged in academic learning environments, and the exploratory and inquisitive nature of the photovoice methodology to provide much insight on this topic, the setting is conducive to rich data collection. The digital images, discussions and narratives collected should be able to reflect the complexity of the immigrant experience and its intersecting factors associated with cultural knowledge, academic engagement and achievement within these specific minority student groups.

**Participants**

Seven young adult and ethnic minority immigrant college students participated in this study, which became entitled the ethnic minority immigrant photovoice project—Danny, Danielle, Maria, Antonio, Fanny, Linda and Jada (five women and two men)—with their ages ranging between 18 to 31 years of age. Initially, there were eight participants in the study, but one of them, John, decided to withdraw from the study after three group sessions. Either the students themselves or their relatives came from Ghana, Jamaica, Chad, Spain and Trinidad. Of

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17 For the purposes of this dissertation and participant privacy and confidentiality, all participant names have been replaced with pseudonyms.
this original group, five were first generation immigrants and the remaining three were second-
generation immigrants. At the time of the study, the students had lived in New York for an
average seven years. This is with the exception Jada and Danny, who were born in the United
States, and resided within the boroughs of The Bronx, Brooklyn and Manhattan; so they all
commuted to the school on a regular basis.

All the participants were matriculated students at Hostos, and with the exception of Jada
who was in her final year at the college, were either in their first year or second year at the
college. What is notable about these year distinctions is that at the community college level, most
students do not graduate within the designated two-year mark, but rather students can take
between 4 and 7 years to graduate. The students primarily pursued Liberal Arts majors.
However, they all maintained potential 4-year degree major choices including Physical Therapy,
Social Work, Dental Hygiene, Law and Political Science.

Of the students who “signed-up” for the study, only one of them withdrew, bringing the
participants down to seven. In regards to this participant, I attempted to contact him to find out
about his absence from the group. He agreed to meet with me to discuss this matter but never
showed for the meeting. After this, I assumed that he had withdrawn from the study.

**Participant recruitment and pre-study planning.** In early October 2014, I gained
approval from the college to start the study and proceeded to recruit the participants. In addition,
I secured a classroom on the college campus to have our meetings.

**Access.** As an Adjunct Lecturer at Hostos Community College, I had established
relationships with several colleagues, who teach in the department of Behavioral and Social
Sciences. I approached several of these professors about making announcements in their classes.
Also, I followed up by sending each professor an invitational email. This invitational email
confirmed a convenient time to make the class visit, to provide more information about the study and a copy of the recruitment flyer.

Recruitment. The sampling for this study was purposive and used several techniques. For example, announcement flyers were posted on noticeboards around the Hostos Community College campus. The flyer had several questions that informed interested participants about the criteria for participating in the study. They were:

- Do you use Facebook and/or Instagram?
- Do you own a smartphone?
- Do you like taking photos and videos with your smartphone?
- Are you a current student at Hostos Community College?
- Are you either a first- or second-generation immigrant?
- Can you commit to attending six weekly group meetings and an interview? (This was changed to 1-hour bi-weekly meetings).

In addition, by word of mouth, I informed fellow professors at Hostos Community College about the study and asked their permission to announce the study in their classes. Also, I made announcements in classrooms.

After two weeks and 20 in-class announcements, I had ten interested students (who responded via email). I decided to arrange a pre-study meet up with students, which would give the students a chance to meet one another. I contacted the students via email about the meet-up. Seven interested students attended this meeting, one student could not make the time, and the other two students decided that they could not participate in the study at all because of time constraints. I continued to place flyers around the campus and revisited several classes and student groups for students for an additional a week after this meeting. At least three weeks after
the study had begun, two other interested students responded via email; yet again, time constraints played a major role in barring them from participating. Additionally, I felt that the eight participants were already beginning to bond at this point.

*Pre-study meet-up.* This meeting was important because it also gave the students the opportunity to learn more about the study, and its requirements, to get to meet one another. Additionally, the meeting allowed the students to decide on the upcoming group meeting dates.

An interesting deviation surfaced when students were not able to commit to meeting for a two-hour block of time on a weekly basis. They were also unwilling to meet on days that they did not have classes at the school or on weekends. This was understandable because several of the students worked, and it was challenging to ask them to take more time out of their schedules to attend the meetings. This made setting the meeting dates a difficult task. A compromise was made when they decided to meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1 to 2 pm. They stated that it was more feasible for them to show up consistently if the meetings fit into their established “free times.” This meant that we would meet twice a week for one hour instead of once a week for two hours. I was not opposed to the idea. The other factor that affected the students’ decision was that school was already in session, as the semester had started in late August of that year, and the students already had their class schedules set for the semester. So, it became my responsibility to make the project work within their time schedule. A compromise was made and we agreed to divide the group sessions into two one-hour bi-weekly sessions that would meet on Tuesday and Thursdays from 1-2pm. In reality, we met for 17 bi-weekly sessions, which includes the training workshop and wrap-up session.

It should be noted that the purpose of this study was not to generalize findings to all ethnic minority immigrant college students but, rather to explore, in an in-depth manner, the
perspectives and experiences of a small group of ethnic minority immigrant students and to
develop a theory of their experiences, which could be possibly expanded on in subsequent
studies. Wang (1999) suggests that a group of seven to ten participants as an ideal sample size
for Photovoice projects. She contended that a group of seven to ten individuals is large enough to
offer a variety of experiences and ideas, yet allows enough time for each person to contribute in a
meaningful way. In addition, Wang (1999) posits that groups of this size are small enough to
allow members to feel safe enough to share and take part in discussions, while simultaneously
allowing them to foster a sense of group commitment and belonging. Furthermore, because this
study uses multiple qualitative data collection techniques (i.e., Photovoice activities, groups
discussions, one-on-one interviews, student journals and student drawings) to answer the main
research questions, the sample population does not need to be very large.

Data Collection

The Photovoice methods used in this study involve the participants taking photographs
and then participating in group discussions and in-depth interviews. Photovoice allowed the
participants to be producers, interpreters, circulators, exhibitors and social analysts of their own
and other’s images (Luttrell, 2010). Based on the participatory approach, the Photovoice method
is useful because of its relative unobtrusiveness and empowering research style, which allows the
participants’ realities and experiences to be articulated without being subjected to intrusive pre-
constructed questions and intensive measurements (Wilkin & Liamputtong, 2010). Data are then
extrapolated from participants’ own narratives that are prompted by the photographs they have
taken, this data are full of rich narrative and visual descriptions. In addition this method is useful
because it allows data to be collected from various sources. In the case of this study, data was
collected using multiple sources, which include digital photographs, group discussions, interviews and field notes.

In this Photovoice project, participants engaged in the following activities:

- Attend an informal orientation session to discuss the project; attend a series of weekly group discussions and participate in Photovoice activities; use smart phones to take photographs.
- Record through digital photography (photographs and short videos) the realities of their experiences for each photo assignment.
- Upload their digital photography onto the shared Facebook page with captions.
- Share and discussed their digital photography on each photo assignment during group sessions to examine emerging issues and themes.

**Digital photographs: the use of smartphones.** This data collection methods used in this study borrowed from the tenets of the Photovoice methodology proposed by Wang & Burris (1994) and other studies that have adapted the method in other areas of research. Participants were asked to take photos, using their smartphones, of three areas related to their immigrant and educational lives: home, school and community. Unlike original Photovoice studies that used single-use 35mm cameras to record images, in the current study, participants used smartphones with camera and Internet capabilities to take photographs and upload them online. In an era when most people have cell phones, a Facebook account, play video games online, and generally use multiple modes of multimedia technologies, engaging participants in the use technologies they already own and use seemed appropriate. Also, rapid changes in technology call for methods different from previous studies. Using digital photography allowed participants to instantaneously take photographs, caption them, and upload them onto Facebook—without
having to purchase a camera, develop images or print out photos. Also, using single-use disposable cameras seemed like it would create a delay in the time it take the participants to access theirs and others’ photographs. Additionally, this method would reduce the amount of time available for sorting of photographs, because of time it takes to process and develop the film used in point-and-shoot cameras.

**Photo-topics.** Each photo session was guided by a distinct theme or topic. For example, “in school,” “the community” and “the home.” These photo-topics were designed to guide participants’ photo-taking, and were derived from the funds of knowledge literature. Also, participants were guided by several open-ended questions, relevant to each particular photo topic. Participants also captioned their photographs and narrated their short videos.

**Private Facebook Page.** Participants uploaded all photographs of their choosing to a shared Facebook page. Participants captioned each picture that they choose to submit and edited these pictures in any way they see fit prior to submitting them to the shared Facebook page. Access to the shared Facebook page was limited to participants in the study. In order to access the Facebook page, participants used a link to the shared page sent via email—a link not shared with anyone. The Facebook page did not appear in any Facebook searches and the privacy settings for this page were set to "secret." Only members of the group saw the group listed on their Facebook homepage, and only group members could see who were in the group and what material members of the group had posted. Participants were not be allowed to invite, share access to, or share information from the private Facebook page. In addition, only participants could post information to the group Facebook page. Had participants withdrawn from the study they would not any longer have been able to access of Facebook page.

The Facebook page served several purposes in this study. It provided a large storage space
for digital photos. Facebook allows for continued access to the images taken by participants, which means that participants could add photos at any point during time of their assigned photopic topic. Also, using Facebook allowed for participants’ photographs along with their comments to be displayed in-vivo during group discussions.

The Current Study

For this study, the data was collected during the fall semester 2014 at Hostos Community college. Students were engaged in a series of bi-weekly discussions over a six-week period, followed by individual interviews, which were scheduled over a two-week period. For the study, students were given the primary tasks of taking digital photographs and short videos using their smartphones, captioning them (narrating videos) and uploading their images to the group’s shared Facebook page, and participating in bi-weekly group discussions.

Table 1: Data Collection Timeline and Related Activities

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IRB approval</td>
<td>Hostos IRB approval</td>
<td>Pre-study meet up</td>
<td>Bi-Weekly discussions</td>
<td>Bi-weekly discussions</td>
<td>Member checking (students read their Biosketches)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training workshop</td>
<td>2 Pile Sorting Sessions</td>
<td>Pile Sorting Session</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment at school</td>
<td>Early Group Sessions</td>
<td>Member checking of pile sorted themes</td>
<td>Conducted Individual Interviews</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permission from students &amp; Finalization of participants</td>
<td>Handed out Student Journals</td>
<td>Member checking of pile sorted themes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Walkabout</td>
<td>Student Journals</td>
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</table>

Reflections on Early Group Session and Study Progress

The first few sessions served as acclimating sessions because participating in a research project was an unfamiliar experience. It took the students some time to get used to the idea of
what they were being asked to do. The first two group meetings were orientation workshops, which served to familiarize the students with the project topic, the study’s objectives, and what was required of them as participants. The first workshop included a discussion about getting to know one’s cellphone, the role of participants, a discussion of how cellphones take pictures, a discussion about the group’s shared but closed Facebook page (connecting photographs with writing), and how to caption photographs. The students were also shown a video tutorial on how to take photos with a smartphone, which was followed by a discussion of taking responsible or ethical pictures. The second day of the workshop consisted of answering participant questions, a discussion of student funds of knowledge and a group walkabout (see Appendix B-1).

The students had several questions about the fact that they could not take pictures of people (in particular pictures with people’s face), and they were advised to take pictures of places instead. They found this idea somewhat strange. Possibly because like many of us who use cellphones for taking pictures, we use them primarily to take selfies and group images, rather than of spaces without people. Here, I was asking them to turn the camera away from themselves, and to document their surroundings, which I felt left them a little confused, at least in the beginning. Additionally, they were also informed that those images that did not follow the rules would be removed within a 24-hour period. It is worth noting that the students also had the option of taking short videos, however none of them chose to do so.

Participants were informed that there was no limit to the number of pictures they could take or upload onto the page per photo topic, yet they wanted a specific number that would be considered acceptable. This was not surprising to me, mainly because, they were students—and they seemed driven by a need “to get it right.” So, it was agreed upon that each student would upload a minimum of three images per photo topic to the Facebook page, which they felt was a
“doable” number. However across photo topics, many participants consistently took more than three images.

At the end of the workshop, students also received a photo topic worksheet, which contained a list of open-ended questions that would guide their photo taking for the first of three topics—school. Although they were given these worksheets for each new photo topic, I felt the participants wanted to be instructed, instead of them taking control of their own image taking. I believe this resulted because the study took place in a classroom on the campus, in addition to the students being aware of my position as a faculty member at the school, which was something that was discussed early on (in recruitment) although none of them were my former students. Furthermore, as a teacher, I find that students can become stymied when they perceive that they have “too much” freedom of choice, and this can prevent them from choosing at all.

The group goes on a walkabout. After the training sessions, I thought that photo taking and the weekly discussions would begin in earnest. However, the students had several questions and needed more clarification on the types of images were to be uploaded onto the shared Facebook page. They were also very much concerned with “getting it right,” and so I spent much time reassuring them that they were doing things correctly, in addition to convincing them to keep trying. This would be something that I found myself doing continually during the early group sessions. Yet, they still showed signs of not fully understanding what kinds of pictures to take or what should be uploaded. I don’t think it was because students were unfamiliar with uploading images to Facebook, but that they were unfamiliar with placing their images onto a shared group page. Additionally, I also think that these students, like many others, were unaccustomed to using this technology (Facebook) for uses other than for “fun.”
As stated earlier, at the beginning of the study the students were somewhat overwhelmed by having the freedom to take as many photos that they wanted and seemed unclear about what images to take (primarily because they were focused on “getting it right”). In order to help them to think about the types of images they could take and because we were working on the photo topic of school, we went on a walkabout of the campus and its surroundings. I asked them to meet me in front of the main campus building at the corner of 149th and Grand Concourse next to the train station, and then we walked. The photo topic worksheet questions guided our conversation. Our trek took us to the school’s museum, which was Jada’s idea. Several of the students had mentioned that they had never been to the museum (including myself) and a few of them even stated that they didn’t even know the school had a museum. They had a robust conversation about several pieces of artwork. Jada wanted us to see these paintings because she saw art as an important means of expression for her and she wanted to show the group several paintings by her art teacher. During the walkabout, they took several pictures, some of the school building, the bridge and the street corner and paintings, among many other things.

This walkabout allowed the students to understand that their images did not have to “get it right” mainly because there was no right or wrong image (with the exception of those with peoples’ faces). This activity allowed them to get more comfortable with taking images on a whole. Although I was there with them, I did not want to control the group’s movements and actions. Additionally, I consistently reminded them that there were no correct or incorrect pictures. I would also ask to think about whether they felt their images were relevant to the worksheet questions. This kind of scaffolding helped be more confident in their picture taking.

After students went on the walkabout, they got a grasp a better understanding that their images were “good enough.” Also, as the students began to see each other’s images on the
Facebook page, they felt less insecure about their own photographs. So the discussion sessions started to feel a lot more routine, maybe almost like a class, which was something that I really was trying to avoid. However, given the circumstances and location of the study setting, this was probably inevitable, especially, on the part of the students.

**Group discussions.** Soon each group session began to take place in a similar fashion. I had secured a “smart” classroom, which made it possible to display the shared Facebook page on a large screen. I would get to the classroom a few minutes before the meeting to set up the computer and projector. So, when the students entered the classroom they could see the latest content added to the page. When the students did enter the classroom, they would immediately start talking about the images they had uploaded (or did not upload) before that session, and elaborate on their intentions to upload their images as soon as possible.

The group discussions played a pivotal role in allowing me to examine students’ perceptions and experiences. Students were keen to take on a show-and-tell approach to the group discussions and guided them on a weekly basis, which was something that I anticipated would take place while planning the study. This meant that each student who wanted to “present” would go up to the front of the group, pull up their images on the Facebook page and describe them to the group. My role was to facilitate the discussion, and so I asked them the prepared SHOWeD (see appendix) questions, for example, “What is happening in this photograph?” and additional questions like, “What is important in this photograph?” and “What does this picture say about learning?” I would also ask them to clarify or expand on topics that were particularly related to learning or issues that the group seemed to become excited about.

During each group session, there were a few images that did seem to stick with the group, which sparked much conversation, sometimes leaning very heated moments. One such image
that comes to mind was Maria’s intersection image. This image shows the intersecting streets of 149th and Grand Concourse Avenues. This image was a catalyst for a discussion of their immigrant stories. These stories also became an anchor for the upcoming sessions and created a moment when the students began to feel connected to one another.

**Images on the shared facebook page.** Several students were not consistent in uploading their images throughout the entire project. Because students volunteered to come up to the front of the group to discuss their images, they would lead the group in discussing the images and any ideas related to them. I did not want to force them into any kind of imposed (or overly structured) way of discussing their images, and I was pleased to see them take control of how they wanted to share their images to the group.

Students using their cellphones took the collected photographs, which were focused on the photo topics of school, community and home. The photographs allowed the students to explore and document the places and spaces that they perceived to be meaningful to their immigrant student lives and those related to learning. More important, these photographs provided students with the opportunity to create an open dialogue with each other during weekly group discussions, and through a showing-and-telling of their images to the group. Additionally, students kept notebooks to document any information that they felt they did not have a chance to express during the group sessions. By the end of the study, the students had taken a total of 107 photographs. Below is a breakdown of the images by photo topic.

**Table 2: Distribution of Student Images by Photo Topic**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Photo Topic</th>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>COMMUNITY</th>
<th>HOME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of images</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total: 107</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Pile sorts.** Prior to starting the study, I had planned that each person would have their own album on the shared Facebook page, so that they could pre-sort their images prior to coming to the session. I did make the albums. However, it was tricky getting the students to access albums via their cell phones. It seemed that the albums were easier to access if they uploaded their images via computer, added an additional step in uploading the images, which the students were not very keen on doing.

The images placed on the shared Facebook page provided a host of ideas. In order to examine the pictures and get the students to reflect on the embedded funds of knowledge that could be found within the images, they engaged in pile sorts. Over the six-week period, students completed three photo topics and three pile sorts. For the pile-sorts, several copies of these images were printed out. Students were split up into two or three groups, and they were given the pile of images to sort. They spread out the pictures onto the large tables and searched them for similar ideas, and then the clustered were into themes and ideas. Students were given an activity worksheet to complete these pile sorts. These pile-sorts were useful because they allowed the students to work together and have within-group discussions about the images and the meanings they felt they shared in common. Additionally, the students took to the whiteboard to write out their sorted themes, and they spent much time explaining to the group how they came up with their piles, this then became a catalyst for further discussion. After each pile sort, I compiled all the themes from the activity sheets and asked the students to reduce them further by clustering them into groups.

**Individual interviews.** After completing the three photo topics, students were invited to individual interviews—conversations with a purpose. Interviews were chosen because this method has the potential to elicit rich, thick descriptions. Furthermore, it give me an opportunity
to clarify statements and ideas brought about in the group discussions and a chance to further probe for additional information, on an additional basis. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) state that a major benefit of collecting data through individual, in-depth interviews is that they offer the potential to capture a person’s perspective of an event or experience while allowing for researchers and participants to develop a personal relationship. Conceptually, the interview, as part of the photovoice process, added another means by which to understand the world of these ethnic minority immigrant students, from their point of view, by unfolding and uncovering their unique experiences and their unique worlds (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). As described in the original work on funds of knowledge, a primary goal was not to elicit information, but to “foster a relationship of trust with the families so they can tell us about their lives and experiences” (Gonzalez et al., 2005, p. xi.).

For these interviews, students were asked to choose 10 photos that they believed to be most representative of their immigrant student experience. During the interviews, students were invited to explain their photos, including the details of their images and the meanings and connections they made while taking them. These interviews were also an opportunity to engage students in further discussing issues and topics that they either brought up in group sessions or issues that they felt that they did not get a chance to discuss during the group sessions. In addition, students were asked to complete series of open-ended statements about their everyday experiences.

Below are two tables (Table 3 & Table 4) representing inventory of the data generated from the above mentioned data collection methods.
Table 3. *Data Inventory Resulting from Varied Data Sources*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Digital Photographs (captions)</th>
<th>Pile sorts &amp; Theme Reductions</th>
<th>Group discussions</th>
<th>Individual Interviews</th>
<th>Student Journals</th>
<th>Student drawings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>107 photos</td>
<td>3 sessions (for the topics of home, school &amp; community)</td>
<td>16 bi-weekly sessions</td>
<td>7 interview sessions</td>
<td>6 journals received</td>
<td>12 (self-identity mental maps &amp; class design drawings)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. *Key Elements of Data Collection*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Objectives/ Ideas</th>
<th>Key Uses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Digital Photographs w/ Captions</td>
<td>• Collect examples reflective cultural funds of knowledge in the places of home, school and community. • To collect examples reflective of students’ understanding of places where knowledge exists and they types of knowledge there, and who has knowledge</td>
<td>• To generate data on funds of knowledge, to further elaborate on <em>funds of knowledge</em> themes discussed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photo-topic pile-sorts of photographs/ Theme reductions</td>
<td>• To engage students in identifying major ideas and themes emergent in photos • To create opportunities for agentic expressions and acts.</td>
<td>• A type of member checking. • To identify of major constructs in relation to main themes of home, school and community, that were student-generated • To explore how students construct ideas about learning across images (narratives)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group discussions (Video and Audio Taped)</td>
<td>• To create a typology of cultural funds of knowledge through exploring everyday experiences of students. • To explore agentic actions, and interactions among group members</td>
<td>• Primary source for the documentation of students attitudes values and beliefs about learning, learning goals and barriers to learning notions of agency through student actions &amp; dialogue • Building community • Documenting agentic instances among students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 4. Key Elements of Data Collection Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection Method</th>
<th>Benefits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual Interviews</strong>&lt;br&gt;(Video and Audio Taped)</td>
<td>• To gather more data / follow up on information about topics/ ideas that students discussed during group sessions. Including ideas students felt they didn’t have a chance to express during group sessions  &lt;br&gt;• Used to construct student Biosketches  &lt;br&gt;• Used to further elaborate ideas/ themes emergent within group discussions  &lt;br&gt;• Information/ Activation of Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student journals</strong></td>
<td>• To give students an opportunity to write any information they chose not express in the group or did not get a chance to express in the group  &lt;br&gt;• Used to further elaborate ideas/ themes emergent within group discussions and images</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student drawings</strong></td>
<td>• To create student mental maps of learning identities and reflective class designs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Field notes based on own observations</strong></td>
<td>• To gather researcher perspectives, reflections on key activities/ concepts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis involves the coding of data into themes, then categories and then the forming conclusions (Hewitt-Taylor, 2001). This study utilized the constant comparative analysis as its primary method and a critical sociocultural analysis as a secondary method to analyze large segments of text. All data, including text and visual sources, were analyzed and coded using Atlas Ti qualitative analysis software to further develop the preliminary coding categories that emerged from the varied data sources.

Constant Comparative Techniques

The analysis of data also included an examination of student-generated images (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Although my approach to this inquiry was informed by grounded theory, it did not maintain a strict adherence to the tenets of this theory. For example, unlike researchers who approach the research settings and data collection without pre-identified coding categories. In examining the data, several theoretical constructs based on the funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 1995; Moll et al., 1992), learning identity (Gee, 2000; Holland et al., 1998; Stetsenko, 2004) and immigrant acculturation (Kim & Diaz, 2013; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2009) literatures, were applied. Yet, I remained open to the idea that new constructs and information would possibly emerge from the data.

Before embarking on this study, several major conceptual topics/subject areas (drawn from the theoretical framework) were identified, which guided the data collection and subsequent analytical process. These concepts acted as a type of a “start list” of concepts. These were: learning identity, immigration, fund of knowledge and agency. Within the area of learning identity, of interest were the constructs related to “how students saw themselves as learners.” Additionally, the data was to be examined in terms of student learning goals. In regards to the
topic of immigration, the focus was on the concept of immigrant experiences, educational barriers and educational supports. In terms of funds of knowledge, relevant types “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (Moll et. al, 2005) were examined. In relation to agency, the focus was on how students “recognized” and “activated” their funds of knowledge with regards to academic learning.

**First cycle coding or initial coding.** The data were examined using different types of comparative methods (see Table 5), including first cycle coding and second cycle coding (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014; Tracy, 2013). In the first step, the data was read and re-read several times. The transcripts were treated as the main data source. Because of the number of transcripts, this data was handled before the other data sources, such as images, captions, drawings and journals. I also think that because the transcripts were easily uploaded into Atlas Ti directly after transcribing they were quickly accessible. Student journals were submitted to the PI after the project ended and had to be scanned and then uploaded, which took place after a majority of the group discussion transcripts were completed. Because it was not completely decided after the data was collected how the images were to be incorporated into the write-up of this study, they were examined at a later point in the analysis.

It must be noted that throughout this study, text data—that is, transcriptions of the group discussions, the interviews, the image captions and student journals—were examined as the main corpus of data. As I read through these transcripts, I began the process of first cycle coding by engaging in the open coding of the data. In this process, the data were looked at with an “open mind,” and several emergent codes were applied. At this point, parsing through the data was done without maintaining an overreliance on the start list of concepts. At this initial coding, the
examination of the corpus of data was guided by the following questions: What is happening here? What are participants saying? And what issues are being brought up among these students?

After re-reading the first few transcripts I began to examine what the participants were saying in relation to the topics of learning, immigration, funds of knowledge and agency. These topics were the main theoretical concepts that guided all levels of analysis in this project. Additionally, several segments of text were often double-coded, because they suggested multiple meanings. Miles and Huberman (1994) state that simultaneous coding is warranted if a segment of text is both descriptively and inferentially meaningful. This double-coding allowed for the capturing of the commonalities and idiosyncrasies of perspectives among students and across the data.

The examination of the data required engaging in several types of coding. As stated above, as part of the first cycle coding, open-coding was used. In addition, it was necessary to incorporate the following types of coding: in vivo coding, descriptive, process, structural values and emotional (see Saldana, 2009) into the data analysis process.

Table 5. *Methods of First Cycle Coding*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Examples from Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| In-Vivo Coding    | This method uses students’ words and short phrases in the data record as code; it may also include folk or indigenous terms (Saldana, 2009). | Sometimes students own words best described a particular phenomenon or depiction. | • “looking cool/being cool/fitting in”  
                  |                                                                         |                                           | • "closed off" future                  |
| Descriptive Coding| A descriptive code assigns labels to data to summarize in a word or short phrase, typically a noun that describes the basic topic of a passage of data (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). | To document and categorize the opinions and perspectives of the students. | • immigrant dreams  
                  |                                                                         |                                           | • inter-race issues                     |
Table 5. *Methods of First Cycle Coding Continued*

| Process Coding | These codes use gerunds (-ing words) and inform us about the observable and conceptual action in the data. It also implies that actions happen over time, emergent actions and change (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). | To document and categorize the types of actions students spoke about, and to document phenomenon over time. | • getting an education
• assimilating |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Structural Coding | These codes apply a content-based or conceptual phrase that placed on a segment of data that is linked to a specific research question (Saldana, 2009). | Used to organize the data around specific research questions and a-priori constructs. | • fund of knowledge
• agency
• educational barriers
• educational supports |
| Values Coding | This type of code captures attitudes and beliefs held by students, including attitudes about themselves and others. In addition to cultural values, personal knowledge, experiences, opinions and other interpretive perceptions of the world and things (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). | In this study this code was used to examine student values (VAL) about Education and beliefs (BEL) about Learning among other concepts. | • (VAL)- "to be educated"= "to go to school"
• (BEL)- perseverance |
| Emotional Coding | These codes label the emotions recalled and experienced by students or those inferred by the researcher. | To gather categorize students emotions in relation to everyday experiences. | • migration related sadness
• fear related to migrating |

After reading the first few transcripts, I began to apply these initial codes to student images (with captions), journals and field notes. Completing this first cycle coding process allowed me to generate a preliminary coding scheme, which consisted of the a priori subject areas as “codes” and those codes that resulted from extensive open coding.

**Second cycle coding.** As I continued to examine the data I began to revise the codes, guided by the main research questions. Several codes changed as I noticed that some did not work, and others were merged, and even a few codes did not have quotations attached to them. While I still held on to the original theoretically based “start list” of concepts, I began to add other codes that emerged as I parsed through the data. Upon the completion of the first-cycle
coding, I also looked across data sources searching for patterns. The categories (and code groups) that came out of this preliminary analysis guided my analysis as I compared across the data sources and across time. The process allowed me to become aware of the interconnectedness between funds of knowledge and learning identity. At this stage I generated the following tentative statements about the data: (1) funds of knowledge need to be recognized (and validated) within a group setting (by others) in order for it to be activated (ownership) by individual students, and (2) building community within the group setting is an agentic task that allows for the recognition of others (as knowledgeable).

These statements are heavily influenced by the funds of knowledge and learning identity/agency literatures. During my analysis, I looked for examples of student-enacted cultural funds of knowledge. I also queried whether there were connections between immigrant life and perceptions of education. Also, I questioned how students’ immigrant backgrounds would come up against their learning identities. Table 6 below outlines the codes (derived from theory) that correspond to the main research questions.

Table 6. Coding Structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Main themes</th>
<th>Main Codes Groups</th>
<th>Related Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MAIN RQ: How do ethnic minority immigrant college students agentially recognize and activate their funds of knowledge as they position themselves towards learning in college, in constructing learning identities?</td>
<td>learning identity, agency, &quot;who they see themselves as learners&quot;, activating funds of knowledge, recognition/value</td>
<td>learning identity, self-recognition/value, activating funds of knowledge</td>
<td>future selves, future goals, bringing knowledge to family, goals/ passion/motivation, &quot;closed off&quot; future, &quot;who is learning for&quot; perceptions of self, openness to learning, having” purpose</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6. Coding Structure Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RQ1: How do ethnic minority immigrant college students make sense of academic learning and the pursuit of higher education as they participate in a collaborative student group?</th>
<th>make sense of academic learning, participate in collaborative group, agency</th>
<th>Agency legitimacy/value illegitimacy/not valued 3rd space</th>
<th>Agentic place where funds of knowledge is used lack of respect (place/value) others’ underestimating their knowledge power place of value others’ perceptions of immigrants non-recognition of foreign education place where funds of knowledge is valued feeling judged by others lack of value building community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<p>| RQ2: What experiences do ethnic minority immigrant College students perceive as barriers to and supports of their learning, engagement and achievement? | barriers to learning supports in learning | Difficulties unfamiliarity lack of support poverty/ poor neighborhoods race issues language barriers support | Disrupted education difficult school experiences difficulties of immigration difficulty navigating the U.S. education system difficulty navigating a different culture lack of respect (place/space) students’ own lack of recognition lack of support (familial) lack of support (academic) lack of knowledge money identifying race/ethnicity racial/ ethnic stereotypes racial/ ethnic distancing race/skin color inter-race issues race issues/ racism language language strengths support (academic) support (familial) education has value (family) parental support |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IMMIGRANT LIFE</th>
<th>immigrant story</th>
<th>future selves</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>poor living situation/neighborhood</td>
<td>adaptive learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of the NYC./ U.S.</td>
<td>knowledge about &quot;getting jobs&quot;</td>
<td>knowledge of college-going</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>migration as &quot;leaving things behind&quot;</td>
<td>knowledge of college-going</td>
<td>knowledge of college-going</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>immigrant identity</td>
<td>knowledge of college-going</td>
<td>knowledge of family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>immigrant dreams/American dream</td>
<td>knowledge of immigration process</td>
<td>knowledge of family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>immigrant reasons</td>
<td>bringing knowledge to family</td>
<td>knowledge of business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>migration as a &quot;forced choice&quot;</td>
<td>fund of knowledge</td>
<td>knowledge of immigration process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reason not to emigrate</td>
<td>knowledge of other cultures</td>
<td>bringing knowledge to family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>migration as &quot;choice&quot;</td>
<td>knowing how to do things</td>
<td>fund of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>immigrant disillusion</td>
<td>knowledge in the home…</td>
<td>knowledge of other cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>positive perceptions of being immigrants</td>
<td>knowledge of &quot;getting around&quot;</td>
<td>knowing how to do things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>immigration barrier</td>
<td>knowledge of who lives where</td>
<td>knowledge in the home…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>remittances</td>
<td>knowledge found in community</td>
<td>knowledge of who lives where</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>place where funds of knowledge is valued</td>
<td>place where funds of knowledge is valued</td>
<td>knowledge found in community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>place where funds of knowledge is not valued</td>
<td>cultural tools</td>
<td>place where funds of knowledge is valued</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cultural strengths</td>
<td>cultural strengths</td>
<td>cultural tools</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 6. Coding Structure Continued**

| types of funds of knowledge, language strengths, cultural history, "the struggle", adaptive learning | funds of knowledge language strengths cultural history family culture | future selves adaptive learning knowledge about "getting jobs" knowledge of college-going knowledge of college-going knowledge of surroundings knowledge of family business knowledge of immigration process bringing knowledge to family fund of knowledge knowledge of other cultures knowing how to do things knowledge in the home… knowledge of "getting around" knowledge of who lives where knowledge found in community place where funds of knowledge is valued place where funds of knowledge is not valued cultural tools cultural strengths |
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Student Biosketches

I have chosen to write the following profiles using the main themes that characterize each students’ story. In writing this dissertation, I felt that it was important provide a mental picture of the participants involved in the study. These simple biographies offer a concise but limited understanding of them as individuals, which may not be easily extrapolated from the large corpus of available data. In writing these Biosketches I utilized the following data sources:

![Figure 1. Data Sources Used to Compile Biosketches](image)

As immigrants, the students in this project occupy multiple positions across multiple communities or figured worlds. Their identities are both complex and constructed across varied communities and within varied relationships. Because these immigrant identities are complex, it is not simply about reporting facts or reporting demographics about them. Learning identities were revealed through the analysis of the data collected within student interviews, group discussions and student images and drawings. Information about students’ identities and lives are presented first as Biosketches, which do represent complete life stories but are slices of their everyday lives. Within these stories are incorporated depictions of the figured worlds of immigrant life, academic learning and within the group setting.
After compiling these Biosketches, I met with each student (with the exception of Jada, because she had graduated and was not reachable via email), to give them the opportunity to read what I had written. Each person provided me with feedback on the accuracy of their portrayal and made suggestions as to how information should change and any information that they disagreed with. On the whole, they were fine with their portrayals and felt that the depictions of them were more or less accurate. Also, several of the students suggested that they wanted to include an update to their lives, which I agreed with. I have included these short statements at the end of the dissertation (see appendix)

Danny is in his early 20s, he was born and raised in New York City. He is a transfer student to Hostos Community College. He is a Liberal Arts Major and plans to continue his education at a 4-year college in the Physician’s Assistant program and he is the only student who is not currently working. Before transferring to Hostos he attended two private colleges, Hofstra and Dowling Universities, but graduated from neither. He lives in Manhattan with his mother, who works as a school nurse and his sister who works in a real estate office. Prevalent in Danny’s story are the themes of poverty, social interaction and persecution.

Growing up in the projects of Bedford Stuyvesant, the third child of a single mother who migrated from Trinidad in the 1990s, Danny’s story depicts his experiences of growing up in poverty, which are evinced by his experiences of living in poor living conditions and gang violence. He speaks of these things primarily through his mother’s difficulties in obtaining safer living conditions for the family and better educational opportunities for her children. He states that she faced many difficulties in securing public assistance and public housing, getting him into a safe school, and one that would cater to his academic needs. He depicts that her being turned

18 All names used here are pseudonyms.
away on several occasions was more a result of her Caribbean accent rather than her insufficient paperwork. In telling his story, it is clear that Danny’s narrative is also punctuated by the theme of persecution.

Danny’s beliefs about the value of college education are primarily tied to making money. Growing up poor for him also means that having things, mainly being able to purchase the things that are desirable to him and which are symbolic of financial independence. In addition, he sees going to college in a means-end kind of way. Practicality drives his need to graduate. Simply put, school is about “having the papers” (the degree) that will get him a job. In his opinion, by getting a job he would be able to provide his family with their basic needs. This kind of practical thinking, allows Danny to see the world in in two ways—school (which he describes as not the real world) and the real world of responsibility. Here, one gets a job, makes a salary and provides for one’s family. He goes so far as to say that college is not the real world because it is not dangerous and has no real consequences. In college, there’s always an opportunity to do things over, and professors are always understanding of students’ life difficulties. This makes him seem somewhat flippant about learning, and on several occasions during our project I felt that he didn’t take his schooling very seriously.

Ironically, He also perceives himself as possessing an adventurous sensibility, prides himself on being ever-curious and being open to new people and experiences. He places extreme value on being willing to talk to anyone, he considers himself a great communicator; he thinks that it is important to go beyond the first impressions we make of others, so that we can get to know them better.

Danny believes that people like him who live in the “hood” are seen in stereotypical ways, and that their capabilities are frequently underestimated. He repeatedly described feeling
that his life options were constricted because of his race and gender. He often described feelings of futility when he spoke of getting an education, and questioned its ability to help him avoid possible unfortunate fates like Eric Garner and Mike Brown, whom he referenced at several points throughout our group discussion. When asked in the individual interview, where it was that he felt he could make a difference, he identified his home and in particular within his family as the only places within which he can effect some kind of change. Danny aspires to make a difference in his community but he feels that he is not able to do so until everything is just right. His ability to give back is predicated on having a well-established career or becoming someone of note in his community—he goes so far as to say he wants to be the President of the United States. In addition, he maintains an aspirational perspective on giving back, but at this point he is unsure about how to go about helping others.

Danielle is in her early 20s, Danielle is from Chad, Africa. She and her family migrated to the United States in 2008. She is a freshman at the college in the Liberal Arts program and she plans to transfer to Lehman College to pursue a Bachelor’s degree in Physical Therapy. She currently works as a customer service agent at American Airlines. Her father is a trained accountant and a politician, but he currently serves as a volunteer at the Human Rights Watch. Her mother is a homemaker but owned her own fabric-selling business. In addition, she has six other brothers and sisters, three of which live in her household. Danielle’s story seems to be center upon the theme of not wasting time and giving back.

Danielle takes pride in claiming her immigrant identity. She does well to remind the group that she is the daughter of a Chad diplomat, who was exiled from his country for being a political activist. She uses this identity that is—she is not a typical African immigrant. She also uses her immigrant identity as a way to distinguish herself from African-Americans.
Danielle has strong beliefs about the benefits of getting an education. She sees school as extremely important and she speaks with much passion about how it is central to her life and attaining her life goals, which is to become a Physical Therapist. She talks about school to say that being in school is doing something meaningful and that “those people” who are not in school are not doing anything with their lives and are therefore wasting time.

She uses the binary of “the doers” vs. “time wasters” to depict the people she encounters. She uses this binary to distance herself from the people in her neighborhood, who are primarily African-Americans. She sees herself in opposition to, as if in negation of the people who live in her current low-income neighborhood in the Bronx. She describes being regularly harassed by young and old people in her building, who always ask her “can I hold a dollar.” In her mind, if these people spend most of their time sitting on the stoop, or hanging out at the street corner or playing basketball and are always begging for money; then they cannot be doing anything with their lives and are always looking for a handout. More important, they don’t value school as she does. She places herself in stark contrast to “those people” because she is doing something; she is going to college to become a Physical therapist. Her activities of schooling are very much wrapped up with this identity of learning and her conscious effort to separate herself from the people in her neighborhood.

Prominent in her story was the theme of giving back to her family through achieving academically. In her family, getting an education is expected of each child in the household and she is one of six children. Her career goals drive her learning behavior, so much so that she decided to limit the amount hours at her job in order to spend more time on her school work on to the idea that to achieve her educational goals, which she believes takes courage, encouragement, and being hardworking.
Her career goals are tied up with the idea of giving back to her family, and to her, getting an education would be the only way to achieve these goals. Furthermore, her ideas about giving back are centered upon fulfilling a practical need for her family, which in this case is becoming a physical therapist. Her father has health issues involving pain and mobility and so in becoming a physical therapist she would be able to help him. Therefore, adding a sense of practicality to her career aspirations. Likewise, her brother is becoming a pharmacist.

In her individual interview, she describes that her knowledge was at her job, where she works as a customer service representative at a local airport. She described that at her workplace, what she knows does not matter. She feels that her language skills are used but not valued at her job, so much so that she feels taken advantage of by her co-workers and manager. Because she speaks a variety of languages including French, Spanish, English and Arabic, one would think she would be acclaimed for her willingness to translate. However, her knowledge is only considered useful when she is needed. As such, her contributions to the job go undervalued. Danielle longs for the day that she can leave her current job and the time when she can become a Physical Therapist.

Linda is the youngest member of our group. Linda is in her late teens and she comes from Ghana, Africa and migrated to the United States in 2008. She is a freshman at the College where she majors in Liberal Arts. Her plan is to pursue a Bachelor’s in Physical Therapy at a four-year college. She currently lives with her mother, stepfather and little brother in Parkchester. Her mother works as a Nursing Assistant and her stepfather is a Firefighter.

Linda’s story is dominated by a tension that results from her experiences of familial disruption and obligation during the immigration process and desires of having a voice. At 6 months old, Linda’s mother left her to come to America—for a better life. She was left behind in
Ghana, where she was raised by her grandmother, and her aunts and uncles. She speaks of her early childhood as a terrible time, during which she experienced physical, psychological and emotional abuse at the hands of her aunts and uncles. Not surprisingly, she blames her mother for these experiences. Linda thinks if her mother did not leave her, then she would have been safe. She goes so far as to call her aunts and uncles, the ‘bad people.’ She grew up not knowing who her mother was. When they were reunited at the age of 13, she describes her as a stranger that she was forced to live with.

Linda is torn by feelings of disdain for her mother who left her at a young age and by feeling a sense of appreciation, because she chose to bring her to America. In her opinion, there is no repairing their relationship—which at best she describes as being that of strangers. She expresses her gratitude for the opportunity to have a better life in America but she feels like an outsider in her home. Her goal of becoming a physical therapist is not really for herself or to make money; instead it is out of obligation to her family. By becoming a physical therapist, she would not disappoint her parents. When asked in her individual interview if she thinks she can make a difference, she really did not think that she was able to at the moment. However, she believes that when she had established herself as physical therapist that she could be able to provide similar educational opportunities for other Ghanaian girls, who have had similar upbringings.

Linda’s academic behaviors are disconnected from what she really enjoys doing—writing poetry (a disconnect between learning and identity). She uses poetry and writing to express her feelings about her immigrant experience and her relationship with her mother. She sees writing as the only way she can have a voice, as a way to speak up. However, according to her mother, writing is passion and passion does not pay the bills. The mismatch comes because, in school she
is encouraged to write by her teachers and peers, but at home she is chastised for it. During one of our group sessions, she expressed her desire to become a writer, to which the group responded in a supportive manner, by acknowledging her passion and writing goals.

In terms of learning, she sees the experience as a means of her having a voice. She states that in Africa and, in particular among her family there that she did not have the ability to speak up. In this way getting an education provides her with ways and opportunities to express herself. She references the classroom as a place where people ask you to speak up, where people listen to you and where people value what you have to say. Hostos is a main place where she feels valued, she feels like she belongs there. She goes as far as to call Hostos her second home and a place where she feels that she can do anything. Although she is a freshman at Hostos, it has become a safe place for her and a place where she can escape from her family and the issues that may stem from there—at least for the time that she’s within those walls.

Maria is the eldest member of our group, she is early 30s and is originally from Spain. She is in her freshman year at the college and is in the Dental Hygiene program. She sees herself as an immigrant, and never hesitates to refer to herself as such. She chose to migrate to the United States in 2011 because she wanted to go to college here. She has changed career directions and now wants to be a Dental Hygienist after completing both a Bachelor’s and a Master’s Degree in Spain and having held a position as a High School music teacher. She works as bartender in the city.

Maria’s story is driven by the themes of change and openness to challenges. Unlike the other students in the group, Maria made the conscious decision to come to America to go to college and she was the only one of the group to come to America as an adult. She states that her coming to America was a complicated experience for her, because she was alone in a new
country, a new culture and a new educational system. However, she sees these things as all part of the challenge of achieving her educational goal, which is to become a dental hygienist.

Coming to America marks a major transition in Maria’s life, because not only is she changing career fields, but also she got married and is learning English. She started off her career journey as a music therapist, but was dissatisfied with that path. So she came to America to pursue her current area dental hygiene, because she wanted to challenge herself get a degree in another country. Choosing to come to the college was also a major change for her because her classes would now be taught in English and she would be challenged to speak, read and write in English—all the time. However, she did not back down from this challenge, she made it a priority to communicate better in English by socializing with English-speaking others, because to her, improving herself in these ways would help her to get to her career goal.

Maria understands that staying in Spain was an option and she acknowledges that it was possible for her to become a dental hygienist there, but she sees getting to this goal in a different language and cultural system as an immense achievement. For her, Hostos is a great place to pursue her goal. She feels like she belongs there because student expectations are made clear to her in the school. She thinks that the educational structure aids her in being a better student. She also perceives that her knowledge is valued at Hostos, because when she expresses herself, she’s taken seriously. In addition, she can always get help there, from teachers, fellow students and advisors. She goes so far as to say that “being in school apart from getting a new career, helps me to be …in the real world.” In this way getting an education will allow her to have a better future. Being a dental hygienist is also about gaining respect for her, as it will allow her to create a new social role for herself, one in which she will be bilingual, economically stable and feel a sense of pride.
Like other students in the group, she perceives that her knowledge is not valued at her job. At this place, she did not use her knowledge as a music therapist. She felt underestimated because of her age and because she was a foreigner. She perceived that her co-workers did not trust her knowledge or skills because she went to school in Spain. This left her frustrated and she eventually quit that job. She then got a job as a bartender; she has now decided to cut back on her work hours to allow her to have more time to pursue her academic goals.

_Jada_ was born and raised in New York City. She is in her mid-20s and like Danny, she is a second-generation immigrant because her family migrated from Jamaica, West Indies. She is a senior at the college and is also a Liberal Arts major. She is undecided about what she will pursue at a four-year college, but she does intend to go to complete a Bachelor’s degree. She lives with her mother who works as a Home Health Aide, her two brothers, who are both a Merchandiser and college student respectively, and her sister is a Direct Care Worker. She currently works as a cashier at a local Duane Reade Pharmacy.

Jada’s narrative is focused on the themes of _tension_, _indecision_, _adapting to immigrant life_ and _dealing with race issues_. When Jada speaks about her experiences as an immigrant student, and highlights a real sense of tension that between her Jamaican heritage and her American citizenship and her experiences about figuring out who she is within these two spaces. She spends much of her time talking about how she tries to get along with many cultural groups by making a major effort to listen to music from various cultures and in varied languages, which seems like a way of adapting to New York culture. She prides herself on being able to deal with the challenges that New York City presents, “Adapting! It says that adapting most definitely because living in the city—is not. I’m not saying that everybody knows how to adapt, but not everybody knows how to adapt quick enough!”
She, like the others, describes her cultural background as a resource for her current life situation. She draws upon her family’s migratory difficulties as a source of strength. For example, she talks about her mother being a single mother and raising four children, as informing her that she has no excuses. She feels a sense of pride from the idea that her mother is also going to college as well. She sees learning as a process of striving and of hardship. She believes that in order for her to succeed that she has to “keep at it and don’t give up,” despite facing many everyday life instances where one’s knowledge may be underestimated or not valued.

When asked about where her knowledge is not valued, she mentions her job. On the one hand, she feels that as a cashier at a pharmacy that others see her in a superficial and one-dimensional way that is—just black! On the other hand, she also thinks she is underestimated because of her Caribbean background. In order to deal with these issues she feels that she has to give up the Caribbean part of herself in order to be accepted by non-immigrant others.

Furthermore, she rationalizes that because New York City is so fast-paced that people don’t have or take the time to get to know people for who they really are. She wishes that people would take the time out to get to know people better. In particular, she would like people to get to know the life stories of immigrant people, instead of passing them over. At times, she wavers between feeling that having an education could ameliorate her exposure to racial issues and feeling of disillusioned about still being judged simply based on race.

Fanny migrated to the United States from Jamaica in 2011 and currently lives with her single mother in the Bronx. She is a freshman at the college and is a Liberal Arts major. She works as a cashier at a local Mc. Donald’s restaurant, and her mother works as a Home Health Aid.
Fanny’s narrative is centered upon familial disruption, negative parental relations and her difficulties in adapting to immigrant life. During group discussions and the individual interview, she spent much time discussing the fact that coming to America was a forced choice for her. She states that her mother made the decision when she was sixteen to bring her to New York, ripping her away from her father, her friends and her life in Jamaica. Her mother acts as a framework through which she tells her story, she acts as both an anchor and as a point of contention. She resents her mother for doing so because she does not have a relationship with her mother who left their family for America when she was a child. So she grew up not knowing her mother. Fanny like Linda experienced the “loss” of her mother at an early age (as a result of migration) and both feel a sense of disconnection from their mothers. Her lack of a relationship with her mother permeates her experiences here and even affects her performance in school. At times, Fanny seems to be disinterested in school. When she discusses school, she talks about it by addressing what her mother wants her to do, rather than pointing out her own objectives. When asked what her career goals are she vacillates between not having an answer to stating that she wants to be a lawyer.

Although she was willing to participate in the projects, Fanny seemed easily distracted during our group sessions and even appeared to be depressed. When she did show up for our meetings she reluctantly participated and spent a lot of time talking about her mother and her disillusionment with her living situation. On occasion, she goes so far as to say that she feels neglected by her mother. Living with her mother is an obligation or “in a box,” and she thinks that she is faking her family life. As such, coming to America is more about loss than gains for her.
On several occasions she equates living in New York City to being trapped, and she states that all she does here is work, work and work some more. When asked, she states that she does not feel valued at home. She feels that she cannot express herself in this space because she doesn’t think that her mother listens to what she has to say. I felt that I got to know more about Fanny in our one-on-one interview, where she opened up about her love of poetry and writing. She views her poems as a form of self-expression. She spends her free time writing poems and feels that her words are valued in her writing class. Fanny (like Linda) sees having a voice as central issues in their lives. In some way writing poems are a release for her and it gives her an outlet for recognition (among her friends), which is something that she desperately craves from her mother. Her idea of having a voice is about being able to express her feelings, and being given the freedom to do what she chooses to do, which is something she cannot do in her current living situation. The only place that she feels capable of doing so is in school. She feels that there are two Fanny’s.

Tony is in his late 20s and was born in Mexico. He has attended the College intermittently for several years. He migrated to the United States in 1996, as a teenager. He plans to pursue a career in Social Work. He works as a customer service attendant at the deli counter at a midtown grocery store. Tony’s story is about transitioning through becoming educated

Of all the students, Tony is most aligned with the idea that getting an education can change one’s life. He is committed to graduating from Hostos and becoming a Social Worker. He spends a lot of time discussing his arrival story with the group and in our individual interview. He calls this “his story.” His arrival to New York was filled with disruptions—familial, educational, legal and financial. Unlike his fellow group members, Tony is undocumented, having been brought to America by his parents at fourteen. He posits that his
parents brought him here for a better life, but that this was hardly the reality that he has experienced. He describes that one point his future was “closed off” and that his only options were to either work in a restaurant kitchen as a dishwasher or a restaurant worker. His family life was disrupted by abuse and alcoholism, and his father left the family. The financial responsibilities fell onto his shoulders and his main priority was to make money for his family. After high school Tony floated from one temporary job to another. Contrary to his parents’ dream of a better life, Tony found himself having to work full time at the age of 16.

Before coming to college, could not envision another path for himself, primarily because of his immigration status and his limited resources during high school. For him his future was set and he felt that he was following the path that he was supposed to. His experiences in high school led him to believe that jobs were things that one gets by knowing someone else that is Mexican. In the past, all his jobs were gained by asking his friends if they knew of any open positions or being told by his friends that they were leaving a job and that he could have it. This friend would introduce him to the manager and then vouch for him. He would verbally inform the manager of his job experience and then would promise to do a good job for him. He knew that he got the job by shaking the hand of the manager.

Luckily, Tony’s dream of becoming a Social Worker was not lost. He found out about the DACA program was accepted and because of this he can attend the college. In turn, getting education has special importance for him because this program has allowed him a new pathway out of his previous life. He maintains a uniquely positive view about becoming educated—in that doing so will allow him to become someone—a social worker. He also embraces the idea that

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19 On June 15, 2012, President Obama created a new policy calling for deferred action for certain undocumented young people who came to the U.S. as children. Applications under the program which is called Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (“DACA”) began on August 15, 2012. © 2015 Immigration Equality.
learning can be difficult, which leads to his sense of striving. As his academic achievements grew, so too did his hopes for attaining his educational and career goals.

For him, college represents both a change in his life and more important, the ability to change his life. He sees going to college as the best thing that has happened to him. Being a college student both grounds and directs his everyday actions and is important in his life world. It is central to his identity and his everyday actions center upon graduating. He even sees his current job as a stepping-stone towards a better future, instead of an endpoint. This outlook moves him towards learning in a positive way, and is only compounded by his belief that he can do anything. More important, he believes that he is truly living his “American Dream.”

**The Figured Worlds of Ethnic Minority Immigrant Students**

As ethnic minorities, immigrants and students, the participants in this study inhabited multiple intersecting spaces of being, which can be understood through the lens of figured worlds. Figured worlds is a theoretical framework that examines how individuals create their identities and agency through everyday actions (Holland et al., 1998) and discourses. These authors state that identities are produced within figured worlds, as it is a space where people can come to understand themselves—that is, “figure” themselves by participating in varied activities and in relation to the available identities afforded to them within these spaces. Using Photovoice methods allowed the participants to shed some light on their intersecting worlds, particularly, by taking images within the school, their homes and their community, and by having group discussions and individual interviews.

A figured world is a “realm of interpretation” in which particular identities exist, are enacted and are taken up by those in that space. Positions like that of teacher, “good” student or

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20 See Figure 19
disengaged student among many others are afforded in a particular figured world because they are “recognized” and “significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others” (Holland et al., 1998). These students exist within intersecting figured worlds, as immigrants, as minorities and as students. In doing so, they navigate the everyday contexts of their neighborhoods (current and homeland), their classroom (school) and their homes. These figured worlds are not simply physical spaces but culturally mediated spaces in which social norms and discourses explicitly and implicitly shape the interactions between and among “actors” - in this case, among students, teachers, their households and other actors, who are continuously constructing and negotiating identities within a given context (Urrieta, 2007).

In figured worlds, people engage in the production of personal and social identities, through the processes of negotiating their positionality, because figured worlds are spaces for authoring these identities and provide practices for the further perpetuation of these figured worlds. However, Holland et al. (1998) views figured identities as positioned, meaning that people are not so much engaged in self-making, but rather are limited the varying degrees of accepting, rejecting, or negotiating the identities being offered to them (Urrieta, 2007). The cultural world of an immigrant is quite complex and it is only further complicated when the individual is an ethnic minority and a student, because they are positioned and position themselves within larger racial and ethnic discourses and practices. New York City has immigrants from all over the world and to some extent being an immigrant here is quite a common thing. Yet, the realities of being an immigrant in this city were emergent within our group conversation, and in particular via student images, as was uncovered through the data analysis process. In general, they maintained a sense of tension in depicting how they negotiate their identities within this figured world and they described how it sometimes is at odds with the
figured world of higher education. Within these immigrant stories are instances of acculturative stress, shifting emotions and resilience in the face of an unfamiliar cultural system. The discussion of the main themes found within these immigrant student stories involves the weaving in of relevant student statements that elaborate on these themes, from the students’ perspectives. These examples draw upon information from the following data sources: group conversations, participant images and/or captions, individual interviews and student journals and student drawings.

Figure 2. Data Sources Used to Compile Figured Worlds Themes

The image below acted as a prototype for the students’ immigrant stories. Maria uploaded this image during the first week of our discussions, and it became a tool for the students’ poignant reflections and discussions about their lives as immigrants and ethnic minorities. Although striking in its simplicity, this intersection of streets became a symbol of students’ intersecting figured worlds and brought to the surface a variety of ideas including their hopes, dreams and disappointments related to immigrant life.
Figure 3. Maria’s Street Corner/ Intersection Image

Maria (personal communication, October, 22, 2014) stated that she had never been in the Bronx before she became a Hostos student

The Figured World of Everyday Immigrant Life

As a protracted period of time filled with pre- and post-migration challenges, immigration is a complex process both at social and individual levels, and it entails many tensions, ups and downs, as well as multiple barriers and supports. For many immigrants, migrating is seen as an opportunity or a chance to improve their lives by presenting an opportunity for social mobility. However, for these same immigrants, migrating to another country can also bring about instances of sadness, loss, separation and longing.

How does this play out in the lives of these students? In retelling their immigrant stories, it was clear that they engaged in the process of coping and dealing with their lives as first- and
second-generation immigrants. Oftentimes, the need for everyday survival can override students’ awareness of stress in the moment (Bursztyn, 2015). In the statement below, Tony discusses his move to New York from Mexico. What can be understood from this statement is the immigrant children are neither involved in the decision of migrating nor are they given much information about the process, which can make the process stressful for them. As such, when Tony arrived here, the realities of being in American did not match up with his preconceived notions of what it would be like, and this sparked his feelings of sadness.

I remember we came to Queens. Corona, Queens, the house was beautiful, spacious house. Second floor. We lived in the second floor. The whole floor only for my family, my Grandpa, my Grandma—they tried to make it comfortable for us. Because I wasn’t comfortable. The first year, 1998. I will never forget it. I used to cry I used to be scared. Scared of the…, of the…, of all the people.

In addition to the difficulties of navigating a new culture, immigrants also experience lowered economic and social statuses—permeated by poverty, poor living situations, crime and segregated educational experiences, and experiencing ethnic and racial inequities. The students also spoke about the dangers of immigrant life, as Jada describes below:

It is like coming from where you’re familiar to where you’re not familiar, you’re gonna have to prepare your child from what’s out there and most of the time they hear the bad before they hear the good; and especially for women it’s a little bit harder because then they’re gonna think well like—when you go out there somebody’s gonna rape you, they’re gonna kill you, they’re gonna murder you. She’s got the talk in your ear. They tell you so much things.
The students expressed several fears that are typical of newcomer immigrants. However, these fears are also those of living in a big city. This is a possible explanation because they also mostly originate from third world countries and from rural villages. However, all of first-generation students spoke about how afraid they were when the first moved to New York. They expressed that coming to the Bronx was especially scary for them based on all the rumors they heard that “they should be careful, don’t go there.” Even Tony expressed that his parents were overprotective and informed him of the stereotypes of other immigrant groups, in particular he recalled that he always heard that he should “stay away from the Bronx.” His parents also told him that Black people lived in the Bronx and that “Black people were bad.” So, he felt that he should limit his interaction with African-Americans because they were dangerous. In reality, what Tony is expressing speaks both to the perpetuation of racial stereotypes by a new generation and demographic of people, but it also speaks to how new immigrants use these stereotypes to help them navigate New York City, especially in the early migration days. Constricting one’s contact and travel to a particular neighborhood, or avoiding certain neighborhoods provides a sense of safety for many immigrants who may feel helpless in this new landscape.

**Homeland Connections and Nostalgia**

The idea of the home and by extension the homeland is a dynamic one—home is not simply a physical place but a place full of meaning, and it serves to connect immigrants with their family and their original life. Like many immigrants, in telling their immigrant stories, these students also reflected on their home countries, or back home. Although they had lived in New York for several years, they primarily referred to their home countries as home...their childhood homes. This is with the exception of Danny and Jada who were born in New York
City and would say “in Jamaica,” “in Trinidad” or “back home” (in reference to their parents’ home countries). De Vos (1995) asserts that for many immigrants, the territorial concept of “homeland” is central in both their symbolic and literal efforts to maintain their ethnic identities. An issue that resonated well with these students and was touched on often within their immigrant stories.

In general, they spoke quite favorably about their home countries and cultures. They held a somewhat rosy picture of their home countries, which they contrasted with a somewhat negative picture of their current living situations. Tony compared his living situation in New York with the one he left behind a life in Mexico.

I got scared, I got scared and there was a point that I didn’t want to go out. I didn’t want to go out, I said I remember locking my door and I cried and I said Mommy, why we here. Why are we here? We had a house. My Dad, my family built that house, for us. A house for us like (...) for us with everything sofa, TV, I had my Nintendo, I remember back then Nintendo was (...) was hot. Super Nintendo. I had my Sega. I had super Nintendo (laughter). I thought I didn’t need anything else. I didn’t think about the other stuff but my father was thinking about, you know... my future and also because I have a bad leg. They were thinking about fixing my leg too. Yeah so, always look for a better future

From his point of view, life in his home country was quite comfortable, unlike his life in New York which was filled with fear and social isolation. In terms of figured worlds, the students created two distinct spaces—here and there, and seemed to always keep a retrospective and idealistic view of what home was like. In terms of danger, back home seemed much safer than where they are currently living. In terms of how they tell their narratives, they lacked a
sense of coherence in their stories. In terms of their migratory figured worlds—among the students there was a definite sense of “here and there” that is, they seem to be straddling two spaces (and even among the second-generation immigrants). Fowler and Korn-Bursztyn (2015) suggest that the psychological task of the immigration process is to make meaning of the migratory process, and to construct a personal story that maintains some consistency and which can provide a framework for moving into future. However, it seems that there many unresolved from “back home” still remains for them, hence their need to place themselves in that space.

**Acculturation as Tension**

As a whole, these student narratives focused on issues that are all too familiar among immigrants. For example, they described an ever-present internal tug between the loyalty to their homeland culture and the need to adapt by dealing with situations that are unfamiliar, and by accepting the host culture as their own. The students described their acculturative experiences as filled with tension. The migratory experiences of modern-day immigrants are quite different from earlier waves of immigrants. The literature theorized that this earlier group had a seamless transition into the majority culture. A general sense one gets from the students’ immigrant stories is that they were dominated by an inability to fit into the larger society. Traditional models of acculturation support that immigrants should move towards increasing behaviors of integration and move away from maintaining their own cultural traits, in order to be successful in the host culture (Bhatia, 2002). By this logic, the problems immigrants may face would be due to their inability of become assimilated (or adapted). However, modern day views of acculturation also accept that there are varying degrees of interaction between immigrants, and that they typically maintain connections to their homeland culture and that of the host culture, which impact their everyday interactions, relationships, and negotiations about things like school and learning.
The students also struggled with preserving their culture: their ethnic heritage, their language, their everyday values and norms while adapting to their lives in this new land. In doing so, they find themselves navigating a figured world that makes multiple difficult demands, including learning English, longs familial separations, poor living and economic conditions, periods of isolation. At times, they spoke of immigrant identity as a matter of pride like Jada who is second-generation Jamaican, but at the same time she sees herself as Jamaican, at the same time, she identifies the tension she feels in trying to identify herself as Jamaican.

Yeah about 45 percent because there are some things I just don’t know! [Laughing].

There are some things I just don’t know. I’m 45 percent Jamaican. I’m very proud of that 45 percent. I’m very proud of that. I’m proud of that green, black and gold flag that I could…raise and stuff mad it plays…and it plays a huge part, it plays a huge part in my life… because you get to connect who are also Jamaican and you have like that kind of kinship that nobody else really has. But you can’t necessarily have like a whole-hearted kinship because you’re not from there really.

This statement highlights the complicated nature of choosing an ethnic identity in America. It also alludes to a sense of in-betweenness that some immigrants perceive even in the second-generation. Jada metaphorically cuts herself in two to deal with the differently worlds she must occupy as a second-generation immigrant—who’s not really from there, but who is also not really seen as being from here either.

Additionally, this new culture oftentimes positions immigrants in lesser positions, and in stereotypical and racialized ways or as Bhatia (2002) states that upon migrating that immigrants often enter in a legacy of stigmatization. Ideally, both the larger host culture and the immigrant populations should experience change, yet the burden of change typically rests on the immigrant
communities, households and individuals (that is, adapting to an established culture) (Liebkind, 2001), thus resulting in tension. The tension also arises from the need to embrace the larger culture, which would mean embracing a figured world that places them in lesser positions—especially in terms of economics, racial stratification. Immigrant life outside of Hostos Community College was filled with a variety of cultural conflicts, which refers to the degree of tension or clash versus harmony perceived between the two cultures.

Some immigrants can see migration as a forced choice. In some immigrant families children are not included in the decision to migrate, which can lead to feelings of confusion and resentment on the part of these children. In this same statement, it is of note that Tony speaks to the group using the word “we”, this word is one of solidarity, and it highlights how these student through using these unifying words, began see themselves as coming from similar backgrounds.

…and because I didn’t know that the high school was supposed to be focused on a career or trade or something because that was—that’s why I came here for or that’s why my parents brought me here, because I didn’t come here by myself, my parents brought me here. It wasn’t my choice, so… It wasn’t my choice because my father…My father and my Mother were thinking about my future. My father is a teacher in Mexico an elementary…middle school, primaria—primary school. He’s like the sixth grade. He’s the end of it. So umm…so…he... We did… It was… not we were starving or we were desperate for money. It’s not like that, some people think that…you know, we come here because we’re running away from something.

As a newcomer immigrant in 1998, Tony felt that he was not involved his family’s decision to move to America. Although he has lived here for some time, he has been directly affected by his parents’ decision to illegally migrate to the country, this means that he is
undocumented. In our group, he described the implications of his legal status. In the statement above Tony suggested to the group that he did not choose to come to America, because he had no need to, and that he wanted for nothing in his home country. Yet, he understood that his parents wanted to give him a better life in America. However, in this same statement, he was also declaring that it was also not his choice to be undocumented. He explained that being without “documents” (see Figure 4) narrowed his financial, educational and career possibilities, as is likely the case with the thousands of children of immigrants in a similar position. However, Tony’s current perspective about his future has shifted into being a positive one because of the DACA program, so he is actually no longer without “documents” and is on his way to becoming a citizen. In addition, it seems that Tony is speaking simultaneously about his family’s experiences but he is also reiterating the feelings of the group. Here, it seems that restating that “we” were not starving, he attempted to counter, some existing stereotype about immigrants being poor, starving and come to America to take advantage of whatever benefits they can, because they are not available in their own countries.

**Immigrant identity.** As Linda explained,

…it’s like wherever you go, you have to know where you come from [unclear]. Even though I don’t like to talk about my country that much, just don’t forget where you come from. Because, even though I move a lot but at the same I know where I’m from. I stand my ground, speak the language sometimes. My Mom would say don’t forget where you come from, like…. Okay Mom I know that, I know I haven’t lost that connection.

Creating an immigrant identity that reflects a sense of cultural maintenance (also referred to as biculturalism)\(^{21}\) can be difficult for immigrants, like it was for this group of students.

\(^{21}\) In biculturalism positive feelings such as pride and uniqueness can be identified by immigrants but they can also be associated with conflicting expectations, identity confusion and a sense of isolation (Fowler & Bursztyn, 2015)
Immigrants can often experience several negative consequences as they navigate the new culture that can lead to conflicting expectations, mainly the development of negative perceptions of their cultural identities and even a sense of isolation. For example, Waters (1999) posits that West Indians may come to America with educational and job qualifications that may distinguish themselves from other immigrant groups or other minority groups, sometimes making it more feasible for them to more readily enter the workforce. She highlights that this is because, in the West Indian community, education holds much value, and also because West Indians maintain a “protestant ethic” that includes “a strong belief in self, discipline, drive and determination.” (Forsythe as cited in Waters, 1999, p. 100). These factors along with the absence of an entrenched history of racism, may provide a buffer for West Indians against acculturative stress. However, because West Indians become immersed into the same system of racial stratification as African Americans (so too are Africans and Afro-Latinos) they face a system of racism that is unfamiliar and oftentimes psychologically damaging.

For the participants in this study, maintaining an immigrant identity was equitable to declaring their national identities. In general, they wore their nationalities on their sleeves, and would proudly declare these identities within our group setting. As Danny (second-generation) mentioned “I can always tell them I’m Trinidadian, I have blood from Trinidad and we can always share experiences of how our Caribbean parents are.”

Research on Latino youth suggests that in acculturating they face several other issues such as, stress. Mainly, in terms of trying to meet the expectations of both ethnic and national cultures, intergenerational conflict, and the need to speak English, and they often rely on maintaining two distinct cultures that may be separated into household and community (like their job or school). Unfortunately, these immigrants display higher rates of depression compared to
their U.S. born peers. As students, these immigrants can struggle in their attempts to accommodate two disparate sets of cultural expectations (Fowler & Burzstyn, 2015). Tony touched on this topic in explaining why he left his East Harlem Mexican community.

Every… ever… everywhere I used to go, I used to think like… oh they look at me, what the fuck. Why they looking at me, they judging me and shit. I used to get mad. Now I don’t have that attitude anymore because I moved out of that atmosphere. We… I feel like sometimes… sometimes by going to… like our neighborhood or staying with our own people we segregate ourselves from everybody else. Sometimes, in a way, I don’t know if you understand?

Embedded within this statement are Tony’s desires to establish a different cultural script than that of his parents, his focus in doing so is not only predicated on learning English but also on his belief that the only way for him to become someone is to leave his Mexican community and to integrate more into the mainstream culture. After he left Harlem, he married an Irish woman and moved to Queens, where his neighborhood is “safer” and where he can interact “different kind[s] of people.” He sees that his life has improved because as he learns English he can communicate with more people other than Mexicans. In this sense, he feels that in order to get the things that he wants in life, like a career as a social worker, he has to shake off his Meixcanness—at least to some extent. Several immigrant theorists would agree that Tony’s desires to “fit in” is quite similar to other immigrants. From their perspective, assimilation is the best way of integrating immigrant into the culture.

Fowler and Burzstyn (2015) suggest that second- and their-generation immigrant children may develop oppositional identities in regards to the national cultures. However, being second- and third-generation immigrants may have rendered these immigrants distant from the group
characteristics of their parents, qualities that may have helped them to succeed in the face of racial stigmatization.

Both Danny and Jada (second-generation immigrants) were aligned with their racialized identities more so than the other students—they identified themselves as Black more than the other students; they, like other second-generation immigrants, have shifted from primarily identifying with the country of origin to relying on immediate context as a source of identification (Deaux, 2008). In contrast, the first generation students seemed to have much reluctance in consistently identifying themselves as Black, and their general ideas about African-Americans were not positive. In other words, students spent more time dis-identifying themselves from African-Americans, by making comparisons in which they were different from and “better than” them.

In an interesting instance of identity-work, Fanny positions herself as being of mixed heritage, because in her country of Jamaica many people claim having varied racial and cultural backgrounds.

Yeah, I’m Jamaican, I’m like but my family is made up of different people. I know I have people, like my friend’s grandmother was straight from India. I have another friend her family is from Germany because after World War II they scattered all over the West Indies. So I don’t know what to label us, I guess. Because, you have Guyanese people, you have some Trini people living in the South Bronx or whatever; but what really are we? Like, if I ask you on the ethnicity chart, you don’t see us but we’re still…what should I put there? I always put other. There’s African decedents, but I know I’m not Black, I’m not Black American. Either I’m not pacific. I’m not from that…
This move is one that allows her to perceive that she is not constrained by the same racial inequities as African-Americans. Danielle on the other hand uses her African identity as a way to separate and distance herself from African-Americans, who are the only group that she compares herself too. She (and Linda) thinks that Africans are inherently superior to African-Americans, because Africans are hard workers, highly educated and persistent people, who come to American to make something of themselves, even though there are many struggles. Whereas African-Americans have all the benefits of being citizens yet they cannot seem to progress and she has decided that laziness is the main reason why this is that case. Here she compares herself to an African-American:

… being smart and doing what I supposed to do in the school. Because you…, if you...
Let’s say, take a Black American right now, I’m not pointing on somebody…. For example, the same age as me and then right now to see what are our level of education, of any learned knowledge. I guarantee you one hundred percent I would take the lead. Because I studied them a lot, they don’t have nothing in mind besides being…, not the majority of them but... Some of them beside being in these corners selling those crazy stuff and asking you for a dollar, it happens to me every day in my building. Every single day.

Danielle sees herself as diametrically opposed to African-Americans (those in her neighborhood) and refuses to let herself be lumped in with this group of people who she continuous describes as lazy, on welfare and beggars. In doing so she positions them as “time wasters” mainly because she is “about something,” because she is going to school and “struggling” to do so unlike her neighbors. Surprisingly, much of the talk about race and race
issues stemmed from the “black” immigrants. Neither Tony nor Maria spent much time talking about race issues in the same way as these students did.

**Separations and reunifications.** Migration to another country is also synonymous with the experience of lengthy separations from family and friends and instances of reunification, which infuses everyday life with unfamiliar experiences and challenges. These events may be commonplace and so they are presumed to be normal; however these experiences can also be psychologically traumatic, especially immigrant youth. Alberto Bursztyn (in Bursztyn & Korn-Bursztyn, 2015) states that there is no painless immigration story, but they may seem to become painless in retrospect, “in the forgetting or in the retelling.” However, like most immigrants, this group of students have left behind familiar lived worlds, some of them had to abandon everything that was familiar for a life that was unfamiliar, which can fill everyday life with feelings of isolation and loss. As Fanny recounts, “so, I remember for three weeks I was crying... I don’t wanna be here.”

People often assume that immigrants migrate as a family; however, the reality is often quite different. Migrating can present a mosaic of separations; a single parent or both parents can migrate ahead of their children Burstyn (in Bursztyn & Korn-Bursztyn, 2015). For example, a phenomenon among West Indians is that the mother typically migrates first. This is probably because there are more available jobs for female workers instead of male workers. Many West Indian women migrate to take up jobs as nurses, home care attendants, babysitters and other care-oriented jobs. Consequently, grandparents, relatives and even family friends take up the roles of caregivers (in the homeland). Depending on the parent’s legal status and economic stability, the time spent away from the child can last from several months to several years.
Sometimes causing the relationship between the parent and the child to become that of strangers. As Linda touches on below:

But mine was different because my parents were not there. They weren’t there. I had to… because she left me when I was six months old. So I didn’t know her.

When the child does reunite with the parent a host of challenges may arise, particularly related to the reestablishing of parent-child roles, which may cause conflict between the both parties. Reuniting with a parent involves reestablishing or creating new attachments, building new relationships, and mourning the loss of the primary caregiver or attachment figures (Suarez-Orozco, Bang, & Kim, 2011; Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2009). In addition, the child may maintain a disposition of resentment toward the parent, stemming from perceived feelings of abandonment.

**Difficult and disrupted familial relations.** When a parent migrates ahead of their children (Bursztyn & Korn-Bursztyn, 2015) children can be placed in a vulnerable situation. They may have to live with relatives, friends and they may experience, abuse, maltreatment and neglect from their caregivers—resulting in having difficulty in establishing trusting relationships, following routines, and modulating their emotions (as is the case with Fanny and Linda). Additionally, as a result of the migration process, children who are left behind tend to experience the trauma of abandonment by a parent.

Here, I highlight the stories Fanny and Linda, who share the similar migratory experiences, because they were both separated from their mothers for other ten years. Both Fanny and Linda were raised by other family members; Fanny by her father and Linda by her grandmother, aunts and uncles. They were both reunited with their mothers during their teenage years, and because of the protracted period of separation they are both faced with the difficult
task of reestablishing a relationship with a mother they don’t know. This issue is central to both of their lives because throughout our time in the project, they spent a majority of time discussing her relationship with their mothers. This trend continued in our individual interviews, where the majority of the conversation focused on their issues with their mother. For Fanny, her mother occupied so much of our conversation that I embraced her as a grounding principle for her story. In reality, Fanny’s sense of self is completely filtered through mother’s eyes. Linda on the other hand, uses her mother as a point of contention; she positions herself in opposition to her, and does things in spite of her, including pursuing her desires to be a writer.

Several student stories hinted towards instances of violence and abuse within their households and at school. For example, Linda told the group that, “I was abused by my father. He was like you’re like a piece of… and all then he keep saying it, hitting me and everything like that.” However, students actively avoided going into much detail about these issues, possibly to ward off anxiety (within the group setting). In the following exchange Linda lets the group know that her family members in whose care she was left, in Ghana abused her. Linda often spoke of being dissuaded from pursuing her education. Additionally, this exchange below highlights how possible her family members’ feelings of jealousy played out when it was time for her to migrate, and probably influenced other instances of abuse.

STACEY: Wait, say that again? There are other people that didn’t want you to come to the United States. Like who?

LINDA: Like my uncles, my nieces, my niece, my cousins, all the bad people but they’re still my family

STACEY: Why do you call them bad people?
LINDA: Because they treated me bad, so. All abused and physically abused and mentally and emotionally abused. This is just a little girl who keep crying over and over to come to the United States by reading his books [referring to Frederick Douglas].

Embedded within this exchange is a sense of tension. Although Linda is grateful for her mother bringing her to America, she still feels much disdain towards her, because she feels that she abandoned her for most of her life to be here in America, having been separated from her for almost thirteen years. She describes the lack of connection at their reunion. She says, “first time I met her, it’s like a clone of myself… I was like she ain’t my mother.” If she had her way, she would have returned to the care of her grandmother, who she considers to be her real mother.

Linda’s dreams of having a happy reunion with her mother were not realized when she reunited with her. She never received the warmth and caring that she had hoped from her estranged mother. She was expected to be fairly independent in a new and unfamiliar place, and was placed under strict rules. She re-tells the story of being forced to take the train by herself without knowing her way around. Also because her mother who had to go to work, she was left to fend for herself on the platform.

I was one of those scared taking the train. My Mom was like take this side, take that side, take this side. I’m like mom relax. She said hello, you’re in New York now. So, I’m okay. Just go. I’m going to work too, just go. I was strange.

These kinds of strained relationships punctuated by moments of neglect and followed by feelings of disdain, frequent Linda’s immigrant story, which cause her story to be filled with much sadness and takes her focus away from learning. She tries to compensate for this by spending more time in school, where she feels like she can be herself. School has become like her “second home.”
**Disrupted education.** Because immigration is an act of relocation, students often experience disruptions in their educational spaces and opportunities, which can jeopardize the stability and quality of their learning experiences, thus, negatively affecting their educational skills and their academic futures. Disrupted educational experiences occur when students abruptly leave one educational setting without gaining the requirements for completion or graduation. Additionally, disruption occurs when students are placed into new educational settings without sufficient preparation, or competency. In the case of immigrant students, this stems from an abrupt breaking away from one system or education and being dropped into another system. Typically, children of immigrants whose parents migrate ahead of them are susceptible to these kinds of incomplete educational experiences. Having one’s education disrupted by migration can lead to delays in the students education because of language discrepancies, differing educational practices, changes in home life, entering into an educational space that does not cater to the needs of immigrant students, poor and segregated school, and psychological issues related to migrating.

Fanny, Tony, Danielle and Linda have experienced breaks in their high school education. They were taken from one learning system and dropped into another. A consequence has been dealing with issues of bullying, learning a different language and navigating the educational system. Unfortunately, even after migrating several students changed high schools on a number of occasions. For example, Fanny went from North Carolina to New York within the first year of moving to the United States. Also because her mother resided in New York and did not have legal status, Fanny and her sister had to live with a family friend in North Carolina until her mother could afford to send for them.
Tony also experienced educational disruptions after he moved to New York and he too switched high schools on more than one occasion. He moved from an all-immigrant school to a mainstream school and faced many challenge, including not being able to speak English.

I got transferred to a school, to Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics and… and… after school I needed a break because it was just too much. The English was too much and everything was too much. I wasn’t comfortable, so I need to adapt, so I met students there and they were from the neighborhood. So they invited me to hang out with them. So it was useful for me because I got to know more people. So now I’m not only Mexican, I’m just meeting new people. New kids that live, that… that went here. They were here before me that were born here. Some of them that were born here and… basically they know English and.... I barely spoke Spanish. So they taught me that. From here, aye man don’t go there, don’t say this. That’s not cool.

However, of all the students, Tony was the only one who had no prior experience with English-language before coming to America, which also negatively affected his early experiences. The other students including Danielle learned some English in their home countries before migrating. Despite these differences, learning English was a major task in the educational experience. Shifting school disrupted their ability to assimilate into the schooling environments, and for Tony, it was detrimental to his developing his competency. For Fanny, these disruptions were far more emotional than cognitive, as she experienced being separated from her school friends back home and in North Carolina. She describes below how she learned that she would be leaving North Carolina to join her mother in New York.

No, to North Carolina, but she took me back up to New York for the summer and—she’s like Imma buy Fanny her stuff so she can go back to school. I’m like you told me I
wasn’t gonna go there back. Then I was there and then I was there weeks in school and then she hit me with the call Friday she was like pack your stuff, you’re coming back to New York. So I had to come back that September to New York, (...) back in the school that I was in and like I was… I was so lost. Because like… I used to go in the gym and stand like in the corner by myself and just look at everyone. Yeah, so it was kinda hard and then like…

Fanny’s sense of social isolation starts when she moves to New York, after being separated from her friends in North Carolina. She moves in with her mother and starts a new school, with different requirements like regents. Unfortunately, even as a college student Fanny still experiences social isolation and loneliness, not stemming from her school interactions but the discordant relationship she has with her mother.

A Place of Struggle: A Sense of Acceptance of “the Struggle”

Immigrants tend to live in neighborhoods that are characterized by a diverse array of social and economic disadvantages, including segregation. As students they tend to go to segregated schools with limited resources (Suarez-Orozco et al. 2009). The students maintained that immigrant life was about “the struggle” and “struggling.” They spoke of this idea as if it was a given among immigrants. Or as Danielle so aptly put it “if you’re immigrant, then you’re struggling.” The idea of the immigrant struggle is well documented in the literature (see Suarez-Orozco et al. 2009; Kim & Diaz, 2013). Students saw the struggle as part and parcel of the migratory experience, and they identified having papers one of the main “struggles” of immigration. Like many immigrants, they had already been through the process of naturalization or were going through it at the time. As such, they depicted how difficult the process was for them, in terms of going to interviews, completing paperwork and paying fees. They also felt that
they had to take whatever opportunities that were offered to them, because job options were restricted, either because of their legal status or because of their limited work experience.

The statement above reveals that immigrants arrive in the country knowing that they will have to struggle to some extent in order to get their needs met. In addition, there is an acceptance of the struggle as way of life. Tony touches on this while discussing what kinds of things immigrants know before coming to America:

You see how people struggling and when you come here you know, you already have this knowledge in your mind. You already know what you’ve been through and if you’re going to come here try to give your parents headache or something instead of finding something better. That’s the type of person I am

This belief fits in well with these immigrant students’ generally positive perceptions of themselves—as hard-working people. They describe immigrants as people who come to America to do better for themselves, and who will make it against all odds. This belief of immigrant striving was popular among the group and showcased that they bought into existing positive immigrant stereotypes that make them out to be determined, perseverant and hard-working people. In another example Danielle expands on this hard-working ethic by using a metaphor of travel. She states that

Sometime, you know I gave them a lot of reason, because you cannot get up one day to go to another place and go back [home] without nothing in return. What was the point of going in the first place? If you’re not going back with anything. Every time, it mean that all these years, you wasted for nothing. Because today if I go back to my country without no Ph.D. or any Master’s in Psychology what I’ve been doing here? Nothing! Basically, I
seem like…it seem like I wasted all these years for nothing. If I go back with associate degree, it seem nothing. It seem like I…. It’s nothing to me. Because you cannot!

Wrapped in Danielle’s statement is the underlying belief that being hard-working went hand in hand with struggle and being proactive. She also hints to the idea the being an immigrant is about having a purpose. More than likely the purpose of migrating is about having a better life or as they shared, having the American dream. As such, their sense of purpose has a lot to do with being hardworking, struggling and not wasting time. Linda also backs up both these claims by simply stating, “Because immigrants we go so strong in everything we do. We go really hard for everything we do.”

**A place of struggle: legal status.** As struggle was primarily related to legal status, money and everyday survival for these students, they maintained a clear understanding that being legal was directly related to the types of opportunities they could have in America. In general, they felt that being immigrants meant that they did not have the same opportunities as people who were born in America, regardless of legal status. However, undocumented immigrants do face a variety of difficult challenges and stressors related to their legal status, and surprisingly deportation was a fear for some of them, despite being of legal status. For example, Fanny discusses feeling anxious in regards to being kicked out of her home by her mother and then being deported. Although she has her green card, she still worries about having nowhere to go, or being forced to leave. She worries about this primarily because her mother uses it as a threat to keep her in line.

My Mom is like you’re not American, you don’t have that luxury of someone who was born here. Because if I was supposed to get in some stupid scenario whatever, they will
deport me and send me back home. Unlike somebody that was born here, they come back out. If they go to jail they go right back

In addition, there are fewer job options and educational opportunities available to these immigrants. As the only undocumented student in the group, Tony identified the need to have “documents” as his major struggle. Tony was quite aware of his status and was very cognizant about his constricted future. He spoke about his status in terms of the opportunities that are available to him and those that are not. As an undocumented student, he cannot receive financial aid, nor can he qualify for most scholarships. He attended the school but dropped out for several years because he was unsure about what kind of future he could have because of his legal status. Since his return to the school two years ago, he has been a consistent part-time student. Since his limited finances prevent him taking a full course load each semester, his progress towards graduation is slowed. At the same time, Tony continues to work several jobs and receives very little pay out of which comes his rent among other things, which is also something that takes away from the time he can spend on completing his school work. Tony discusses his beliefs about his status in the following vignette and how it prevented him from going after his goal of going to college. Because of his status, his beliefs about his educational potential were closed off. However, his outlook on his educational future changed after her received his DACA number.

I can say… For me… for me was… not having… not having the… the documents part then, because if I had… I…. We pay social. I thought… I didn’t know. I was a high school student and I thought that you needed a social security number to go to college (…). I thought that you needed that to go to a superior school or whatever. Because I didn’t have it, I give up and I said… why… why I…, why should I bother did. So…. I
was a good student. I was a… I like school and but because I didn’t have the number I just gave up. I said that’s it I’m gonna work in the kitchen and there’s no need for me to fucking push myself because everybody’s gonna see that I don’t have a number so they gonna close the door on me. But the minute I got the number, that’s it, it was like a huge, new opportunity and a lot of doors opened to me and that’s it since then I’m going like juggernaut through walls.

Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2009) found that undocumented immigrant youth feel an overwhelming sense of injustice when they realize that the limitations that come along with their legal status. This includes feelings of anger, hopelessness and depression. Tony discusses how the opportunities available to him changed when he applied for the DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) program. This program defers deportation for two years for those who came to the U.S. illegally as children and allows them to have legal employment and other kinds of rights (Robles, 2014). Being part of this program has given him hope, and the possibility to having a future driven by getting an education and having a career.

Contrasting their “struggle” with being or becoming American. As the group got to know each other better, there was a clear indication that their bonding was predicated on comparing themselves to and distancing themselves from American born people. One way that they began to do so was by using “the struggle” to “other” Americans, in particular African-Americans. In general, the first-generation students held strong negative views of African-Americans that is, with the exception of Maria. They had a general perception that Americans had a better time at life, because they were privileged to be born in the United States and contrasted that with their lives being closed off and without opportunities for progress. As Tony indicated in the following statement:
On the struggling, what can I say? What can I say? I feel like that because like being born here… so like I see it as a privilege, being born here. Because you’re born here with a number, with a…, with a… green card and you… The minute you’re born here with the opportunity of doors and… you have like many open doors. Doors… for some of us just because I don’t have a green card, or I don’t have a number. I don’t have the same doors that open for you, you know what I mean. Like even though… no matter how hard I try to better my English. No matter how hard I try… I can have like many diplomas. I can be a top student but what’s stopped me before, not now because I applied for DACA and I have number now. Before I came here, I thought that just when I graduate high school. I thought that was it! I thought that was my limit. I thought that was it. I graduated from high school and then I said, now what?

Without the DACA program, Tony would have never realized his American dream, which was “to get my education and a…get a diploma, a degree and be able to work not as… not as… not in the restaurant.”

In addition, becoming American held both positive and negative connotations for the group and they vacillated between viewing becoming American as gaining legal status—because allowed them to have more life options, provided them with a sense of freedom, and gave them a way out of poverty. Yet, at other times, they felt that becoming American meant that they would have to embrace negative perceptions about themselves related to ethnicity and race. For example, Danielle believed that living in America makes immigrants lazy. In this exchange she asserts even she has become lazier as she has gone through the American education system.

DANIELLE: But I feel like here, the education, the education in here it makes students become lazy, why because…
LINDA: Oh yeah, definitely

TONY: Yeah

MARIA: Really?

DANIELLE: When you don’t get your work done when there’s nobody behind you to tell you do it. Professor really… some professor really care about the students, but not as much as back home.

Also, embedded within this statement is an underlying belief that the teacher is responsible for motivating student learning. There is no mention here of any responsibility on the part of the student to learn or to complete task on their own, because the onus falls on the professor to do so.

Most of the students resisted the idea that they were becoming American, and relied on othering Americans, by casting them in a negative light. They then sharply contrasted immigrants casting them in a positive light. When speaking of becoming Americans, they spoke in a two-fold way about this issue, they would start off by speaking negatively about Americans and then shift to speaking positively about immigrants, or vice versa.

What is his name, he said it the other day too. Tony said it the other day too. They think like immigrant, right, you already know what is your background because you coming from a… like hardworking. Like you’re already like hardworking person. You know how people struggle in your country to overcome some stuff like to get something to eat. If you come to another country you knew, in order for you to survive. You have to take it, you don’t have a choice but Americans, and they don’t have that in their minds. Since there’s something called shelter, food stamps and public speak... I mean…. I’m like public speaking, public assistance. That’s it! That’s all they care about.
Here Danielle creates a sweeping stereotype of Americans, in particular African-Americans, and she paints them in a negative light, as being on welfare. More than likely, Danielle believes that people who are on welfare a lazy and fail to try. Also, it is also likely that the people she sees on welfare in her neighborhood are African-Americans, this confirming her biased opinion of the group.

Interestingly enough, when asked if they would go back to their home countries, they did not consistently declare that they would not go back permanently. Maria stated, “I don’t think so. I think I want to live here.” Linda said outright that she would never go back because, “they don’t have the things I want. You have to use a calculator there, now I’m spoiled!” Although she was probably being facetious, she really believes that she could never realistically become a physical therapist there, much less a writer. However, Danielle and Fanny showed some interest in returning to their home countries but only after attaining their education and achieving their career goals. Fanny, in her interview, reiterates Danielle’s earlier comment:

I can’t just leave my country and not do anything somewhere else. I have to like… I have to be trying to achieve something so that when I go back, like I’ve been doing this, and like people can actually see what I’m actually doing and be proud.

Keeping these statements in mind, it seems that on a whole they preferred to endure a difficult immigrant life rather then return to their home countries.

The struggle as sacrifice. The idea of the struggle was also addressed in terms of getting an education. The students all maintained that it was worth the sacrifice, despite having to pay more for it, depending on their legal status or financial aid options. They referred to getting an education as an investment and that maintaining a striving for it was what immigrants do. As Danielle puts it, “like you don’t travel… from another water to another water without nothing.”
To them, failure was not an option and so struggling is part of *not failing*. Aspirationally, they maintained a positive disposition towards educational success, because it was a way to ease the suffering of immigrant life. Consequently, they accepted struggling “so as to not fail” as part of the process. For example, Tony discusses:

> Failure is not an option. We have to accomplish something, not only for us, but for them maybe because they… they…. Through us don’t you think they’re have another chance, if we make it then they make it. They struggle in the past, so it’s…you know what I mean? If we accomplish something it’s like oh my God, they feel like they accomplish something through us, because they giving us the chance by bringing us here. So I guess…

Mary Alfred (2003) states that learning how to live through struggle is valuable, she asserts that the immigrants’ ability to manage these struggles is a type of “indigenous knowledge,” which allows them to negotiate the difficulties of their everyday immigrant lives. The students in this study accepted struggling as part and parcel of the process immigrant educational experience. Entangled with this belief were ideas about familial sacrifice, which made academic failure a tangible issue for them. In light of this, their failing academically would be tantamount to familial failure. They viewed graduating and embarking on their careers to be more of a familial duty rather than a personal pursuit because their individual success would be the validation of their parents’ choices sacrifices as immigrants. In this regard, they reported feeling a sense of pressure to do well. As is suggested in this statement:

> Yeah, to like validate that they made the right choice by coming here and taking on these sacrifices to make our lives better. It’s like validation, like okay, she did it, thank
Jesus…okay, she didn’t waste what opportunity was given to her [unclear], so that’s a good thing. It’s always a good thing.

As this excerpt revealed, although the students perceived their educational choices, in terms of careers to be their own, their sense of achievement lacked a sense of personal ownership. Instead, their achievement maintained a sense of for their parents and grandparents, instead of for themselves. In some way it feels like to hopes of their entire family rested on their shoulders—and their success. It was clear that to them and to their families, the only way to avoid failure was to persist. In some way, persisting could mean taking years to graduate from a two-year college, but the point would be that they graduated.

In other words, despite being from different countries, they all could join together as people who struggle alike in America. In some way, the idea of struggling served to unify the group members and it allowed them to open up to each other, but at the same time it helped them to other Americans and paint them in a negative and stereotypical light.

**Racial and Ethnic Stereotypes**

Navigating a new cultural system also involves encountering and dealing with myriad stereotypes that exist about immigrants. Fiske et al. (2002) state that an immigrant’s country of origin will determine how they are treated by the majority population, because each immigrant nationality has its own unique economic and social history with regard to its host country, including who happens to come the country, under what circumstances and what are their trajectories for incorporation into the mainstream culture. For example, Mexicans are typically perceived as migrant workers while Chinese immigrants are viewed as model minorities. Stereotypical views like these create a legacy of afforded participation and identities for newcomer and second-generation immigrants alike, and can constrain the kinds of opportunities
that these migrants may have once they migrate. Similarly, the students in this project negotiate their ethnic and racial identities as they navigate everyday immigrant life. They come to understand the existing historical tensions between and among ethnic groups, into which they enter—as newcomer immigrants. For example, Danielle and Linda reported experiencing tensions and having negative interactions with African-Americans, Haitians, Caribbean Blacks and other African groups.

During our conversations, participants highlighted several stereotypical perceptions that “others” have of them, which only foster tense interactions with others and constrict the types of opportunities they have in this new culture.

**Negative racial experiences generate negative self-perceptions.** A poignant moment in our group discussions took place the day after the lack of an indictment verdict was passed for the police officer accused in the choking death of Eric Garner. The mood in the room was somber and something was obviously bothering Danny (a second-generation Black male). Even before the discussion commenced he was itching to share his feelings regarding this decision and what he felt this meant for his life options and his pursuits.

Danny started off by asking “why am I even in school…if it doesn’t matter?” Here, he compares himself to Eric Garner, a black man, who lost his life in an unfortunate incident. Danny feels that having an education will not remove the possibility of Garner’s fate becoming his own. As he states, “to be treated the same way in… in that’s not to my liking and I could die for it?” He was thinking out loud about the futility he felt, a sentiment that was shared by the group. He felt that this matter related to him closely because in America he could not escape being identified as a black male, and he expressed his fear about existing life-threatening consequences to being black and male in America.
Danny’s thoughts also reveal a depressing side of immigration that, upon arrival to the U.S., people are cast in racial groups with imposed rules and hierarchies, often with no way of understanding how to navigate this unfamiliar terrain. He also highlights the fact that immigrants come here for better opportunities but face many barriers including racial stigmatization that are tightly wounded with socio-economics. We talked about the idea that the second generation tends to do better than the first in terms of social mobility, to which Danny responds, “I mean hopefully, if I don’t die first!” He proceeds to talk about his belief that former Major Guiliani’s position was that, because African-American’s already kill each other (black on black crime) in such high numbers, it’s okay for police officers to do so also.

As the students trickled into the room, the conversation began to incorporate their stories of racial interactions, but this was dominated by stories from Jada and Danny (both second-generation). Immigration research suggests that the first-generation may avoid some of kinds of racial stigmatization by relying on their national or ethnic identities as a means of protection, through distancing themselves from other racial groups.

**Ethnic distancing.** Much research on first-generation African and West-Indian immigrants has reported that a great deal of tension exists between them and American-born Blacks across social class. Kasinitz (1992) posits that longstanding tensions between these groups, in particular between newcomer West Indians and American Blacks have created a legacy of mutual stereotyping. During our conversations, a recurrent theme among the first generation students from Chad, Ghana and Jamaica was that they were different from African-Americans. The students engaged in distancing themselves from African-Americans and tended to position “those people” (African-Americans) as ignorant of their “roots” and culture. They used ethnic distancing as a mechanism to explain why African American were not like them,
were not persisting, and failed to progress. For example, Danielle discusses her negative perceptions of African-Americans by comparing herself to African-Americans who play basketball, which she sees as a waste of time.

The true difference for one personality, which… my point to that one is like. They over there like trying to play basketball like… getting dirty or something, getting [unclear] while I’m here sitting in class being more educated, getting more experience, open my eyes towards study. Them over there just playing basketball, not getting anything out of it. They don’t have any benefit in basketball. You can play basketball all your life but if you not good enough… Sometimes you have knowledge from you parents but sometimes but it’s not enough to go out there and show yourself. You have to no matter what, you have to go to school to get the time you want to add it up and then help somebody, that’s how I think about education and going to school.

Like other first generation black immigrants, (see Kasinitz, 1992; Waters, 1994) the students in this project tended to maintain a preference to using nationality instead of race/ethnic identifications. Additionally, on several occasions they reported active attempts to distance themselves from American blacks, by stressing their national origins and ethnic identities (Waters, 1992) like Jamaican or Ghanaian. However, like first generation immigrants, their depictions also hinted a perceived pressure to identify themselves a “just Black” or what Bryce-Laporte (1972) calls “invisible immigrants.” This occurs because in comparisons between ethnic groups, these immigrants, in terms of acculturation, are repeatedly contrasted with Black immigrants rather than other groups like the Chinese, for example.

Immigration literature (Kasinitz, 1992) suggests that as immigrants assimilate into the U.S. culture where people of African ancestry are stigmatized, they will attempt to distance
themselves from existing racialized discourses and stereotypes by “choosing different ethnic options” like referencing their nationalities, maintaining their accents, engaging in the stereotyping of African-Americans and restricting their interactions with this group as a way to avoid potential negative treatment.

Figure 4. Word Cloud of Student-Generated Themes Related to “Community”

This word cloud derived from the pile-sorts conducted with the students, shows that students’ focus in the community is about protection, safety, health needs, an example of which is the need to have papers. Of note are the statements “different community same needs.” Culture is depicted here as a central element in their perceptions of community. It is clear that they believed that they live in diverse communities but, it is possible that they strive for others
understanding that they too have the same needs people from other communities. Therefore the ideas of difference and understanding make sense here, and are included among these themes.

**Supports: Parental, Familial Involvement and Expectations**

Overall, strong family ties and parental attachment and support (see Figure 5) “are resources for immigrant youth, providing the security and assistance they need to meet the challenges of school” (Crosnoe & Turley, 2011, p. 7). Although these students are young adults, several of them still live with their parents, with the exception of Maria and Tony, who were married and living with their spouses. They described *home* (as family) as a place where they can bring knowledge to (family) and a place of support (familial). In contrast, when describing where their funds of knowledge were not valued, students overwhelmingly identified their place of work. Several students held customer service jobs. Yet, in line with research on parental involvement, they came from families who all maintain much interest in the academic progress, since they are young adults parental involvement like parent-teacher meetings are not typical at the college level. Yet, parents are involved in other less visible but important ways.

All the students declared that their parents maintained high educational expectations for them. However, with the exception of Danny and Jada, none of their parents were college educated (Danny’s mother received her college degree at the same time he received his high school diploma), yet getting a college education is of great importance in each of their families. These immigrant parents would talk to them about their progress towards their expectations for them (the student). They would also support them financially, although several of the students had financial aid (with the exception of Maria and Tony), the other students who resided with their parents, reported that their parents would give them money if they needed it. This is notable
because, all of the students reported that money was a major barrier in either the everyday lives or in their academic attempts, or both.

Interestingly, several of the students were not the first in their families to pursue a higher education. In fact, in Danielle’s family, her four older siblings had attained degrees in various subject areas and her twin brother was also pursuing an Associate’s degree in Pharmacology. The same goes for Jada whose two older brothers are degree holders. Maria’s sister had a degree in Music. Also, Danny’s mother has a degree in Business. However, Linda and Tony are the exceptions, as they are the first in their families to go to college.

Unfortunately, high levels of family cohesion, coupled with parents’ limited access to appropriate resources can sometimes negatively affect immigrant students’ academic progress (Cooper & Korn-Bursztyn, 2015). Although their parents and siblings provide them with emotional support, high expectations and the occasional financial help, it seems that they fall short in providing them with practical assistance with regard to navigating the college-going process. Although their family may possess college-going knowledge, by way of family members who have already gone to college, support occurs only in the form of familial expectations or intermittent check-ins on their progress. This does little to alleviate students’ stress when it comes to maintaining good grades, and in keeping up with the demands of school and work. Instead, they could benefit from things like course and career planning and tutoring, and practical advice and information about navigating the college experience, which is something that is lacking within their households, even those where other family members have college-going experiences. It seems that these responsibilities are left in the hands of academic faculty, like teachers and advisors, or up to them to figure these things out.
In addition, two of the students have siblings who have attained some level of college education. For example, Danielle’s older brother is going to school to become a pharmacist and her twin brother is going to another local community college. All of Jada’s older siblings have degrees and Maria’s sister also went to college in Spain.

Having familial support worked like a buffer for these immigrant students during the migration process, which helped them in their academic goals. All of the students maintained strong ties with their families, even if they did not live in New York. Although they spoke of feelings of post migration sadness and loss, they also felt that it was important to maintain strong familial bonds.

**Parental and familial involvement as obligation.** The exceptions to this idea of strong familial bonds are Linda and Fanny, whose familial relations proved to be extremely negative and strained. Both students had in common a negative relationship with their mothers that resulted from abrupt and lengthy parental separations, and recent reunifications. In addition, parental involvement took the form of obligation via high academic expectations; meaning that instead of making their own academic and career choices, they had to comply with their parents’ educational and career selections. Although Fanny’s current major is Liberal Arts, she will change to Law at a four-year college. The only issue is that this is her mother’s plan, not Fanny’s. She would like to be a writer. Interestingly enough, Linda also wants to become a
writer, but her mother is pushing her to become a Physical Therapist.

Figure 5. Word Cloud of Student-Generated Themes Related to "Home"

Looking at this word cloud, it seems like the home is a place that brings together many themes, mainly family and support. In terms of support and education, the cloud reveals a focus on terms like hard-working, perseverance, staying focused; goals, strong-willed, open-minded, motivation and “family will push you.” These all seem like values that are held within these immigrant students’ households that would be centrally related to the pursuit of higher education. Not surprisingly, home is seen as a place of traditions. In terms of immigration, the idea of reunions seems to stand out here, as several students depicted stories of familial separations and reunions being part of their migratory experience.
Student Identity Maps

By the end of November, the dynamic in the group was one of competence. The students displayed a continued sense of interest in the group project, by taking of pictures and by engaging in ongoing our conversations. In particular, it seemed that they were beginning to feel a lot more competent in demonstrating knowledge and they seemed to be a lot more aware that they could express themselves freely and that everyone would respect what they had to say.

During the month of November, I began to notice that they were more willing to take control of group discussions and I wanted to engage them in reflecting on “who they saw themselves as” in school, at home, and in the community. However, I felt that it would be interesting to see how they would use drawings to project some sense of who they were. So, at the end of November, I engaged them in drawing identity maps.

Identity maps are drawings that a participant makes of him or herself (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014) that can depict pertinent issues in their lives, conflicts, hopes and dreams among many other things. The students were asked to draw a picture of who they saw themselves as, as students, as immigrants, a community members and as knowledgeable persons, which at that point we had spent a lot of time discussing in the group. Additionally, they could add any information they felt would tell us about the things or people that were important to them, as well as the joys and challenges that they had experienced in their everyday life. In terms of funds of knowledge, the identity map gives us information about the participant’s historically accumulated, culturally developed, and socially distributed resources that are essential for self-definition, self-expression, and self-understanding (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). The identity maps are presented below with their accompanying student narratives—with the exception of Fanny, who did not have one.
Danielle

Figure 6. Danielle’s Immigrant Identity Map

“This is me, myself and I,” are the first words Danielle used to describe this drawing. She continued:

This is me with my Psychology books… obviously with other books, but this is me here at Hostos Community College library reading my books trying to prepare for my finals. Because I believe everything will be good for me like towards my career, so I don’t have any worries at all, right now. So I designed my office here [the building to the right hand side of the drawing], my physical therapy office here, and I’m here with a patient. There are my materials and I’m talking with my patient and every week they come here and we do therapy and I’m talking about how her health improved…this is the chain in the
Hostos library [big chair drawn in the middle of the page] and that’s me trying to go run
go have a seat in the chair before somebody else take it, because in the library you have
to reserve them.

In explaining the drawing title “immigrant life,” Danielle says:

It’s about working hard, sometimes we struggle as a lot but then we put all the struggle
behind thinking when you were back home, you were even in more worse that when you
are here. So just forget about the struggle and then believe in yourself. Put your mind, set
up yourself to one thing, and all that you will overcome—one day it will pay off. That’s
all I have in my mind right now.

Danielle’s depicted sense of self is one of persistence (see Figure 6). She puts many
details into this image that showcase her life in the present and the future. She presents herself
here to be a hardworking student who through putting aside or working through her issues will
become someone—a physical therapist, which is represented here by her chair in her future
office. More important, her sense of self is driven by her future goal of becoming a physical
therapist. Going to school and getting an education are central to her attaining her future goals.
She also claims her identity as an immigrant student, an identity that is grounded within the idea
of struggling—the overall picture suggests that immigrants face many struggles, but in order to
succeed, one has to work through and get past those issues.
Maria states that:

At the beginning, before I started school I was completely lost. I didn’t know… I knew I wanted to change my career at some point but, I didn’t have the right idea and I was looking for something that I really like it but I didn’t like anything. So it took me time to realize that what I want to do now is dental hygiene. Okay so before I was lost but then I saw what I can do, like a new career, then I decided. Then I decided back to school again that was like a hard decision because I was like another three years to study, but I decided so I just went. After I was scared about the new environment, the new academic language and I’m going to study in a new country and new language… financial worries because I know if I get in the program, I cannot work. So I was worried where I am I
going to get the money or save up enough money. I know I don’t have time because I know I spend more time than any student [does in] studying, because it takes me more time. I can sacrifice, I cannot socialize or vacation but, I’m happy because I think I’m learning and right now I’m in a crisis because I don’t know if I’m going to get in the program or not and now I’m thinking of new options. Like I study harder or see another school.

As Maria wraps up her description, Danielle asks her about her commitment to becoming a dental hygienist. She states, “You believe you want to do that or you think you want to do that? To which Maria confidently responds, “I believe I can do that and I think that I can do that!”

Maria’s drawing (see Figure 7) depicts her educational and career goal that is, to become a Dental Hygienist. From this starting point, she details the varied choices that are open and closed-off to her. She presents this option as struggles that she must face. At the bottom left corner of the page she drew an image of herself with the words “COMPLETELY LOST???” This seems like both a statement and a question that she may be asking herself. As she explains, choosing to come to America in pursuit of her higher education goals, and a new career was not an easy choice, particularly because she faced a new system, linguistically, academically and financially. Although not necessarily captured in her drawing, Maria truly believes that she will accomplish her career goal despite these challenges, as is evidenced by her resounding declaration of commitment to this path.
Jada

Jada begins by saying, “It starts with me and it ends with me!” She continues:

It’s just like I guess what I think I identify with. It’s just with me. It’s like I’m a daughter, sister, auntie and it says voyeur. Sweetheart. I’m a Jamerican, adventurer, foodie. I’m Caribbean, because I still consider myself Caribbean. It says so Brooklyn, obviously that’s where I’m from and a New Yorker. I always say I’ll be a New Yorker first, Brooklyn is my place of residence. Potential Mom, that’s like to the future. It says eccentric scholar, internal activist, a free-spirited traveler. A modern-day slave, that refers to my job, a
modern-day learner and a product of my ancestors. I was just writing, I just didn’t know…

The only thing that it shows me from this… it just shows that I’m just all over the place. I’m just that person that just likes to be involved in any and everything. I just, if it sparks my interest, it’s just like Imma go for it. But…because I guess being of Caribbean background and being grown up in a household where we’re not too closed minded. Like we are open to a lot of things it kind of gave me that kind of background. Like hey, I live in Brooklyn, let me go to school in the Bronx, and let me go work in Manhattan and let me go live upstate. I kind of gave me that flexibility to do what I wanted to do; and I get called a free spirit a lot, so I guess that’s where it comes from.

In her drawing (see Figure 8), Jada presents her social identities as herself, daughter and sister. However, she has created hierarchy of identities in her drawing. Her identity drawing seems to have several conflicting identities; for example, the “free spirit” is shaded and connected to “modern day slave,” which seem like opposing self-positions. The drawing seems to be divided into parts. The top third of this drawing seems to be filled with titles or social roles that she takes up, like daughter, sister, college student, friends, auntie. However, the words at the lower third of the drawing seem to focus more on personality type identities. In the middle of the drawing, she uses several types of place identities, including Caribbean and So Brooklyn. At the outmost parts, she identifies herself in contrasting ways; to the left she calls herself Jamericand to the right Caribbean. It seems that she holds on to a bicultural sense of identity. Also at the lower third, she describes herself in a very complex ways that seem to be a reflection of how she wants others to see her. For example, she wants to be perceived as eccentric, a scholar, an internal activist, a modern-day learner, a free-sprit, a traveler and all over the place. This part of
her drawing hints to a major theme in Jada’s life story that is she perceives that others see her stereotypically, and that other people don’t take the time to get to know her.

**Linda**

![Image](image.png)

*Figure 9. Linda’s Immigrant Identity Map*

As the student presented their drawings to each other Linda stated “I’ll go first. I have this!” Comparatively, at the start of the project, Linda would never have stood up in front of the group to present her work. She preferred to let others speak first, then she would chime in, but by the end of November she became more confident and took it upon herself to lead the group in the discussion of her drawing. She continued:

I’m a flower and this is myself and these are the ideas that comes out of me. I’m a survivor, I’m a helper, I’m bold, I’m a fighter, I’m confident, I’m a college student, I’m an
immigrant, I’m independent and a churchgoer… like how I’m a fighter all the time, because I used to be a wrestler. So people would say that she just trying to get independent and that was what I was doing. Because if I see somebody in the street and they treating somebody bad, so I just… Physically go ahead and just smack them in the head or get a brick and hit their face. I don’t care. But, these shows me who…I reminding me to become a better person. Even though some of them are negative, some of them are bad and good. It shows me who I am. Because I was abused by my father, he was like you’re like a piece of… and all then he keep saying it, hitting me and everything like that. So I was like next time, and when I move of this place. I’m going to be a wrestler. So… so don’t mess with me. Mhmmm, don’t touch me when I’m mad He was pissed off, he said why you being offensive. All the things you did, that’s why I going to [get out of here].

Linda presents herself here (see Figure 9), as a plant with a flower, to be unfolded petal by petal, which hints towards a complicate sense of self. She locates herself at the root of the flower, possibly representing the core of who she is. She describes herself in social ways, like as a college student, volunteer member, immigrant, family member and a church-goer but as one looks around the petals, Linda’s complex identity begins to emerge. She sees herself as independent, a survivor, and helper, lover, fighter, bold and confident. However, when she explains why she considers herself a fighter she opens up, which is written close to the center of her flower, possibly indicating how strongly she feels about this identity. She reveals to the group her experiences of abuse at the hands of her father. This is something that she would not have done at the start of the project. In the early sessions, Linda was very quiet and would hardly speak up but at this point, she was quite expressive and she became more confident in telling her story. Interestingly, she places being independent on a large outer petal. Being independent was a
major theme in Linda’s story, even early on in the group, she declared that coming to America allowed her to be independent. Taking this into consideration, maybe Linda feels that since migrating she could be away from and free of her abuse relatives, it is possible that this represents independence for her.

Danny

![Image of Danny's Immigrant Identity Map]

*Figure 10. Danny’s Immigrant Identity Map*

As Danny starts discussing his drawing (see Figure 10), he declares, “I’m kind of disappointed, I don’t know if I answered the question.” To which I responded, “Just go ahead,
there’s no wrong answer.” This fixation on getting the right answer was prevalent among the students, however, by the middle of project, these kinds of response became less frequent as the students began to see themselves as more capable. He continues:

So, you know I have a… I don’t know why I wrote my name twice the top one is with my left hand. So I am son, Mama’s boy. I’m a younger brother, I have two older sisters and one older brother. I’m an older brother, so I have a younger sister as well. So, I guess I’m going to start with the right side. So I was… growing up around elementary school I was not an active community member. I was inside my house mostly, doing whatever I could do in my house. So, as I… when I went to high school or a little after maybe fourth fifth grade I’d become… an active community member playground knowledge… going to the basketball court… going to places of my friends hang out, hung out or going to house parties or… whatever… high school I believe was the first time I voted... I think it was... was it 2008 elections that I will, nah it wasn’t old enough yet. I feel like the first time that’s... I feel sad but yeah voting... I wasn’t act… It’s you know becoming... an active member of the community. And then on the left side... starting with elementary school I was a troubled student, so I had a lack of direction; and then... one of… Years after, sometime before fifth grade I’d become an aware student. So, I had academic direction sometime in high school I was exposed to nursing... I have a lot of chats with my high school nurse about all aspects of the human body the anatomy and all that; and then I finally became a high school graduate... excited student, college students, I went to three colleges (unclear) on the left and Hofstra on the right. I have Hostos community college... hopefully I can change my... what is a called? Major… nursing and then become a physician’s assistant.

At this point, I responded to Danny by saying, “sounds good, sounds like a map of your
life, yeah.” Because I validated his story, it allowed him to see his drawing and his story as valuable, if not “right.” To which he responded. “Yeah, hopefully it’s a map of my life, well some day!”

Like Jada, Danny prominently displays several social roles at the top of his drawing, which looks like a flow chart, hinting towards a kind of existing hierarchy among his identities. Some examples are: son (mama’s boy), younger brother, and older brother. In his second tier to the left, he begins to depict some of the issues that he seems to have faced, including being a troubled student and lacking direction. Also to the right of his drawing, he displays a variety of his social interests, for example, a voter. However, in this section he does seem to showing that he has moved from being (or he hopes to move) from being an inactive community member to an active community member. In the middle of the drawing shows his progression from being a troubled student to being an aware student by gaining some direction in his life. At one point, it seems that his goal was to become a nurse, yet it is unclear as to whether this is no longer an option for him. At the right bottom of the drawing, he identifies all the schools that he had attending, which all seemed to lead him to Hostos. As such, Hostos became a place where he can explore both possibilities.
Fanny

Fanny completed her drawing at another point during our project. Consequently, she does not have an accompanying narrative unlike the other students. However, here is an overview of her drawing. Fanny’s identity “drawing” (see Figure 11) reads like a declaration of nationalism and patriotism, as is evinced by her “wearing her flag on her forehead.” She believes that her immigrant identity makes her different from others in the world; it makes her unique, yet she struggle with dealing with others’ opinions. Unfortunately she does not elaborate on who these others are and what makes her opinions clash with theirs.

**Reflections on student identity maps.** These identity maps were a deviation from our photo-taking, and served as a tool through which the students could further examine their immigrant identities. In building on group story-telling practices, these activities exposed (to them and myself) many of the often taken-for granted themes embedded within their everyday
lived experiences. This activity built upon the themes addressed within these images, and allowed for critically reflecting on the everyday figured worlds and practices they participated in, as ethnic minority immigrant students.

The drawings presented above illustrate how identities are distributed and culturally mediated. As such, identities can represent social roles (for example, son or daughter) as well as individual declarations (for example, I’m a survivor, I’m a helper, as stated by Linda). Identities can also relate to social institutions (for example, the school, the church, work); they can also be about place (Community, for example as stated by Jada, It says so Brooklyn), and artifacts (for instance, Danielle’s chairs, in the library and in her future office). It is a lived experience, embedded in social and cultural sources of identity (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). In terms of funds of knowledge, the home, the school and the community are sources of funds of knowledge that become funds that are drawn upon in identity-making when individuals appropriate them and use them to define themselves as they engage in shared practices like that of our collaborative Photovoice project.
**Academic Learning**

Academic settings are spaces where students of immigrant backgrounds (who are also students of color) negotiate multiple identities grounded in the struggles for equality and power in mainstream society (Caraballo, 2011). Typically, students from ethnic minority and immigrant backgrounds find themselves facing learning settings that de-contextualize learning and devalue their cultural and linguistic knowledge, thus resigning themselves to the positions of “incapable” and “deficient.” While immigrant life spaces excluded them from participating in meaningful ways, and delegitimized their immigrant experiences and cultural funds of knowledge, Hostos Community College created a space that privileged these personal experiences and considered it relevant to student success and belonging.

To discuss the local culture of Hostos Community College, I have adopted the concept of figured worlds. Holland et al. (1998) describe a figured world as a “realm of interpretation in which a particular set of characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others” (p. 52). This concept of figured worlds provides a lens through which to examine the world of this small, neighborhood community college, a place where immigrant cultural skills and knowledge are positioned as valuable.

Hostos community college is not a typical neighborhood school where students go to because it is a last resort; instead, it is a school that is well spoken about in the neighborhood of the South Bronx. This school caters specifically to first and second-generation immigrant students who are also primarily first time college students. This is also a school where students’ social, cultural and linguistic funds are valued and enriched. This school does well to create a local culture that positions immigrant students as capable of success and immigrant knowledge as a valuable resource. The buildings as depicted in the students photos are clean, modern, and in good repair.
Classrooms, although somewhat plain, have educational resources. However, when students get to this school, they enter into a figured world that does not essentialize learning as English-only or a textbook based process; rather, it positions immigrant cultural and linguistic skills as resources and places them as central to academic achievement. Both Spanish and English are spoken here among other languages.

The Figured World of Hostos Community College

Getting off the train at 149th street and Grand Concourse, one can sense a change in the surroundings. At the top of a hill, at the intersection of 149th and Grand Concourse, sits this little school. This is an old neighborhood, full of history, and as you reach the top of the subway station stairs, you are aware that several generations of people who have walked up and down those stairs before you. About twelve steps is all it takes to get to the doors of the college. Pausing to think about all who walked through the doors to Hostos since it’s opening 1968, it is easy to conjure up ideas about the myriad groups of people who have lived in this Bronx neighborhood over the years, and how it has changed and as one looks towards the east with new constructions on the horizon one gets the sense that change is coming to this old neighborhood.

It is loud and it is always loud here! There are traffic noises, the screams of children, vendors hawking their goods, and the screeching of ambulance sirens—as they go to and from Lincoln hospital next door. You can hear a multitude of languages and accents. You can see crowds of people waiting on buses, trains and taxis, while an admixture of Arabic food, Popeye’s and McDonalds punctures the air. The rhythm of this street corner is one of business and a hustled pace. Yet, amid this confusion, you can hear someone shout out in a familiar tone,

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22 See Figure 19
“primo, que tal,” followed by a bellow of laughter as arms fly into the air and hugs and kisses flow. There is a familiarity here; people know each other in this crowded place.

If you stand at this intersection at the top of the hill, you can see for several blocks, to the north is the Concourse and Franz Sigel Park, to the west is Harlem River and lots of new construction, and in the east is a steady stream of people coming from 3rd Avenue shops. To the south the images of old industrial buildings seems unchanged by time. What does stick out when one looks in this southern direction is the bridge, which links the C and A buildings of the school campus. Not only does it stand out from the rest of the background but it one of the first things that one sees when getting out of the train station, it lets you know that you have arrived at Hostos.

Like most neighborhoods in NYC, this one is in transition; you can see several new constructions in progress—a new mall about five blocks away, a reconstructed park down the block. However, there are remnants of things unchanged, the congestion and noise delivered by Lincoln Hospital, the main shopping strip of Third Avenue, all come together at the top of the hill at 149th and Grand Concourse. At the southern end of the Hostos campus is and dilapidated and long-abandoned high school building, a symbol of times gone by but, it also could be a sign of the future, as it could be the very place into which the school may expand.

Hostos sits at the cusp of old and new, its ever-changing and ever-growing student body represents new populations of students and new set of needs, yet the campus building itself signals its stagnation. The school is said to be at capacity (or way past, depending on who you speak with), the conversation among the staff is always one of limited space, so this spot is noteworthy. The school is growing, its student population has increased over recent years and the little neighborhood school that one served a few hundred now serves over six thousand. Space is
but one of the growing pains of this little school; finding effective ways to educate “all those who seek it” is high on its list of things to do.

As you walk in the main campus building security guards and turnstiles greet you. These mechanisms give the impression that one is safe. In reality, the Hostos campus security does a good job in being conspicuous on campus. They are ever-present, walking through the hallways, checking identification at each entrance into the campus buildings, riding their bicycles and cars around the small campus block. While in the Hostos building, one does feel protected, yet there is a sneaking suspicion that the security is there for a reason. In addition, one is also quite aware of the boundaries of the campus security as soon as one leaves the block in any direction. After swiping your id card, a slow elevator ride takes you to one of the five floors in the main building. These elevators have been a sore point for most students and faculty, because there are only two of them to service an entire building including students, faculty and staff. Oftentimes, it is just faster to walk up the stairs.

Having been in existence since the 1960s, this school has served many people who would have been passed over, ignored and turned away by other schools, some of which are even CUNY schools. This school caters to the needs of an ever-growing minority immigrant class. A large number of students who come to Hostos are considered non-traditional students. They come from low-income and immigrant households, they are Black and/or Hispanic, they are older, they have kids, they work multiple part-time jobs, English is not their first language, and they typically the first in their families to go to college. Many students report feeling like they belong at this school, primarily because of it small-campus feel, convenient location and the innumerable support programs and services available at the school.
Hostos’ retention rate is around 67 percent\(^{23}\). However, taking remedial courses is a major part of students’ curriculum here. Students often have to take several semesters of remedial Math and English before they can enter into the major courses, a factor the cripples their graduation rates and their GPAs as well. However, many students do persist. They work their way through these courses and move on to major courses. Because Hostos is a community college, one of its main tasks is to prepare students for a terminal degree, an Associate’s degree. This kind of degree is typically done in a practical area of study like Nursing, Dental Hygiene and Radiologic Technology, which are three of the most popular major choices among students. Additionally, in programs like these, students receive practical training via internships at local hospitals. However, students cannot simply enter into these programs, they must compete for entrance via having near perfect GPAs and by taking an entrance exam. The stakes a pretty high since these programs are capped at around 50 students per program year. Therefore making it even more of a task to get into. Although highly competitive, programs like Dental Hygiene receive over 300 applications a year from students. Two things are of interest in this observation; first, because most students have to take so many remedial courses, it takes them a long time to get into the program of choice (if ever at all). Second, as students who are considered non-traditional—that is older, working, and with familial responsibilities—it is surprising that many of students stick with their educational plans and even manage to make it into these types of programs, and eventually graduate. However, as a teacher I oftentimes hear students griping about their inability to complete an assignment or attend class because of a variety of life responsibilities.

In comparing Hostos to its surroundings, it can seem like an oasis among many of the brown project buildings of the South Bronx. As a teacher at the school, I have never had the impression that students come here as a last resort. Instead, students come here because they want to be here, they have known someone who attended the school or they have heard that it’s a good school. The school has a good reputation for being a community school rather than a commuter school. Meaning that it serves mostly people from the South Bronx, although many students do come from the other New York boroughs to take classes there.

*Figure 12. A Typical Classroom*
Hostos Community College is a school that caters to a diverse student population, and provides students with a figured world that supports a multiethnic and multilingual environment and a practices. McDermott and Varenne (1995) argue that cultures have the ability to create ways for people to be disabled and that failure is not something that students attain, but is instead something that schools and cultures achieve in creating a system that privileges a singular way of knowing.

Too often, ethnic minority immigrant students make the “forced choice” (Nasir & Saxe, 2003, p. 3) of trading in their cultural practices, knowledge and identities in order to get an education. In discussing this concept, these authors state that youth from minority groups often deal with an existing tension between their ethnic and academic identities (inclusive of race, class, nationality and linguistic designations) as they position themselves and are positioned by
others in relation the educational practices. They assert that ethnic minority students “feel that
they must choose between a positive ethnic identity and a strong academic identity” (p. 3) and
that despite bringing their ethnic identities into the classroom, these student perceive that in order
to be successful in learning that they need to become “raceless” (p. 3).

In Hostos, students do not have to choose between their cultural backgrounds or identities
and their academic identities. Instead, within this school exists a cultural environment where
students can maintain their cultural identities, and where they feel that they are all one and the
same because “everyone here is immigrant and everyone here is struggling” (Danielle, on our
walkabout). For example, at Hostos, being Mexican, Trinidadian, or Dominican is synonymous
with being educated. Therefore, at this school, academic success is part of immigrant identity,
allowing students to feel as though they do not have to betray their linguistic and cultural
heritages in order to attain an education.

In this college, the pressure to choose between cultural maintenance and cultural
assimilation is minimized because here students see models, usually in the form of faculty and
staff, who are multiethnic and academically successful, accomplished, and fluent in multiple
languages—chiefly Spanish and English, although other languages are spoken here including
French, Arabic, Nigerian languages like Igbo and Yoruba, Ghanaian languages like Twi, Ga and
Akan, and a host of other African languages and dialects. Here, being from another country is
normal, so much so that the students in this study did not perceive being an immigrant as
problematic within this space. As one walks down the hallways, it is common to hear a variety of
languages other than English and Spanish. Basically, most people here have some sort of accent,
even West Indian.
Because this school creates a sense of inclusion, students here do not seem to feel deficient because of their lack of English skills. Instead they uphold the belief that learning English is part of the process of getting an education, rather than an act of replacing their own languages. Such a view allows them to maintain a positive disposition towards learning English, as if it is part of their self-improvement, rather than being something they must just get through or pass because the school acknowledges and caters to students whose are typically second language learners, and a sense of bilingualism permeates students’ school lives, even if they are native English speakers. This makes being able to speak another language a resource and not a deficit.

Hostos is a figured world that acknowledges students’ backgrounds, and also caters to students who come from immigrant, low socioeconomic and historically stigmatized groups. The students in this study discussed their feelings about going to another college, the reasons why they came to Hostos and the benefits of coming to Hostos, and how connected they felt to the school. This school offers students a range of services, including financial aid, legal aid, immigration, childcare, tutoring, scholarship mental health, and technology among many others. As these support services are made available to students, they are relayed to them in a language that they can understand, which at another school would probably be relayed only in English. The school also hosts several events and activities throughout the year that involves local community members, local artists and local government officials from the South Bronx neighborhood, all of which work to foster as sense of pride in the students, in terms of culture, history, community and language.

The environment here values diverse cultural histories, languages and practices found within the student population. This is evidenced by teachers making an effort to include these
things into their curricula. For example, Danielle mentions that she is currently taking a Public Speaking class where she has to write a research paper on “conventional or organically produced meat.” She goes on to say that “from this knowledge [of farming] I can bring it in my research.” Also, at this college several courses are offered in Spanish, including Introduction to Psychology. Even in English classes it is likely that teachers will engage with students in Spanish (or other languages), in attempts to make connections between both languages.

As a teacher at the school, I find myself using Spanish and French words at times to explain English words or concepts. Also, here it is easy to draw upon my own experiences as an immigrant, in particular with Caribbean students (both English- and Spanish-speaking). I typically talk to them about how things are “back home,” a concept that “we all share.” This is something I never found myself capable of doing so freely in my other teaching positions, where the student population was different. Among the group, the black students were eager to display their Spanish-speaking skills, being able to do so made them feel even more connected to the school.

Students’ Beliefs about Learning

In order to examine the students’ beliefs about learning, they were asked to complete a series of open-ended statements during their individual interviews. For example, my goal of learning is and learning is important to me. Additionally, this topic was touched on during the group discussions. The students saw themselves as goal-oriented, yet they maintained a means-end approach to learning, and they often equated learning to “getting an education.” However, as our discussions progressed it was clear that learning held more complex motivations for them; including giving back to their families, giving back to others, the struggle and motivation and passion, perseverance. Not surprisingly, they all reported their future jobs as major source of
motivation for their current educational goals. In general, their main educational goals were to pass the classes that they were taking and to graduate from the college. Graduating was very important for several of students because, it meant that they could move on to a 4-year college where they could take classes in the major area. At the community college level, a majority of students maintain liberal arts majors, allowing them to complete their remedial courses and general education requirements, which would make them better prepared for courses in their major fields. For example, Tony’s career goal is to become a social worker, but because the closest area the school offers is Human Services. Still, Tony has several remedial courses to complete in order to take classes in his major.

Figure 14. Maria’s Dental Hygiene image

Maria (personal communication, October, 22, 2014) stated that she really wants to get a Dental Hygiene degree.

Not surprising was the emphasis students placed on getting good grades. However, good grades were understood as transferrable grades, meaning grades that were C and above. As Danielle highlights, “all my classes need B+ and above to transfer and in order to be in that
program. That’s what I hope to get next semester.” Although it may not seem like it, there is much competition in community colleges for spaces in major programs. For example, Maria was about to apply to the Dental Hygiene program (see Figure 14), where only 50 spaces were available each year. In order to get in, a student must have above a 3.5 GPA. However, with such limited space and over 300 applicants, the competition was tough. Here, Maria expresses her frustration about her odds of getting into the program.

…ehh the advisor, but the advisor is like always like study hard but the reality it’s like 50 spaces. This is the reality. I mean, know if I study hard okay maybe I can get A, A or one B+ but still I want to know one hundred percent, so if I have the possibility to get in the program next year, if not please let me know because, you know I don’t want to waste time another year or waiting for getting in the program in two years. Or study all this subjects for getting in this program that I’m not going to start, so I need answers I’m like completely like over the moon. I don’t know, fifty spaces is nothing? You know how many people apply for this program. I don’t know, I don’t know, I’m like freaking out.

Consequently, doing well in school was about maintaining a transferrable GPA, which would lead to graduating and then towards having their degrees. Also, having their degrees would lead them to having careers, this was a major motivator for them. As such, GPAs, graduating and having a degree were the main components of their learning goals. In turn, “being educated” was about getting the “piece of paper” that would allow to get a job.

**Purpose in learning.** The statement *I’m going to school because...* was used to address how students conceptualized the purpose of learning. The responses to this statement were varied, but they were predominantly practically oriented. However, Linda’s, Jada’s and Danny’s responses revolved around family, albeit in differing ways. Yet, for these students even family
maintained a sense of real-worldness. Both Linda’s and Danny’s responses reflected a sense of family obligation. For example, Linda stated that she was going to school “to make my parents proud and my grandmother.” At times, Linda contended that she felt obligated to get an education because her mother insisted that she become a Physical Therapist. However, her dream was to become a writer, but her mother often reminded her that “passion doesn’t pay the bills.”

Similarly, Jada noted, “for myself and my family.” She felt that her educational dreams were being supported by her family members because they never criticized her for having these goals. She continues, “I never had anybody say like you can’t do this.” Unlike Linda, Jada sees her family as a source of strength that she can draw from in setting out and accomplishing her goals.

Likewise, Danny maintained a sense of obligation about school. He stated that school is a “great opportunity for us all in terms of...getting a...solidifying a career achieving something that everyone else has, in the family. So there are no excuses, no more criticism—hopefully.” His beliefs about school centered upon doing what others in his family expected him to do, because it would lead him to a career. However, unlike the other students, Danny did not see much value in a college education besides getting to a point where he could make money. Additionally, he did not see school as “real world.” In his mind, “college is not. I won’t say it’s the real world, you don’t get everything all at once in a college classroom because people are more accepting in the college classroom.” For him, school was in opposition to the world that he had experienced. He continued:

You’re really not working for a salary in college and that’s the ultimate goal after, for me anyways in my personal opinion. That’s the ultimate goal after graduating college, you’re going to get a career. You’re going to provide yourself with a happy life at some point,
but the reason why it’s not a real world for me is because I feel like you escape from
some of the things that will happen outside of the school like dangers. I know there are
dangers that happen in school but you know a lot of that from a day to day or daily
routine that doesn’t really happen that consistently. Usually what happens is the
organized—running around, going to the library being able to pass a test or just read the
next chapter that’s something you don’t do outside of the school as much as you do in
school and that’s why I don’t call it the real world.

Furthermore, Danny saw very little value in school and spoke as if he was “doing his
time.” His views of school were oftentimes blasé and he took on a somewhat passive approach to
his studies. He believed that he should be living life instead of sitting in the classroom—as he
expands on below:

Yeah because the experiences that you have aren’t always in the class and you can meet
some nice people and you can always talk about whatever topic that was presented in
class but if you go out in the real world and be able to experience what life has to offer, I
think it’s worthwhile to me. Because I’m a poor college student, there’s not much more
that I can do but learn and get past the two years that I have here, that’s what I see it as.

Danny’s point of view may not be so strange in the world of community college.

Moreover, Danny’s position here is quite reflective of the typical non-traditional student
who juggles the responsibilities of work, family and school, taking a class in between jobs and
other obligations. Furthermore, if you poll a class of community college students (which I did in
my current Introduction to Psychology course) about their motivation for being in college, the
most popular answer by far will be money. Like these students, Danny believed that school
serves only a purpose if it leads to securing a job. As such he, like many other immigrant
students, was constrained by the practicalities of his everyday life, which he repeatedly described as “survival.”

However, when they were asked to explain what school (education) gives to them their answers took on a more philosophical tone and centered upon the opportunities for change that were related to getting educated. For them, education was about gaining more experience, socializing with others, it gave them a voice, and it validated their parents’ decision to migrate. For Maria, education gave her,

More experience and more excited because you studied more things, then but you became more educated because you see different things, different kinds of people and you learn and diversity, and you grow up like a person… I mean being here in the school, first helped me to socialize. I mean outside the school I socialize but I socialize in another [way]. Secondly, I improved my English because I’m speaking English and helped me to be … When I started school, helped me to be in another environment because before it was just work, home ah well friends… go the gym blah, blah, blah. But I wasn’t… having like… a proper education I guess.

Throughout our time together, Maria’s biggest complaint was that she did not speak English well enough, and at one point she blurted out to the group “I no speak, I no speak.” However, by the end of our project Maria was speaking with more competence, she engaged the group and even led several group discussions and presentations of images. As such, getting an education provided her with the means to improve herself, by improving her language skills but more important, her perceptions of her language capabilities.

For Jada, getting an education was related to recognizing her family’s migratory choices and sacrifices. This sentiment alludes to the idea that immigrants describe as “being here for a
purpose.” In her case, her graduating from college would demonstrate this to her to her parents.

As she discusses below:

Yeah, to like validate that they made the right choice by coming here and taking on these
sacrifices to make our lives better. It’s like validation, like okay, she did it, thank Jesus.
Okay, I get to have peace [laughing], stuff like that, it just makes them happy. Okay, she
didn’t waste what opportunity was given to her [unclear], so that’s a good thing. It’s
always a good thing.

Yet, rooted in this sentiment is also as sense of obligation, because Jada also feels that
getting an education is “absolutely necessary” because “you can’t just sit at home doing
nothing.” In my discussions with Jada, it was clear that like Danny that getting an education held
much practical significance for her. She believed that getting her education would please her
parents, but unfortunately she wants to “already graduate, God!”

Furthermore Linda explained that having an education had afforded her the opportunity
“to speak up.” She believes that an education will give her the platform to speak up because
“without education, I won’t be here.” In discussing her beliefs, she reflects on her experiences in
Ghana, where she could not speak up because she was a girl and because “you can’t raise you
voice to your husband or your boyfriend… you can’t speak up, even if your husband is hurting
you…because you’re a girl you’re supposed to take it.” Now, being here in America, she can
avoid that fate, because she has the opportunity to express herself, which is extremely important
to her. In particular, at Hostos, others would listen. To Linda getting an education was the only
way that she could avoid a future living under the control of her mother and gain independence.

Similarly, Fanny viewed self-expression as an important outcome of getting an education.
However, she saw school as the place where she could speak up and be herself, because she
could not speak up at home. In response to this question, Fanny tells the tale of “two Fannies,” she is just Fanny at home and Fanny X at school.

How am I different? Like I express myself very differently. Instead of shouting in the house like… Instead of shouting, I behave like I’m having a regular conversation. I’m smiling, I’m communicating with other people because my Mom… I’m just there. If it wasn’t for work or school, I don’t go anywhere. So, I’m just in the house, I don’t have anyone to socialize with and she mean like I’m always on my phone. I don’t have anybody to talk to. I don’t have anyone to socialize with, so what else am I going to do?

Yeah, so. This is a complete new person you see.

Here, Fanny presents a fragmented sense of her identity, she feels as though she has to split herself in two in order to deal with the difficulties resulting from an extended familial separations. This broken relationship also affects her perceptions of school as a safe place, because at Hostos she feels connected to others, mainly because she can express herself there, unlike in her home. Although she is pained by the acrimonious relationship she has with her mother, Fanny also views staying in school is the only way she can eventually avoid this situation, because by coming to school she can leave the drama at the door, at least for a short time. Like Linda, she too feels that her opinion is valued in school and in the meantime, she is content on expressing herself through poetry. In this way, school allowed her the opportunity to be something that she was unable to be in her home and in her relationship with her mother—it gave her a voice, because “people would listen” to her. It gave her an outlet and the context to discover who she was, unrestricted by the rigidity of home life.

**Students’ academic goals as intrinsically linked with career goals.** For these students getting an education had a redressive quality. As can be heard in John’s statement, “yes… think
about getting your education and what it says to your family. You know they’ve been there to support all the time. It’s like yeah!” Their academic goals were primarily connected to having a career, and making money. The discussion about the relationship between academic goals and career goals started in our October 30th group session, when Danielle presented her image to the group about depicting a textbook. It was a Physical Therapy textbook, this book made her feel “passionate.” She stated that she took this picture because, “since my career is to become a Physical Therapist, when I see this picture…it encourages me to go further to pursue my education and to have let’s say Ph.D.” She describes becoming a Physical Therapist as being her passion, and that it drove her decision to go to college.

Figure 15. Danielle’s Physical Therapy textbook image
Danielle (personal communication, October, 28, 2014) stated that being a Physical therapist was her reason for being in school.

Within the group, students’ purpose of learning and going to school, and even their openness to learning had much to do with reaching their career goals. Amongst the group
members, there were a variety of career choices, but they were all service-oriented types of positions: Tony wanted to become a Social Worker, Maria, a Dental Hygienist, Fanny dreamed of being a lawyer, Danny, a Physician’s Assistant, Linda also wanted to become a Physical Therapist (see Figure 15) and Jada was unsure about becoming a Speech Pathologist and was not quite convinced that this was her true calling. However, they saw “becoming educated” as a means to getting their future careers.

In addition, they conceptualized their career goals as a way to avoid certain futures. This is evidenced by Tony’s description of how limiting everyday life was before college.

How can I put it… that like I just need to take them [jobs], why because I need to pay my school. I need to pay my bills. It doesn’t matter if I have to, hard to say it but being the porter includes all the cleaning stuff. Clean the bathrooms, wash the dishes, sweep and mop the floors. That was before, that was before. I came to college. Now I’m at college I learn how to talk more. How to communicate. How to engage with people and now I got a better job. Now I work for customer service at a supermarket and I also work at the deli station. I’m not getting dirty. I just have to talk to people. I’m like hi miss, how you doing? And then the ladies… the customers tell me what they want and I just serve them. You know it’s not like I’m cleaning. I don’t have nobody on top of me telling me what to do. You know I learned that and so because, and school helped me.

Prior to coming to Hostos, Tony’s career opportunities were restricted to the kitchens of restaurants. As such, he feared that he would remain either a cleaner or a dishwasher. At the time his legal status and his English language competency prevented him from having dreams beyond the kitchen. However, since coming to Hostos where he began to learn more things and where he
gained more competency in the English language and received his DACA status, his outlook on
his life options began to change. He was no longer destined for the kitchen.

Also entangled within career goals are ideas about familial sacrifice and compensation
and a sense of helping. In light of this, “being educated” took on a different relevance, as they
also placed much emphasis on addressing familial needs. For these students “giving back” had
much relevance in the career decisions. For example, in discussing why she wants to be a
Physical Therapist, Danielle recounts:

You see I’m going to give you an example of a doctor. Like you see for example when
you are sick and you go to the hospital, the doctor is there to help you, right. To give you
his help right. Like let’s say the medication that you need stuff like that. It would be the
same as me. For example, if I would become a physical therapist today, people that need
my help, I would provide it for them. But, for example, the parent… my family. Let’s say
my Dad… actually, currently he walks with a cane, right? Let’s say if he’s going to a
therapist and I’m already a physical therapist, then there is nowhere for him to travel to
go all the way to see the therapist while I’m his daughter. I’m already there for him. So
that’s… my… my point of becoming a like… that why I really wanna be… that’s me
right there… the book [referring to the Physical Therapy textbook]. It’s Danielle all day
and my family and that’s why I show the picture.

In this way, becoming a physical therapist is more a matter of duty rather than a choice.
Yet, this duty to family is pulling her towards a career that she believes will be beneficial to
everyone, especially her father, who apparently needs the service of a Physical Therapist. In
other words, his ailment inspired her career choice. However, it is possible that Danielle’s sense
of commitment may come under fire if the circumstances of her father’s health problems change.
It should be mentioned that Danielle’s older brother is training to become a pharmacist, and it is arguable that familial duty also played a role in his career choice.

Danielle also talks about “giving back” through the narrative of helping. She believes that she is a helpful person and as such her career choice is about helping others. In speaking about her career choice, she is convinced of her helping nature, as she highlights by saying, “I’m doing it from my heart, so it’s natural.” In projecting herself into the Physical Therapist’s chair Danielle believes that she is:

A person who… Because I like to help others, no matter who it is, if they need my help I’m there for them. That’s the person I am so in order to help somebody like—there’s another thing I would have chose but, I see like you know choosing something that have to do with health is more important because in this life is a lot of people who get sick and stuff who need others. So that’s how I see being a physical therapist… that’s how I see it. I’m helping people.

Figure 16: Tony’s long hair image
Tony (personal communication, November 6, 2014) stated that his mother wants him to cut his hair because going to college means changing his appearance. He promised her that he would do so when he graduates.

For Tony, his educational and career goals were also connected to fulfilling a promise to his mother, that he would become someone, someday—in this case a social worker (see Figure 16). Although his parents do not know much about what he does in school, they value his decision to pursue his education. Getting his degree is also a matter of familial pride and duty, and would represent that the fact that he made it despite seemingly insurmountable odds. His mother even likens his getting a degree to him becoming a different person.

That’s when she told me you know Tony you’re going to college. You don’t think you should cut your hair? Maybe dress different. Little bit because you’re going… you’re not going to high school anymore you’re going to college. I was like no, no… Then she was going and going and going, yes cut your hair, cut your hair. I was like Mommy I promise your… I’m gonna cut my hair but just until I graduate, just to like…. Look at as… I promise you. I’m gonna give my hair and I’m going to show you my diploma.

In contrast, Danny places (making) money at the center of his academic and career goals. Here, he describes going to college as a non-essential because making money to provide for oneself and family is more important to him.

You’re not getting a lot of money. Right now I want to be able to support myself, my family and my mother like financially and… going to school right away. The result of graduating college, that’s what you will get by going to college, but during college… you don’t have to go to the workforce, but that’s what I want to balance. That’s why I don’t call it a necessity because honestly… we’re all going to be working for that dollar bill but that’s what’s going to provide us with the necessary things that we need.
However, it is ironic that while Danny spends a lot of time discussing his desires to work and his monetary and familial needs, he is the only student in the group who was not working at the time.

Students’ beliefs about academic goals and academic success maintained highlighted a tension between achieving pragmatic goals, such as, financial stability and purpose driven goals, such as contributing to their households. At a practical level, the students wanted to get good grades and to maintain a high GPA as this would allow them to graduate and move on to the 4-year college of their choice where they could pursue their major courses, and get relevant internships and practical experience. Also, their academic goals maintained a sense of redressivity. This finding was surprising, because, on the one hand the students did not view themselves as able to make changes in their lives, yet here they were attempting to get careers that could potentially improve the lives of their families. In this way, not only did getting an education include beliefs about “what is learning for” but it also included notions about “who is learning for.” However, the redressive nature of their academic and career choices was limited to their contributing to their immediate family. For example, Danielle’s focus is on helping her father, and Tony’s focus is on filling his mother with pride when he graduates. Consequently, the latter emphasis was on providing practical familial needs. As such, they also placed much value on their ability to financially contribute to their households. However, for students like Danny, this contribution seemed more like an obligation rather than a choice.

It was interesting that their sense of redressivity only reach back towards addressing the needs of their immediate family members. This could be because for the most part, they still lived with their families. Making their need to help them seem more pertinent.
Maria’s careers goals are bounded up with going to college, and maintaining excellent grades. Unlike the other students, Maria came to America to attend college. Although she understood that coming here would mean that she would encounter an educational system that was English-based, she saw it as a challenge. As she comments on in the following statement:

“You know to complete my goal as an immigrant student was a little bit complicated for me because before I started school I was a little bit lost. You know you are in a new country, you don’t know what you can do because your education is different, so you’re looking for a new education I guess. So it was a little bit complicated but I get it. In order to complete my goals, I have to study more, going to tutoring, going to the library and taking classes that I never think that I’m gonna take like a science class because my studies were like language and music and it was hard for me. My goal is become a dental hygienist. My goal is become a dental hygienist. I wanted to change my career because I think it’s gonna be challenge for me; you know to start a new career here in America. In her mind, going to college was about changing her life, because it would give her the opportunity to become a Dental Hygienist, but most specifically it would highlight that she could become a Dental Hygienist in a another language system, which to her would be an incredible achievement. It seems that her proving to herself that she can make it, is driving her educational and career goals.

Students’ Participation in School, Belonging

For these students, belonging, in terms of getting an education, had less to do with being like everyone else, and more to do with their desires to have equal access to the same things as everyone else that is, in terms of resources. In general, they felt like they belonged at the school, and they often referred to the school as their “second home.” Possibly because at Hostos they
had access to a multitude of resources, they could interact with others students and faculty who were just like them, were supportive of their goals; also their situations and responsibilities were similar to others in the space. As Maria points out in the following statement:

If I have trouble with my class, I go to the tutoring. Tutoring center. If I have a problem that I have that I don’t understand something, or my professor is really really, really hard. I would go to the tutoring and they will give me help. I will understand what’s going on and make me feel-- in the make the class easier. Tutors in this school I like.

These factors among others made them feel as though they were part of the Hostos community.

In addressing their perceptions of the school, during the individual interviews the students were asked two questions: “where do you feel that what you know is valued?” and “where do you feel that you are valued?” In response, several students highlighted school as that place. Hostos represented to them a place where others, like faculty, staff and peers valued their funds of knowledge. Students also described Hostos as a place where they felt that they mattered, a place of support (academic), a place where they could use their funds of knowledge, a place where they felt safe, a place where they could do anything, and a place where they had a voice. In general, these student held very positive feelings about the school. As is evidenced in the statement below.

Danielle expresses her thoughts about the school as her second community, and at times her second home. To her, it’s a place where she feels like she can get help and support.

Well, I think that Hostos Community College is like my second community, my second house. Because sometime I might be coming from home or work mad and then once I come here I see some of my professors or my friends I forget about everything that I was
going through and then we start talking about education or if I need other help-- like for
advices, what to like do, in order for me to like be better in something or in order for me
to like change my habits or like the way that I behave. I feel like it’s more like a second
home to me because every day I feel like get help from like here in Hostos. From friends,
from professor, advisors like all over the places. Even though people that are random.
Sometimes they might look at me and then think like I look lost-- and then they ask me
do you need help? And I say yes and they offer me the help like--. For example, the other
day I didn’t know if you can cross from the B building you can go through the A building
and then the advisor told me yes and then we had to go all the way to fifth floor and then
we cross. So, every day here at Hostos I get help no matter what. So I feel Hostos like my
second house. To me it’s like my community.

Teachers can create as space that is helpful and caring for immigrant students, which can
become a type of holding environment (Winnicott, 1965) for these students. School friends
played a significant role in students’ academic lives, and they provided much support for them,
emotionally and otherwise. Moje et al. (2004) also refer to this as “studenting.” In light of this,
having peers can also represent a type of funds of knowledge. These funds are defined as the
ways and knowledge that students use in supporting each other in school and also in dealing with
school issues. This was demonstrated through helping friends with studying, taking notes and
answering questions, providing missed information and more important, being able to translate
for those friends who needed it. Evidence of this occurred over the course of our group sessions,
when students would take the time to explain how to go about things to each other. When those
students had “figured things out” they would then explain it to each other, including in pileSorts
to their partner, using simpler forms of language and by acting out their interpretations of the task.

**School as a “holding space.”** “Again, in a Winnicottian sense, Hostos acts like a holding space for these immigrant students, creates a buffer from the existing difficulties of immigrant life, and at the same time it is a space where they can take up the identities of “successful immigrant students.” Hostos becomes a transitional space where the students could feel safe and powerful enough to navigate and integrate their needs and emotions, therefore allowing them the opportunity to develop a stable sense of self to navigate new situations and potential spaces, where they may find themselves as immigrants in the future.

*Figure 17. John’s Train to school image*

John (personal communication, October, 28, 2014) stated that this scene represents his journey to a better life and reminds him to stay focused on his learning goals.

John’s image above, along with its caption, suggests that school holds a major purpose in these students’ lives. As is evinced in John’s statement, he is “on my way to a better life” and like all the students in the study, regardless of their varied reasons for attending college, they all
seem to hold on to the narrative that the college is the gateway to their careers and a better life. As such, John shows us that his journey through the Bronx is well worth it because at Hostos he gets one step closer towards achieving his goals.

**Hostos as a “safe space.”** In probing the students during the study, I found it interesting that they maintained a positive disposition towards the school. Surprisingly, they genuinely felt that the school was a “safe space” and continued to refer to it as a second home, despite sometimes stating that it did not have the “fancy” (Tony) equipment like blackboards and computers. Although, all the students maintained that Hostos was predominantly a Spanish-speaking school, many of them felt that they belonged there, even if they didn’t speak Spanish (only two of the participants were Spanish speakers).

In general, the students maintained a sense of optimism about going to the school. They felt that in general the teachers were caring and they were glad that they made several friends—who made up a supportive social network. For example, when asked, “Who goes to school here?” The students quickly responded, “Everyone!” This simple question opened up the conversation about the diversity of the school’s student population. They surmised that, although Hostos students came from a variety of countries, they were similar because they faced the same struggles. Among the group, several students claimed that they liked the school because it allowed them to interact with people outside their communities.

Hostos was a place where they can forget their drama at home. As Linda shared below, she saw Hostos as a place where:

I see a future, I see opportunities. I see independence. That’s what I call home and school is like my second home because I’m always here. I take later-- late classes because I want
to be at school. It get my mind off drama at home, so I stay here to-- ease the pain before going home. I think that’s it.

In the statement above, Linda identifies Hostos as a place where she feels that she belongs. It was clear that like Linda, the other students felt a close connection with the school, the faculty, staff and friends. This goes to show the important role that social others and social relationships play in fostering a sense of connection to place. For Linda, school became a haven away from the “drama” of her home life with her mother. As she indicated, she maintained a strained relationship with her mother. So, staying later in school, gave her a way to avoid the seemingly inevitable arguments and stress of living with her estranged mother. Comparatively, the idea of avoidance was relevant in both Tony’s and Linda’s stories about school and getting an education. For example, Linda was going to school to avoid her mother, her inevitable present, and Tony was going to school to avoid his inevitable future, that is being an undocumented worker with limited choices.
This word-cloud is a visual representation of the themes derived from the pile-sorts conducted with the students. This cloud depicts the core ideas that were represented in this particular related to the phototopic about “school.” Clearly, the idea of goals appears frequently among the identified themes. Although this word-cloud represents the themes related to school, it also highlights the intersecting nature of students’ figured worlds, including school, home and community. Some other interesting themes related to immigrant figured worlds are: moving from one place to another, changes in environments, community, neighborhood, transportation. In terms of immigrant life and immigrant values, the core words included: melting pot, struggle leads to finishing, cultural beliefs, telling others about our culture, values, hard work. The identified themes related to learning and learning goals were: achieving a dream, education, and motivation, path to one’s dream or goals, and increasing knowledge. After compiling the major
themes about students’ figured world, it was possible to generate a diagram depicting their intersecting everyday figured worlds, as is shown in Figure 19 below.

Figure 19. Model of Students’ Figured Worlds Based on Findings
The Figured World of the Group Project

In the beginning of this study, there were eight students, who shared the same experience of going to Hostos CC, but who had never met each other—strangers. At first, they seemed so different, but soon they quickly came to realize that they were more alike than dissimilar. What made them similar was the fact that they were all immigrants, going to a predominantly immigrant school. Consequently, being an immigrant in an immigrant school makes being an immigrant somewhat normative. Ironically, since it is considered “normal” to be immigrant, having critical discussions of immigrant life is less likely to happen in this context. One possible reason behind this could be that the school maintains a focus on educating them, while simultaneously value their immigrant backgrounds. However, there is still some disconnect between the school world and the immigrant world, in this place. In this way, to create a place where immigrants can feel “successful” the school puts on the back burner the myriad issues found in immigrant life, permitting them the space to leave their troubles at the door.

By using the figured worlds approach, makes it possible to examine how individuals create their identities and agency through their everyday actions (Holland, et al., 1998). Maintaining a positionality lens through which to analyze the students’ depictions as actions, allowed me to examine how the students positioned themselves in the context of the group. Positioning theory examines how an individual may “position oneself” (Harre & van Langenhove, 1995, p. 16), or “take up” a certain position (p. 16) or become “a different person with respect to the possibilities enabled by these systems of relations” (p. 53). This means that positioning involves agency.

Linking positioning theory with the figured worlds framework provides a lens through which one can examine both a person’s subjective actions and participatory actions. Within this
theoretical perspective, individuals construct “positions of possible activity.” This view holds that, as individuals, we are subjects within specific contexts who operate by means of using a variety of cultural expectations, social norms and practices and possibilities for identity making. Participation in figured worlds gives individuals’ the opportunity to take up, resist, renegotiate, or improvise identity positions (Holland et al., 1998). Therefore, agency is produced within this “space of authoring” (Holland et al, 2001, p. 63), as an individual works to create a sense of self in a new space amidst the colliding of their worlds and identities. As such, individuals can make and re-make history as they “figure” their identities as they engage in actions and relations with others in the same context (Holland et al., 1998). Individuals enact agency through everyday decisions and acts as they “rework” their positions in their own terms and their own ways.

Configuring the Group Setting

In Linda’s words, being in the group was a good experience for her because “I feel comfortable telling my experience with people that I found as friends.” In response to the question: Did you feel that this group was a place that you could share things (knowledge, feelings, experiences etc.) with others? Linda summarized the group’s generally positive observation about participating in a collaborative group project. The group responded to this question with a resounding “yes.” Maria felt that in the beginning of the project she was “shy to share my experiences [but] after a few meeting[s] I felt part of the group, because I felt that most of us have the same issues and experiences.” To a major degree, the students believed that the group provided a comfortable setting where they could express themselves freely, and “listen to testimonies,” mainly because they were all immigrants and “we all had something in common” so they were “confident in sharing anything there.”
This section will take a reflective look at the steps taken to establish the shared space created within this group project, and it will also highlight the role of confianza in creating a third space.

**Creating the Figured World of the Group Setting, a Third Space**

The third space is a “particular social environment of development in which students begin to reflect upon and reconceive of who they are and examine their potential—academically and beyond... a place where people feel a sense of shared humanity, a profound obligation to others, a place where difference is celebrated without being romanticized about or questioned” (Gutiérrez, 2008, p. 148). Put another way, the third space fosters a sense confianza (Moll et al., 1995) among its members, that is, a mutual trust that develops among individuals who participate in shared activities. In addition, third spaces can also become discursive spaces where “alternative and competing discourses and positionings transform conflict and difference into rich zones of collaborations and learning” (Gutierrez, Badquedano, & Tejeda, 1999, p. 287).

Using this notion as a guide, the corpus of data was examined for instances where students enacted moments of solidarity, support and valued each other’s knowledge and points of view.

Within our group space, several features undergirded our interactions and helped to foster our shared space. Here, the students were free to tell their personal stories, without the consequence of being chastised. They could talk about anything they liked, no matter how personal. As a group, they decided when the group met and for how long. The students had the choice of taking and uploading whatever pictures they liked, with the exception of taking images of people’s faces. They decided how they would use their images, to tell whichever story their liked. They guided the group discussions by taking on a presenter style that is, they went to the front of the class and presented their images and started each conversation. At times, they
brought in artifacts from their lives. Also, the group connection was not built on false pretenses, or a need to get along, or avoiding conflict. The students were very open in expressing their likes and dislikes, and contradictory opinions about the topics under discussion.

**Personal Sharing and Confianza**

Personal sharing became an important element of the group dynamics, and gave the students the opportunity to re-tell the experiences they had in migrating to America. These stories worked as a major unifier—they allowed the students to see themselves as similar, having been through comparable experiences and hardships. These stories helped to foster a sense of solidarity and trust among the group. This storytelling feature of the group also touches on a key element of critical race theory. More specifically, it refers to the idea of “naming one’s own reality” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). As the students began to share more of their lived experiences, they realized that they were not alone, that they shared similar feelings with respect to migrating, like a sense of loss, disillusionment upon arrival, and difficulties; they also realized that they shared comparable dreams and hopes, like the goals to graduate, and to give back to their families. The more we met, the more comfortable they became and the more willing they were to share their stories. As the weeks passed, they began to draw strength from each other’s stories. Or as Linda so aptly put it, “I have a piece of…of like everyone’s story.”

In one meeting, Fanny discussed how socially isolated she felt living with her mother. Fanny wished to return to her life in Jamaica where she had more freedom, was happier and comfortable living with her father. However, she could not left because her mother had locked away her passport, to get her to remain in New York, but also this was her main way to control Fanny’s actions. In the exchange below, several group members tried to convince her that her mother was trying to protect her and that this was typical behavior for immigrant parents. They
hinted that they had all been through this at some point with their parents, but they were mainly trying not to discourage Fanny. They also suggested that if she wanted more freedom then she would need to show her parents that she was capable of handling such responsibility.

FANNY: My Mom has trust issues and fear.

STACEY: Yeah

Group (cross talk)

STACEY: Is that a common thing? Is that like a common thing? Because I heard Tony say something like that and you’re saying something about your parents…

DANIELLE: It is

FANNY: It is like…

TONY: It’s like they do it to protect us, so the put it… they put that in us…

FANNY: Yeah, but even…

DANIELLE: Yeah like sometimes probably the way you act it makes them feel like you are not grown yet.

TONY: Exactly

DANIELLE: I’m going to take the example of me. Right now even though I want to go out my father ask me like where you going and I’m not 18, I’m like 21. I’m not 18.

FANNY: I understand that

DANIELLE: He’s… and when I go to work like I leave my house at 12 midnight, he calls me by the time I’m in the bus, by the time I get to the airport any time. So basically they feel like you know out there is like danger. It’s not like they don’t… it’s like they don’t like you or something. It’s like

LINDA: They just don’t trust you
DANIELLE: No, there’s something about it that is (...)

FANNY: It’s trust

LINDA: It’s trust

STACEY: But, remember JADA was saying that all immigrant parents do the same thing, you guys agree with that

DANIELLE: Yes, I agree

This exchange was important because it reflected how support (including through advice) was an integral part of the students’ sense of confianza. They listened to Fanny’s story of social isolation and parental control, and advised her that how it was possibly to prove herself worthy of freedom. Surprisingly, in doing so, they also showed that they valued Fanny’s parents’ reasoning behind their decision to restrict her movements, citing how dangerous New York City was for a new immigrant. Also, support for parental choices was something that re-occurred throughout the text. To this group of students, it seemed that their parents’ opinions were very important, as was gaining their trust too. However, for Fanny, sharing this issue with her mother was out of the question, because Fanny felt that she could not speak up in her home. However, as she re-told her feelings of isolation and parental control to her group mates, she drew upon their support and solidarity to re-examine the issue so that she could possibly find some type of compromise. Here, her act of speaking up was affirmed in a move for support within the group.

Enactments of confianza via statements of validation and support. During the group discussions, students enacted confianza and used a variety of statements to do so. The table below presents some of the types of statements used by students during the group discussions, to build a space filled with validation and support.
Table 7. Confianza Statement Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Confianza Statement Types</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Statements of respect/understanding</td>
<td>• “I understand that”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “I can relate to that”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “I could like relate to you on that”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• “I agree with that too”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• “Exactly, I hate it!”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Statements of similarity/shared experiences</td>
<td>• “Yeah the same thing”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “You see how God means to both of us!”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “I had the same problem”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• “Same thing here”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Statements of affirmation</td>
<td>• “That’s true”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “Yes!”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “I think that’s what it may be”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• “That would be cool!”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Statements of challenge</td>
<td>• “Don’t get her started!”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• “It’s not that bad, I think”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• “I speak it but I’m not saying it anyway”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• “Okay say something in French, if you speak French. Say it!”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Statements respecting another’s knowledge</td>
<td>• “You need to teach me!”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• “I’m never gonna lose your phone number. You’re gonna help me.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “That’s a big vocabulary you have.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• “That’s cool! Thanks for speaking”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Statements of advice</td>
<td>• “Sometimes you need to speak up because what they telling you to do,”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• “and you listen to them. Trust me, they’ll walk on top of you!”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• “I used to think like that. I used to think that.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• “Passing is always good, but you have to make sure that [when] you</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• “come out the class you at least have the knowledge.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “If you really wanna go for that then (…), then there can be like a</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• “thousand people but if. Since that is for you to make it, then you’re</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “gonna make it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statements of support</td>
<td>• “So, all… we feel like that because like you said… I love what you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “said that failure is not an option for us. I love that.”</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “How is your Spanish class?”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• “I think a good thing about writing, you could pretty much do it at</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• “any time. Like later on if you want to write a book, you’re totally</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• “able to do that.”</td>
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These statements can be grouped by their use and time of occurrence. For example, statements of respect/understanding and statements of similarity were generally used early on in the project as a means of identifying with others’ shared experiences. At this time, the students were less familiar with each other and they spent a lot of time re-telling their immigrant stories. Also at this time, they spent a lot time listening to each other’s stories. As the study progressed, students used more statements of affirmation, challenge and respecting one’s knowledge—
through which they validated each other’s cultural knowledge, educational goals and immigrant dreams.

Around the middle of the project, the students started challenging each other’s perspectives, a main example of which came from a conversation on language strengths on November 11th, when Danielle attempted to promote herself as a competent multilingual speaker to the group, an act that was met with much challenge. In this conversation, Linda also places her bid for language speaker but gets challenged and denied by Danielle and Maria, who reasserted their identities as competent language speakers. Linda is forced to retract her bid when she refuses to display competence in French and Arabic, which ends up reconfirming both Danielle’s and Maria’s linguistic identities within the group.

Throughout the project, the students were willing to provide advice and support to each other. As they became more familiar with each other they would check up on each other, by asking about how their classes were progressing. They would also message each other on the shared Facebook page. Additionally, when they expressed their true passions, they were supported by the other group members. For example, in December, Linda expressed to the group her feeling of conflict with regards to her educational goals—that is, she wanted to become a writer but was under pressure to fulfill her mother’s dream of becoming a Physical Therapist. Linda’s dream of becoming a writer, once expressed, was immediately supported by Steph (student researcher), who was already a writer. As she told Linda, “I think a good thing about writing, you could pretty much do it at any time. Like later on if you want to write a book, you’re totally able to do that.” The group was then made aware that Linda was having a hard time exploring this identity because she felt immense pressure to conform to her mother’s wishes, a feeling that was acknowledged by the rest of the group.
Across the group meetings, which started in late October 2014 and ended in Early December 2014, the students actively worked around several difficult discussion topics. For example, in October acts of confianza occurred when students spoke about their migratory experiences, in particular about issues like migration as a “forced choice,” difficulties of immigrant life, parental relations and difficulties in navigating the U.S. education system, the purpose of learning and negative perceptions of African-Americans. In November, acts of confianza happened when students spoke about their language strengths, their idea of “the struggle,” race issues, feelings of disillusionment since migrating, working, asking how each other about classes, and academic progress, self-esteem, and their perceptions of Hostos. In December, they displayed acts of confianza around issues of immigrant identity, educational mismatch, race issues and inter-race issues, feeling judged and underestimated by others.

One of the issues that the students bonded over was the issue of race. Interestingly, primarily the Black students in the group often raised the topic of race. However, Maria did mention feeling the constrictions of white privilege, which she felt was related to her limited English-language skills and not to any specific racial incident or experience. She felt that she was perceived as white until she began to speak and people realized that she was a foreigner, and she felt that she was treated differently, as a result. This probably lends support to her persistent efforts to learn English. However, for the second-generation Black immigrant students, their issues were multifaceted and the issue of race was inescapable. In the following dialog, Jada describes feeling stereotyped and underestimated because of her skin color and nationality at her job. She works as a cashier at a local pharmacy.

JADA: For example, my family went to Europe. I want to say early this year in February, we went to Paris, we went to France. Sorry, we went to Paris and we went to Italy. When
I came back and I was telling a customer. They say like oh my God you’ve been there. I
didn’t think that you [emphasis] go there. I’m like wow

STACEY: You mean you [emphasis]. You mean you Jada or you [stressed]

JADA: Me, me as a…

LINDA: Yeah, As an African-American

JADA: Yeah they wouldn’t think that I would even afford to actually go there

STACEY: Wow!

JADA: They’re just like oh how was it; and then I’m telling them the places that I’ve
been. I make sure to remember too because you’re not going to call me stupid, and I’m
telling them and they’re like oh my God I’ve been there, have you been to…you know
just to open up…

In the exchange above, Jada displayed much distress over the fact that her customers
(who were predominantly of Caucasian background) saw her in a one-dimensional and
stereotypical manner, which she took opposition to as she discussed her shock over this. Jada
also relayed to the group several of the crass comments she would receive from her customers.
At one point, Jada tried to finish her sentence, “Me, me as a…” Yet, there was no need to
complete her statement, because Linda already knew where she was going. As is evidenced by in
Linda’s assertion, “Yeah, as an African-American.” Underlying this exchange was a shared
understanding of how pervasive racial stereotyping was in both of their lives, especially outside
of the school context. Again, this simple reflective statement of Linda’s served to validate Jada’s
terrible experience and somehow bonded them as having shared a similar racialized experience.

**Confianza and shifts in identities within the group: Maria.** The group dynamics relied
on a lot on encouragement. As Maria pointed out, it was not that they lacked the ability to
participate meaningfully in school practices or research, but that they felt they lacked the “opportunity” to do things that they knew they could do, and the opportunity to prove to others that they were capable. As the statement below indicates, Maria by the end of the project, states that she feels confident in talking to the group. I would go so far as to say that she gained confidence in presenting herself to the group in English, something that she was hesitant to do at the start of our project. At the beginning of the project Maria described her ability to speak English as, “I mean I cannot speak… so…but when you have to express yourself at the college level. It’s comp… It’s really difficult for me…” Her ability to do progressed during the group meetings, and by the end of the project there was an observable change in her that was born out of the relationships of trust and solidarity built within the group, as was evinced in the following statement.

MARIA: Yeah. I feel more better about myself. I’m not like, I’m nervous before. I never speak. It’s not like I’m shy, it’s like I don’t want to, but now I feel like more, yeah more confident. Like yes I can say something

STACEY: I think it has changed over… maybe it has anything to do with being with these people here

MARIA: I think so

STACEY: Yeah

MARIA: I think… for sure because in the rest of my classes I have friends but I don’t have. I don’t speak too much with them. So here I feel more confident and I can say about my life and I can tell stories about it

Here we see a major shift in Maria’s sense of self, in terms of confidence but also in terms of taking action, as she now wanted to speak up because she could. This was because her
ability to speak English was being realized. Here, in the group, people wanted to hear what she had to say. Also, what she had to say had value, and consequently she felt that she could speak out and others will listen.

Reflecting on my experiences in this group, it was clear that two things could happen when people become part of a group where everyone comes from similar background. On the one hand, it allows them to create a mutually supportive group where they can act as if their shared problems have subsided, for the time being at least. However, being part of a group can cause its members to take their cultural backgrounds for granted, and lead the group members to treat their cultural knowledge as normative. This occurs because ironically because the group members see each other as the same, based on having similar negative experiences, which they take as normative. In doing so, they failed to be addressed or are even silenced. On the other hand, within groups, people’s shared issues can also become problematized (especially with the right kind of questioning), silenced issues can come to light, and acted upon, and people can voice their opinions about them without stigma. In this group, both phenomena took place. In the beginning of the project, students were reticent to expose issues of race, inter-race and how others’ stereotypical thinking of them constrained their perceived life options. However, by the end of the project, the group began to re-evaluate their everyday issues and had shared many a tale about dealing with them from both a personal and shared standpoint.

Creating confianza, respect, advice and community within the group as a practice of recognition. Within the context of the group, the purpose was to establish relationships with resourceful others (Salazar & Franquiz, 2008). The students worked to create a space where they could be open about their experiences, their issues and their goals and purposes. After a short
time, they began to *trust* each other and began to share more including very personal information. As Danielle shares below,

But I can give you an advice, you have to be confident in yourself. There can be like a thousand people on the waiting list but if you feel like you can do it, you can do it. Don’t! People always tell you stuff to make you devaluate yourself and go crazy but if you have faith into yourself and into what you’re doing you’re gonna. It’s gonna come out. If I’m you, I’m not really gonna bother myself thinking about there’s 50 people, be positive thinking, that you are one of them.

The students became sources of information and support for each other, and would help one other in completing group tasks; they acted as supportive ears for the issues that each other would bring up in the group. Also, support came from students commenting on and liking each other’s images placed on the shared Facebook page.
Recognition

Learning Identities and Recognition

The most interesting finding of this study is the impactful role that recognition played in shaping students’ use of funds of knowledge, agentic moves of positionality in fostering their learning identities. The finding suggests that if people come together in a setting where their funds of knowledge are recognized and validated, then they would begin to think about themselves as agents. In terms of figured worlds, validation helped the students to gain confidence in the ability to participate in the group activities and begin to recognize and position themselves as knowledgeable and valued persons.

Recognition came into play as the students began to engage in acts of confianza, whereby they co-constructed a sense of community in the group. An examination of the above listed confianza statements (Table 7) indicates that for confianza to take place, the students also needed to recognize and validate each other as valued members of the group. In this way, the experience itself allowed for this phenomenon to happen. Moll (2010) argues that “when students witness the validation of their culture and language, hence of themselves, within the educational process, when they “see themselves” in their schooling, they combine their home or community identities with an academic identity” (p. 456). In this section, I will elaborate on the varied ways that recognition and validation worked to support students’ engagement within the group setting.

How students develop identities in relation to learning is of particular interest in higher education. Sociocultural theorists have argued that to effectively learn any subject area, students need to participate in learning practices in a manner that allows them to be recognized as learners (Gee, 2000). A goal of this study was to elucidate how students would reflect upon and come to recognize their own funds of knowledge as valuable. However, what was discovered was the
significant role that others play in recognizing and validating these funds of knowledge as well, and how that worked to afford a space for students to use their funds of knowledge and consequently leverage them within that space.

Recent research has suggested that becoming someone in learning also requires individuals to recognize themselves as learners (Brickhouse et. al, 2000; Tan & Calabrese-Barton). Much of this research examines science learning identities, in particular how youth author identities related to science learning that are recognizable to others within a particular social setting (or what Gee calls “configuration”). More important, as individuals participate in more recognizable ways within a configuration or an activity setting, they begin to view themselves or herself as a learner in ways that are aligned with the perceptions that others in the learning space hold of him or her (Brown, Reveles, & Kelly, 2005; Tan & Calabrese-Barton, 2008).

Nasir and Cooks (2009) point out that identities are formed within settings because of three types of resources. In this project, the practice of a third space was made available (through the organization of the practice, its structured activities and artifacts, and the norms and interactions within it). They identify three core resources that supported the development of students’ identities as participants in this group. First, material resources, that is, the way in which the physical shared environment is organized, the artifacts that it supports, and the fostering of a connection by participants to the shared practices within the group. Second, relational resources describe the positive relationships emergent within the group that can increase a connection to group practices. Third, ideational resources relate to the ideas that individuals have of themselves and their positionality within and across social practices, as well as the taking up and reproduction of ideas about what is good or valued. These authors also
believe that “identity resources accumulate over time” (p. 44) and have implications for learners’ trajectories of participation and their coinciding identities in development.

**Student Reflections About, and Funds of Knowledge and Participating in the Group**

In describing how she felt about being part of the group, Danielle stated that “this group was very helpful to me because they reminded me of the reason that we [are] here, whatever it is that we dream, it is part of the American dream.”

The impact of being recognized as knowledgeable persons can be seen in students’ reflective statements about their participation in the group. In reflecting on what they learned by participating in the group project, the students stressed that they felt that they learned more about immigrant life and the struggles that immigrants go through, with respect to getting an education and learning another language. They also indicated that participating in the group allowed them to share their stories, ideas and thoughts that they never shared before, or as Tony put it, “sharing my part,” and in general that they were not alone. They hinted at realizing that they were not alone, that others were going through the same struggles that they were. Or as Danielle surmises, “I learned that I was not the only immigrant student that was struggling with the language and the culture that there’s more students like me and we need programs in school that helps us dealing with these struggles.”

Several of participants identified that they gained more appreciation for the cultural knowledge that they had from their immigrant backgrounds. As Tony stated, “I learned to be more comfortable with myself when explaining my experience as an immigrant college student in America. I also learned to appreciate more the cultural education that I already have from my background.”
Looking back on our time together, it is good to see that they saw their immigrant experience through a positive light, and with a true appreciation of their cultural background, because at the start of the project they maintained a somewhat pessimistic view of it all. They culled from the experiences an important fact that they were not alone in this journey. It was useful to them to understand that they were not the only ones struggling as they navigated their everyday immigrant experiences.

As highlighted, the students no longer perceived a need to silence themselves, or pretend that everything was okay. Through mutual affirmation and support, they began to feel safe in talking about who they are as immigrants and as students, and they began to develop a real sense of pride in what they brought to school.

In discussing whether being part of the group was important to them, all the students said that they valued being part of the group, mainly because they learned about other immigrants and more about migratory experiences on a whole. But, more important was that they learned about themselves: their personal experiences, their ability to identify with others in the same situation and having the ability to share their life stories. In speaking about what she gained by participating in the group, Maria states,

Being part of the group was important to me because first of all I am an immigrant student and I see how difficult it is to be an immigrant and study with a different language. Also the most important part of it to me is to write a syllabus to the following immigrant students will come leave [live] in United States and study at Hostos.

In comparison to the Maria that came to the group in early October, the Maria that left the group was someone who felt confident in her abilities, and she acted as someone who was a knowledgeable person. As she makes reference to her class design, an activity the group did at
the end of the project, it is clear that Maria feels that she possessed relevant skills, knowledge and the capacity to contribute to other immigrants who may be in the same position she was when she first arrived in the country. In this figured world, Maria has come to see herself as not just a student but someone who can provide others with useful information, based on her own migratory experiences, which have value. This kind of agency (and reciprocity) was not evident among the students at the start of the project.

In addition, when the students reflected on how their perceptions about learning changed since participating in the group, they indicated that their way to think about learning has changed for the better. Some of them stated that they were more confident and determined to achieve their goals, and they discovered that learning was multidimensional and that there was no one way to learn. In Danielle words, “my perceptions about learning totally changed, now I put a lot of study and effort on anything I am doing.” The group setting provided students with the chance to use their cultural knowledge in ways that were both academic and non-academic. Additionally, they had the opportunity to see others just like them use their knowledge in useful ways and be validated for doing so.

**Providing the Opportunity for Students to See Themselves as Capable Learners**

The belief that ethnic minority students hold much valuable cultural knowledge, which may go unacknowledged within classroom settings, undergirds the aims and methods in this project. A majority of research on knowing has placed much emphasis on text-centric practices (see Leander & Boldt, 2013; Moje, 2012), rather than the relational engagement that students have with learning practices, or the relationships relevant to knowledge and identity building. In this way, this project sought to activate their cultural knowledge about learning primarily through imagery, although student-generated text was also used. This is a departure from situating
knowledge within text-centric boundaries, which is prevalent among literacy research.

Additionally, the goal of this project was not to strictly adhere to the tenets of Photovoice, but to use these techniques as tools to provide students with the opportunity to investigate what learning and cultural knowledge looked like within their varied lived spaces/figured worlds. Furthermore, students also had the opportunity to jointly examine their “discoveries,” while simultaneously reflecting on their own lives and knowledge.

In order to do so, students went out and took photographs that they would bring into our shared space, to tell us about them. However, these images also served as a means of them telling themselves and each other what their lives and knowledge were about. Narrating their life stories was the major source of motivation for them, they seemed to enjoy going in front of the group to discuss their images, taking on a show-and-tell approach. Looking at this from an educational stance, it is clear that they were also able to take up behaviors that were appropriate within the classroom setting and using it for these purposes, which were not about academic topics per se. More important, the fact that the students were able to complete these tasks confirmed that they were able to engage in learning, because they were knowledgeable people.

Their images were imbued with both personal and cultural meanings including values, beliefs, behaviors and sites related to learning. In addition, the photographs helped to confirm a confluence of events they experienced and shared in common. Furthermore, these images did more than capture and preserve memories; they enabled students’ everyday lives to be recalled and reinterpreted, information which at one point had seemed trivial and normative. Moreover, this cultural knowledge began to take on new importance within the group setting. By engaging students in the active reflection on their images, and by following up with a series of probing
questions, including the SHOWeD questions, student images took on a different value than simply being the recording of events, spaces and things.

**Images as Artifacts of Identity-Making through Recognition**

This group setting and the activities of taking photographs and discussing these images primarily contributed to students’ making and re-making of their learning identities—that is, how they saw themselves as learners. The group afforded the students with the opportunities to go out into their figured worlds and take images about what they perceived to be important. Additionally, the group setting offered students an opportunity to tell their immigrant stories, which surprisingly they felt happy to do. More important, these activities provided the students with the opportunity for expressive engagement (Kuby & Vaughn, 2015) that was instantiated through their *presentations of self*, as speakers and writers, and holders of valuable cultural knowledge across contexts.

Taking photographs, along with writing captions, having discussions and keeping journals became agentic activities for these students because it became a tool through which they told their stories which gave them an opportunity to re-story themselves within the group in particular ways. Gee (1999) describes situations like this group setting as dynamic and actively created, sustained, negotiated, resisted, and transformed moment by moment through ongoing work. He calls this kind of work “enactive and recognition work” (p. 10). He states that these are materials that we use to constantly make and remake ourselves in the social world.

**Recognition as Validation within the Group Setting**

Within this group context, or what I refer to as a *third space*, recognition took on two main purposes; first, it operated as a means of support, and second, it worked as a type of competitiveness, a poignant example of which comes from the November 11th conversation,
where the students work on making bids for and affirming their identities as language knowers. Bachmann-Medick argued that a *third space* is a kind of hybrid space where better knowledge exchange is possible, because participants have the ability to question, challenge, reinterpret and renegotiate varied constructs and dialogues that exist across contexts and differences (as cited in Muller, 2003). More important—it is a space where differences can be examined and problematized leading to a shift from assumptions to reflections, and from individuals to collectives (Muller, 2003). During the group sessions and across the captioned photographs, it was clear that the students themselves worked to encourage each other by providing supportive comments that valued the work of their peers (see Table 7).

Nora (1987) describes validations as a key element of recognition, and therefore an important element of a hybrid space, because it acts like a supportive system for the co-construction of ways of knowing. She posits that support and encouragement can take different forms and sources and be provided by a variety of significant others within the group setting. Nora, Urick and Cerecer (2011) advance the idea that validations are embedded within several relational forms, like words and gestures which work to convey a support system, either by parents, friends or teachers. She asserts that all forms of validation hold that same aim, to promote a sense of caring on the part of a significant other, or as is the case here—in this group setting, fellow ethnic minority immigrant students. She also identifies that a feeling of belonging is central to individuals’ perceptions of validation within the school contexts. In this group setting, recognition started off as being a means by which the students connected with each other over their immigrant stories, the difficulties of everyday immigrant life, educational difficulties and parental relations. In the early sessions, I coded recognition as “solidarity” to note how students shared similar stories, as they worked to carve out a place in the group. Students were
more likely to use solidarity-like statements when addressing these issues through the sequence of our group sessions. In this space the student backgrounds and experiences as immigrants and ethnic minorities were validated because they all shared similar lived experiences, and faced similar difficulties in acculturating, which was exposed during the retelling of their immigrant stories throughout the group discussions. Additionally, the students worked to validate what they knew and brought into the group sessions (and into the classroom) as equally valuable as what others think and know.

As I recoded the data, I incorporated the solidarity code into the category of recognition and within the code of family of legitimacy. This was done primarily because the construct of solidarity was central to how the students supported each other in the group; however, they did so primarily through recognizing and validating each other’s statements and experiences. In addition, it seemed that by doing so they were legitimizing what they knew and what they had experienced at least within this space, and among themselves.

**Providing Opportunities for Students to Validate Each Other by Fostering Friendships**

Moreover, within the group, the students valued each other because they started to become friends. In reality, they took a genuine interest in getting to know each other. As they got to know each other as people, they began to build a new social network, and they genuinely began to care for each other. They expressed that they felt “comfortable and related” within the group because it was a “comfortable environment to express ourselves freely.”

They began to inquire about each other’s progress in school. For example, during our sessions Maria would ask Linda about her class. The exchange below is from our November 18th session,

MARIA: How is your Spanish class?
LINDA: I’m passing though, but I can’t speak the language either

MARIA: Aye no!

DANIELLE: So how are you passing?

LINDA: I get a B in like my...

MARIA: Nice!

LINDA: But I can’t speak with everybody. At least I’m passing. I glad to. That’s the only thing

DANIELLE: But passing is always good, but you have to make sure that [when] you come out the class you at least have the knowledge

It is clear that both Maria and Danielle are concerned about Linda’s progress in this class, and they show concern by asking about how she is doing. What is interesting is that here, support also takes the form of giving advice, which is what Danielle does by telling Linda that knowledge matters more than grades. Here Danielle seems to take on a kind of mother figure, possibly reflecting a sentiment that her parents had expressed to her at some point.

**Affirming the Possibility that Students were Knowledgeable Persons: Becoming Agents of Validation**

The underlying premise of this study was to create a space through participatory activities where the students could reflect upon and see *for themselves* that they were knowing people. One of the main issues in doing so was surprisingly coming up against students “counter” belief that they are not knowledgeable people. For example, at the beginning of the project, Maria declares to the group, “I cannot learn English!” It was surprising to discover that the students predominantly held this limited view of themselves in terms of knowing, especially because the learning environment promoted by Hostos was one of immigrant success and striving through
education. As such, it became my responsibility to take on the role of an agent of validation for the students in this space. Rendon (2002) suggests that validating experiences such as encouragement, affirmation, and support play an important role in affecting student development. At the end of the study, Maria commented on the sense of support that was fostered within the group: “Yes, I felt that this group was a place that I could share things because we were all immigrants and we all had something in common, so I was confident to share anything there.”

A major factor that also affirmed students’ developing identities as knowledgeable persons was that within the group setting they were free to bring up any topic that they wanted, and in whatever form the found useful. Yet, the images did act as the main source of reflection. Students often enacted their knowledge by demonstrating competence or re-telling personal stories. However, it was all accepted, and at no point did any of the students flat-out dismiss another student’s opinions or stories. On the whole, they did well to listen attentively, respect and encourage each other’s narratives. Additionally, as the facilitator, I also used these stories as a base from which to develop more in-depth descriptions and reflections. Furthermore, students’ confianza statements to each other helped to reinforce this sense of connection that began to emerge within the group. By providing consistent reflective statements, statements of support and statements of genuine interest, and redirecting their questions, the students began to do this for themselves and with each other. Additionally, I would often communicate with the students outside of our group meetings, and check up on them via email and text message.

Also, being open with the students about my migratory and higher education experiences, allowed them to feel connected to me because I shared my migratory history, which was a lot like theirs. Like several of them, I too came from another country with a temporary legal status,
very little money and was enveloped in an ongoing immigrant and racial legacy that often viewed me as a black immigrant woman. Like them, I attended and was still attending a CUNY school, while I worked multiple jobs to pay the bills. I also had parents and family members who did not go to college. Consequently, my sociocultural history and educational path were much like that of the Hostos students.

**Affirming students’ cultures.** Students went about taking their images, captioning and sharing them while developing a sense of pride, not only in their ability to produce sharable images but also by examining the purpose and meaning behind their engagement in getting a college education. The students spent much time openly discussing their experiences as learners across their varied educational levels, they also spoke about their parents expectations for them in terms of getting an education and what going to college means for them and their immigrant families.

**Conclusion.** What emerged from our group coming together was the creation of a space of valuing. In this space, the students’ voices, experiences and cultural knowledge mattered. They, for themselves, came to see each other as holders of useful information that would typically go unnoticed in the everyday classroom and definitely in the everyday interactions of immigrant life.

**Learning in the third space.** After participating in the study, Tony reflected on his experience and noted that projects like this help students to value and be determined in their education, because “as a student you don’t only see yourself in your trajectory but you see yourself among other students with the same or similar path to education”.

Learning in the *third space* tends to include both vertical and horizontal forms of learning. Meaning that learning would incorporate what students learn in formal learning
situations like classrooms and what they learn from participating in a range of practices outside of school (Gutierrez, 2008). Additionally, learning in the third space, comes up against discourses that are narrowly conceived, a-historical, disembodied and lacking transformative supports. Moje (2004) also argued that the third space is a learning tool that acts as a productive scaffold for young people to learn the literacy practices that are framed by the discourses and knowledge privileged in academic learning practices. She contends that our the goal is to work toward third spaces that bring the texts framed by everyday discourses and knowledge into classrooms in ways that challenge, destabilize, and, ultimately, expand the literacy practices that are typically valued in school and in the everyday world. Taking such an expansive view of learning and development requires a shift to legitimizing the expertise that individuals bring with them into learning spaces and using this knowledge to develop novel ways of knowing, bridge and extend both within and across students’ figured worlds (Moje, 2004).
Immigrant Students’ Funds of Knowledge

This section addresses the third research question: What kinds of funds of knowledge in relation academic learning are present and utilized by ethnic minority immigrant college students? Here, the term *funds of knowledge* describes the historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being (Moll et al., 2005; Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 1992). The findings presented in this section describe the bodies of knowledge and skills that are found among the students of the ethnic minority immigrant project, their families and their communities. In addition, this group project investigated how the participants used these funds of knowledge as they worked towards creating a sense of themselves as learners within the contexts of home, school and community.

In this project, funds of knowledge were recognized in several ways: by students’ enactment, stories and through students’ utilization of cultural artifacts, including digital imagery, writings and drawings. Moll et al. (1992) revealed that Mexican immigrants had a broad knowledge base. He also categorized the types of funds of knowledge among Mexican immigrants into several types (see Figure 19). According to Moll et al., Mexican immigrants utilized several types of knowledge in their households and everyday lives, including agriculture and mining, economics, household management, material and scientific knowledge, repair, medicine and religion.
Using Moll et al.’s (1992) categories as a means of comparison, it was clear that some of the knowledge enacted by immigrant students in this project did fit well into these original groupings. It must be noted that unlike Moll et al.’s (1992) traditional funds of knowledge studies, which derive its information about Mexican immigrant students’ funds of knowledge from teacher visits to their households, this study engaged students themselves through a process of self-reflection (via the taking of photographs, group discussions and individual interviews) to “discover” for themselves the types of knowledge in their own (an each other’s) households. Table 8 (see below) shows the varied funds of knowledge across participants in the study.
In line with the work done by traditional researchers of funds of knowledge like Luis Moll, the types of knowledge practices that were identified by the students in this study highlight that they do bring with them into the classroom a variety of useful information, ways of thinking, and practices that stem from their daily household and community interactions.

Table 8 Funds of Knowledge Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATA SUMMARY TABLE FINDINGS</th>
<th>Funds of knowledge displayed/enacted/ described by students</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DANIELLE</td>
<td>LINDA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funds of knowledge Category</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. knowing how to do things, fixing things</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. knowledge about getting a job</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. knowledge about surroundings</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. knowledge about who lives where in</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. knowledge about cultural community, newspapers/magazines/events/cultural artifacts</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. knowledge about college-going &amp; school knowledge, taking classes/school</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. knowledge of family business</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. knowledge of &quot;getting-around&quot; NYC</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. knowledge of the immigration process</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. knowledge of other cultures</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. art/music</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. fabrics/cutting and design</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. organization/&quot;being organized&quot;</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. public speaking/communicating</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. technology, internet, social media, digital media</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. health and healthy living</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. (language strengths) languages, speaking, reading, writing, transcribing</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. cooking/food/goods</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. religion</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. agriculture, planting, farming</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. dance/athletics</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. cultural history/politics/nationalism/international travel/current events</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comparatively, several of the kinds of emergent funds of knowledge fit into Moll et al.’s (1992) original sample of household knowledge (see Figure 19). The analysis indicated that these types of categories are useful for examining the funds of knowledge present among this group of immigrant students.

Table 9 *Funds of Knowledge Categories and Subcategories Obtained from Data Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Subcategory (Moll et al., 1992)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fixing things/ repairs</td>
<td>Household Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking/ cleaning and household chores</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being organized</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and healthy living</td>
<td>Folk medicine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating/ Knowledge of religious ceremonies</td>
<td>Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious beliefs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family business</td>
<td>Economics/ Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of “getting a job”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the data were analyzed using the constant comparative method. Using this method, different categories and subcategories were developed (Saldana, 2013). Not surprising, the analysis of data also showed several types of funds of knowledge that did not fit neatly into the categories created by Moll et al. (1992).

These types of knowledge reflect the unique lives of this group of immigrant students, who are situated within a particular immigrant network of home, school and community, making them different from the immigrants in the original funds of knowledge study conducted by Moll and his colleagues. These categories of information were particular to this group in terms of them being immigrant students in New York City. Looking across the data, three main categories related to funds of knowledge emerged from the data analysis (see Table 2): (a) college-going knowledge, (b) immigrant life knowledge, and (c) adaptive funds of knowledge. In addition, each grouping contained information that allowed it to also be clustered around Moll et al.’s (1992) funds of knowledge categories.
Table 10 *Funds of Knowledge Particular to the Ethnic Minority Immigrant Project Students*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funds of knowledge category</th>
<th>Subcategory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College-going knowledge</td>
<td>College-going process (registration, financial aid, transferring schools)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic subjects (History, Psychology)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant life knowledge</td>
<td>Knowledge of surroundings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Immigration process (status, changing status)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knowing how to “get jobs”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Homeland knowledge (history, politics, nationalism, international travel)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Adaptive</em> funds of knowledge</td>
<td>Knowledge of “getting around”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knowledge of “who lives where” in NYC (gentrification, social stratification,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NYC economics)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Languages (speaking/ learning new languages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knowing about/ Dealing with other cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dealing with/ coping with racial/ethnic issues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each category was analyzed to identify the number of instances the participants mentioned something related to the emergent codes, the main categories and the subcategories of funds of knowledge. As Table 11 (below) shows, language strengths were the most prominent type of knowledge mentioned by the group. This table gives a simple breakdown of the frequencies of how these depicted funds of knowledge were coded in the text (across data sources). This representation is important because it lists the group’s funds of knowledge from most frequently mentioned (per quotation) type of funds of knowledge to the least frequently mentioned type of funds of knowledge.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language strengths</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of surroundings</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge in the home...</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of &quot;getting around&quot;</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of immigration process</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge found in community</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing how to do things</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of family business</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge about who lives where</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of college-going</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of cooking, goods, foods</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of other cultures</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of fabrics/tailoring/sales</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of health/ healthy living</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of music</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge from home country</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of writing/poetry</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge about &quot;getting jobs&quot;</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of art</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of fixing things</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of taking classes/school</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of planting/ farming/ agriculture</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of being organized</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of practical math</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of athletics/sports</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of dance</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of history</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of psychology</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Categories and Subcategories Related to Funds of Knowledge

In this section, I present the categories and subcategories related to funds of knowledge that emerged from the data, listed in order from the most frequently mentioned to the least frequently mentioned. At the end of this section, I will discuss how these funds of knowledge relate to the three main categories of funds of knowledge identified in Table 11. It must be noted that since this project used digital media as a main source of data collection, I have also included several photographs, captions, selected texts from student journals.

Language Strengths. At several moments during the study, the concept of language became a topic of discussion, reflection and performance. Students spent much time discussing the different kinds of languages, which they either spoke or were in the process of learning at school. Among the group, there were many languages and dialects spoken, including Spanish, French, English, Arabic, Twi, Ga and Patois. Several students were bilingual or multilingual. Students discussed language as a strength in terms of (1) how being multilingual is useful in helping them learn in school; (2) as connected to their openness to learning, (3) allowing them to deal with everyday situations, in particular those related to immigrant life (navigating a new culture), and (4) being useful in their overcoming of others’ underestimating their abilities/knowledge. This concept of language strengths is examined further in relation to students’ learning identity work later on in this chapter.

Here Danielle discusses how she uses her ability to speak multiple languages to help others, as a translator.

Well I can give you an example. I translate for people a lot. Especially my work, every day. Every time I go to work, there’s a lot of people from Paris. From…. I mean French. When I say Paris sometimes people don’t know. From France. From Canada. Mostly
from Montreal, when they come, they don’t know no English. I’m the only one who speak French over there at my work place so they just put finger one me. They point finger like hello, she’s here, she’s going to help you. It help my help not me because they don’t pay me extra for that, it only help the company not me. (...) In contrast, Tony in a journal entry talks about learning English was beneficial in assisting him to communicate with and socialize with others.

![Figure 21. Tony's Journal Entry 1](image)

**Knowledge of their surroundings.** Several students in the group are fairly new migrants to New York City, having lived here for only between 1 to 3 years. During our discussions, the students spent much time giving extensive accounts of the geographic, economic and social make-up of their current communities. Some of the other commonalities in this category centered upon student depictions of the persistent changes taking place in NYC (gentrification), resources found in and conveniences of particular neighborhoods, and the diversity found in NYC communities.
They also spent quite a bit of time comparing their current living situations with those of their home countries (with the exception of the two second-generation students). As is probably expected of people who live in NYC, several students identified NYC as a place full of conveniences (having resources). Linda (Ghanaian immigrant) describes her neighborhood as having everything:

So Parkchester is where I started my American journey, go to school. Have a relationship with my mother, which we don’t. Started everything there. We moved twice in the same neighborhood, one was up one was down. I’m in the down place. And… Parkchester, we have everything, so I don’t have to travel. I have shopping malls. I get my nails done, but I don’t travel. I get everything. So in case you want something, I just have to buy it for you and just bring it to you. I don’t travel.

Additionally, borne within their depictions of their surroundings were ideas about the types of resources that were available to them, their families. As Danny (Second-Generation Trinidadian) depicts below in both the following image and caption:
Danny (personal communication, October, 27, 2014) stated having living in Brooklyn for over 15 years that during that time, his mother worked to keep he and his siblings fun by taking them to the recreational center, which was also as safe place for him and his friends to hang out.

Here, Danny talks about his surroundings, but in doing so he brings up the idea that being outside was not completely acceptable to his parents and may have brought with it some dangers:

I just went outside you know, my sister if she broke the rules, it was just a wrap for her, there was no way that she would be able to break the rules. I had too… I just knew something in me just... I just had to go outside and experience exactly what’s going on what… why is this happening. I mean I really couldn’t go up to a guy who had a gun and say why you shooting this person but you know I had to know my environment. How far is the store? How far is the supermarket? Where is another store where I can get other resources? I can guide my Mom through the neighborhood, through many ways; and she started going by herself and I stayed inside, took care of my sister. I was you know… I was a vice versa kind of relationship.
Danny (personal communication, October, 27, 2014) stated that living in Brooklyn that Fine Fare was the main supermarket in his neighborhood. He would go there for newspapers, and other household items. In his family, it was his duty to pick up the food, which also gave him the freedom to go outside and explore his environment.

Tony (Mexican immigrant) mentions how his job as a poster of weekly circulars gave him the opportunity to better know his immediate surroundings:

That’s because my first job in the high school was a paperboy. A paperboy. Like walking around putting the… the specials. The C-town specials, The C-town, Fine Fare, Associated. So I walked everywhere. I walked…. The car used to drop us like everywhere. Everywhere you see a supermarket and you see the flyers at your door—people do that. I used to do that. I used to do that because I was young. So it was fun for me. Because I like to… I was like… I didn’t know this was here. Because… and that’s how I learned. Brooklyn, I know some parts in Brooklyn that there’s a lot of Jamaicans and in Brooklyn but way, way in Brooklyn. I didn’t even know where.
Interestingly enough, both Danny and Tony discuss gaining knowledge about their surroundings through having familial responsibilities; Danny, as the designated grocery shopper and Tony as a weekly circular-poster (he calls it paperboy). In fulfilling these roles, they also developed a strong sense of what growing up in and living in NYC was all about. In terms of funds of knowledge, I believe that they are extremely contextualized, as is evident by the types of knowledge/skills that are presented here. For these New Yorkers, they embody a NY kind of sensibility, which is maintained in their immigrant households and helps them to navigate their everyday lives in NYC. In the group Danny said that in order to navigate his everyday immigrant life in New York, he used a type of “adaptive learning,” meaning that he uses a variety of cultural knowledge to figure his way through the New York terrain.

**Knowledge in the home.** Students were asked about this topic at several occasions during our project. To get at this issue, I asked the students questions like: What kinds of knowledge do you have in your home? What are some things that people in your family know? Can you show me a photo that depicts the knowledge that you have in your home? In response, the students discussed a variety of information and skills. Again, they spoke about knowing how to do household tasks like cooking, cleaning, gardening, being organized and healthy living. Additionally, students mentioned having knowledge about saving money, math, the family business, politics, religion and languages.

In the conversation below, the students discuss math as a way of not losing money. In this exchange, they seem math as a skill they can use in everyday life, especially in terms of keeping their money.

TONY: Yeah, of course. Everybody knows math even though if you’re not in school. Nobody wants to lose money. Everybody wants more money so…
DANIELLE: Of course

TONY: Even my grandma. I don’t think she went to school but she’s very good with money.

DANIELLE: My Mom too, she’s very good in math

TONY: Yeah so, there was a big change

DANNY: I’m fluent in money

DANIELLE: Ahh?

DANNY: I’m fluent in money

This conversation stands out because, at several instances during our group discussions, Danny mentioned that money was a central issue in his life. In the conversation above he positions himself as someone who is “fluent in money” but at the same time he claims that it is his greatest barrier as an immigrant student. At several points across our conversations, Danny states that money is the main difficulty he faces as an immigrant that is, not having any. He believes that it is his lack of money that keeps him from being successful in life. He maintains a practical view of learning and states in his one-on-one interview that his main purpose of getting a degree was to be financially stable so that he could buy the things that he wanted.

Many students discussed several types of knowledge found in their homes. For example, Danielle (Chad immigrant) spent much time during her interview informing me about the types of cookware/ pottery what are traditionally used in Chad households.
Figure 24. Danielle’s Pottery image

DANIELLE: I know how to cook it to put it in here too (African bowl)

STACEY: You know how to make fu-fu

DANIELLE: Yes. I made it two days ago, I know how to make fu-fu. So when I put it this, we just do it like that and then put it in because we put a little bit of oil on this, just a little bit to not stick on it… for the fu-fu to not stick on it and we put like… Before doing it, we wash this calabas. I don’t know… that how they say calabas right?

STACEY: Calabash?

DANIELLE: Yes calabash. So I wash the calabash with water, I clean it and I put a little bit of oil on it, because then it won’t stick on the calabash. It’s just to keep the fu-fu a little warmer. Because when you do it and you leave it open then it’s not going to be warmer. If the person don’t want to eat right away, it’s not going to be warm. So the cover it’s from the [left]. From dirty let’s say like there’s, how do you say. That there’s a [unclear] of something you don’t know. No one… nothing will touch it, it’s just to cover it and make it a little…
Throughout this conversation, Danielle discusses and enacts her knowledge (expertise) of cooking within her household. As an expert in her culture’s cooking tools, Danielle actively works to inform me (the researcher) about the art of cooking Chadian food.

Also in her one-on-one interview, Jada spoke at length about her family providing her with the opportunity to have arguments, she saw this as where she learned that having an opinion was important, but it was also where she learned that she must be able to back up her argument. She claims that in her family, being able to state one’s point of view and back it up is highly valued, especially when it comes to having debates about politics and political issues. From our group discussions, I can definitely say that Jada is really good at making and backing up her point of view. Additionally, this ability to take up a stance is one that is useful in college and other forms of academic learning.

Knowledge of “getting around.” Several early discussions showed that the students possessed an extensive knowledge of NYC itself, and the NYC transportation system. Some of the other commonalities in this category centered upon depictions of the diversity of NYC neighborhoods along the train routes and navigating the city. Students displayed much knowledge about the subway system as well as other forms of transportation, as one can gather from the following statement made by Jada (second-generation Jamaican immigrant), who goes so far as to call herself an expert when it comes to taking the train.
Jada’s Subway Platform Image

Jada (personal communication, November 4, 2014) stated that being in and out of the trains is an everyday school thing for her.

As Jada states:

I say this picture… mainly because I’m in and out the subway and I’m in and out the bus a lot. So I feel like I’m an expert here. I know what trains to take. I know which routes to take if the train would have… to re-route, sick passenger, derailed, whatever. I have more experience with that. I know what bus to take. I know what bus to take from 125th street all the way down to 14th street or so and… just that I’m able to find my way away like that. It’s like… you’re everyday—you’re a modern day nomadic person. That’s how I feel (unclear). As far as what I’m an expert in, it would be at the train

In another example, Jada also describes living in the city as an act of adapting. Like her fellow group mates, she discusses the need to learn how to deal with people pretty quickly and efficiently as someone who lives in NYC. In the statement below, she brings up the idea of
safety (see Figure 4) as a main concern when traveling in NYC and which is also important to knowing how to get around in NYC.

Adapting. It says that adapting most definitely because living in the city is not… I’m not saying that everybody knows how to adapt, but not everybody knows how to adapt quick enough. So, you have to think especially if you’re on a subway station, you’re dealing with different people… you’re coming in contact with different things that are yuck, you don’t even [see]… Anything can happen, that… where to go, who to talk to, how to talk to people, you need to know who is worth talking to, who’s not worth talking to. Just got to know like little things and that’s not something that they necessarily teach you in school and not even… Sometimes not even at home because some people are kind of naive, they just go on the train and think anybody will help them so Also, Linda’s picture below speaks to this idea of adapting to city life.

Figure 26. Linda’s Subway Map Image
Linda (personal communication, October, 24, 2014) stated that this map represents the first thing she saw when she came to the United States, it was also the first time she got lost taking the train, but thanks to the subway map she found her way out of the train station.

**Knowledge found in the community.** Students also discussed their funds of knowledge in terms of the types of knowledge that were found in their communities. Some of the prominent points in this category centered upon how knowledge is disseminated within immigrant communities. At several instances, Danny brings to the attention of the group that community information can be found in local newspapers and magazines like *Caribbean Life*. He describes his interest in these magazines in the following series of statements. In this series of statements, Danny is referring to the image of the free magazine dispenser usually located at street corners in NYC, which he presented to the group.

![Figure 27. Danny’s Magazine Dispensers Image](image)

Danny (personal communication, November 24, 2014) stated that this image of a local magazine dispenser represents the types of underground knowledge hidden in his community.

He states,
Definitely, we can always pick up the daily news, the New York Times, the Post, but these magazines… look at the condition. There’s pee on this thing… I mean if you open and... I mean there’s stickers that were everywhere. It’s kind of wear and tear over the years, so they’re pretty neglected sometimes. But if you open it up, those magazines are fresh; and you open them up and you never know what type of information you might be revealed to.

Later in the same conversation, Danny continues to explain the importance of these magazines, and that they share good news about the community. In some way, he thinks that these magazines present a more positive outlook on the community, unlike the more mainstream news sources like the NY Times. He says,

…and, that’s what I most appreciate about these magazines…, you can always hear about what the media wants to tell you but I want to hear from my community because those are the direct people who I, indirectly interact with, and they are part of my community. They want success, just like I want success and they want to have a safe community like just like I want a safe community. They’re trying to do things for our community to be progressive or productive for our community in a way that many people might not have seen 20, 30 years ago. That’s all for now.

Maria (Spanish immigrant), who agreed with Danny’s view of these magazines, actually brought a few copies of these magazines (Especialito and the Time Ledger) to one of our group meetings. The image below is of the newspapers she found in her own neighborhood. These newspapers were targeted towards Spanish speakers.
Maria (personal communication, December 2, 2014) some of the local magazines brought into the group by Maria. She states,

In my area, it’s like a place, like it’s [a] Boricuan place. They have this magazines, just in Spanish. In Williamsburg, you have a neighborhood that is like Republican Dominican, Puerto Rican and these magazines are in Spanish and people use them for looking for a job or something in the community, like a parade or something like that. I read one and I was like oh interesting

Another type of community knowledge discussed by the group was that of available homeland services, typically in the form of artisanal work. Both Tony and Danielle describe the importance of being able to have these services in their current communities. Tony describes his neighborhood as an ethnic enclave, where people from Mexico bring their traditional skills and services for Mexicans in NYC. According to Tony, “basically if you want authentic Mexican stuff, you need to get somebody who worked the same back home. A Mexican baker from home
to get the… the… traditional bread.” Similarly, Danielle, speaking of the African tailors in Harlem, says,

In Harlem, in area (unclear) they have it. Mostly are Africans, the problem is if you take it to the other tailor, like let’s say like Americans. It would be hard. They won’t fix it exactly the way you want it. Especially people from Ivory Coast, they are very good at it. Because they learn it, they have the huge, huge journals. A lot of pictures. You could just design it and the one, two three they would do it for you, but sometimes the charge you like $300, $400 for the way that you want it to be. That’s how my sister, they did hers, $300. For the woman, March 8th, she had this friend from my country, so every year we get (unclear) and they said in Chad but how they say in French and my aunt sent three of them for my two sisters and my Mothers, since I don’t wear it, she don’t bother to send me one. So she saw that it was mad long, very nice. I got to get one.

**Knowledge of the immigration process.** Students also spent much time discussing their experiences with and perceptions of the immigration process. Students exhibited a deep understanding of the following aspects of immigration. They showed a strong awareness about the importance of having *papers* (being a citizen or green card holder that is, not being illegal). They explained immigration as primarily a legal process, in which the interview process was a major event. It involved preparing a lot of immigration documents and consulting with lawyers. They identified the immigration as a process with big risk and even bigger gains. They identified that having papers was extremely important to immigrants because as immigrants they felt that they were under pressure (real or imagined) to have their papers. They mentioned that several incidents of when they were stopped on their return to the U.S. because they were not U.S. citizens. Several students relayed stories that highlighted the major risks that immigrants would
face to get their papers, like false marriages and having anchor babies. Though they claim to not support these actions, in several of their statements they identified that having papers would allow them to receive the same privileges as Americans. Also, to the students, being deported was a real fear. As such, they feared not having their papers with them and they also feared losing them.

Both in the image and caption below, Maria highlights the *strangeness* she felt being asked to prove her marriage to the stranger who is interviewing her, so that she can get her papers.

![Maria's Immigration Office Image](image)

*Figure 29. Maria’s Immigration Office Image*

Maria (personal communication, November 8, 2014) stated this image represents that place where she completed her interview for her new green card. There she felt like she spoke to a stranger (interviewer) about her personal life and had to prove them that she was married.

**Knowledge of how to do things.** Students also discussed and enacted several types of things that they knew how to do. They expressed that they are good at doing several actions,
most of which were centered around the household, for example, small appliance repairs, doing household chores and other responsibilities.

Figure 30. Maria’s Fixing Things Image
Maria (personal communication, November 30, 2014) used this image to express her knowledge about fixing things.

Maria uses this image to discuss her ability to fix things and her need to stay organized at home.

About my home. Well taking these three pictures, I realized that I have more skill that I never think about and… because you are at home and you’re doing many things. For example, I know that I am organized and I have another skills like for example I didn’t take a picture, like for example, it maybe sound stupid but I can iron things. You know, I can take care of people in another way that people don’t realize. Like for example like I try to be like a wife for my husband like I do like iron the t-shirt… and like try to [save] not cook but like put like meals for him… I don’t know. And then I like to fix things at home, I’m not a handyman but I like it and also I am really organized with my time because I don’t have enough time. It’s another thing when you are like immigrant, you
have to organize and keeping your future more focused than another person, because first of all it’s a little bit hard for you and secondly you need more time.

It is clear that being good at household chores is a point of pride for Maria. However, she makes an important acknowledgment in the first sentence, where she says, “Well taking these three pictures, I realized that I have more skill that I never think about and—because you are at home and you’re doing many things.” This kind of self-reflection was an integral component of this study as it pushed students to take a more in-depth look at their funds of knowledge (what they knew and what they were good at). However, it was not an easy task to get them to recognize that the things that they knew were valuable. Oftentimes, they glossed over their skills, by privileging their academic skills over their so-called non-academic skills.

**Knowledge of family business and fabrics/ tailoring/ sales.** In exploring this topic, Danielle spends much time relaying to the group her experiences working with her mother in her fabric store both in Chad and in the U.S. She enacts her practical math knowledge in selling fabrics to customers, by telling the group how she negotiates a sale price, which gives the customer an incentive to buy more fabric. She states, “Yes, it’s a six yards. Six yards for fifty dollars. Or sometimes… no six yard for $25.” Danielle uses the following image of a fabric swatch to support her narrative.
Danielle (personal communication, December 2, 2014) stated that this picture reminds of her home country and her mother’s African fabric business. Her mother used to travel all around the world to buy the African materials to sell back in her home country.

In the statement below, she goes on to discuss how she would go about helping a customer; it is clear that her knowledge of fabrics goes beyond cutting and selling but extend into fashion designing and styling.

Selling it and cutting it. Telling you what is the much of it, if you… if you sew it like this way. It would look nice and if you sew it that way it would look nice. Because sometime when… those… they buy it and come to us, they ask us okay. When you look at my skin color you think this goes much with me or stuff like that [talking about fabric swatch image]. If somebody is darker, it would go a little nice, but if somebody lighter since this part look already lighter then it wouldn’t look much, but it would not really look nice on them like a dark person. Sometime they ask us like what is the good like… if they want to make an outfit like skirt pants or just—anything like that—or dress. Is it good or
something. Sometime when you take it to the tailor, they make cut like this, I believe this is a bird. They may cut it and try to make this stuff, to the neck or the elbow stuff like that.

By engaging in these practices, Danielle not only contributed to her household functioning (Moll et al., 1992) but also acquired bodies of knowledge and skills from her Mother’s work-related activities. She was an active participant in helping her mother to buy and sell fabrics. Throughout our project, she began to reflect on these as her own and, at another point in our group conversation, she began to regard this knowledge as a type of expertise, as is evidenced in the following statement taken from our one-on-one interview.

It show that I’m an expert, why because I already know how [prints/fabrics], I did the business since I was ten years old. So now I’m 21, I’m pretty sure if I open my own business I can even handle it. So, this one it really tell my story. It really tell who I am right now, even today, even if it is sometime, when me and my mother go to the African store and she wants to buy the prints, you already know how to cut them and stuff like that. People even be wondering where you learned that and my Mother tell them that’s the business and I’ve been doing that for thirty to forty years.

Danielle’s experience highlights the situated nature of learning business skills. As sociocultural theorists would concur, learning business skills can happen in the practical, everyday activities of a family business.

**Knowledge about “who lives where.”** The students seemed to have an acute awareness of the makeup of New York City and their neighborhoods in particular. In discussing this topic, the students made reference to the socioeconomic geography of NYC. Students spoke about this issue in two ways: on the one hand, they spoke about the diversity that exists in NYC. Several
students mentioned that living NYC meant knowing “who live where” in the city. On the other hand, and more striking, students spoke about the city in terms of segregated spaces.

As Linda hints to below:

You could... You go on one side of the road, you could see any Bangladesh people. You go on the other side you see another Spanish side. It’s like a whole bunch of group, group, group, group. That makes Parkchester… and Metropolitan is divided too. So, they ask you what side you’re going. You mean southern or you mean what? People get confused because the buildings are all... The left side is the odd number and right side is the even numbers. I get confused too. I’ve been there for a long time and still confused… it feel like a twilight zone.

In the discussing the image below, Jada also posits that living in Manhattan is part of her family’s immigrant dream, but she also hints to the reality that living in the city is out of the reach of many immigrants.

Figure 32. Jada’s Luxury Homes Image
Jada (personal communication, December 3, 2014) stated that this image represented her family’s desire to reside in New York City. It is a dream of both her and her mother alike to do so.

Students often equated living in NYC with having limited opportunities to socialize with people outside of their neighborhoods. Jada relates this idea below:

I live in Brooklyn, the places that I…. Where I live (...) and the places I visit I visit are all West Indians. You have Trinidad, Haiti, you got Jamaica and you’ve got just all the African West Indies. You do not have any Spanish person. I have never met a Spanish person until I went to high school. I had no… We didn’t have that culture introduced to us, we kind of learned it slowly and then afterwards when we started to go high school and college then we tried to like become. Not become… but be a part of that culture to kind of learn and understand it. So I have more of a love for this…. To learn Spanish than any other language.

This is an interesting phenomenon that is likely to happen in many metropolitan cities, where neighborhoods are separated by class, people perceive the city to be diverse, yet their everyday interactions speak more to living distanced lives.

**Knowledge of college-going experience.** In examining student responses regarding the college-going experience, several types of knowledge and skills seemed to fit into this group. In turn, I clustered several other funds of knowledge themes into this group, for example, knowledge about taking classes, school transfers, grades (GPA), knowledge of academic subjects like history, psychology, writing/poetry and public speaking. Below Danielle’s speaks about how having a good GPA can help in student placements (exams and schools).

If your GPA is good and they see that you have you like you know the level of like you know English level. They will take you. I personally, when I was leaving from high school, I applied to Brooklyn college. My SAT score was good but my GPA wasn’t good
so they tell me that they would like me to go to 2 years college first, do some semesters and transfer over there.

Additionally, Maria speaks about GPAs in terms of failure, as she discusses how keeping her GPA is central to her acceptance into the Dental Hygiene program at Hostos, which is an immensely competitive program.

![Figure 33. Maria’s Exam Image](image)

Maria (personal communication, October 28, 2014) stated that she was having her second exam of the week and was feeling positive.

The following text speaks to her awareness of the importance of grades but also to the frustration of feeling like she is not doing enough regardless of having a high GPA. She even resigns herself to the possibility that she may need to transfer to another school because there are not enough available spaces in the program. She complains to the group about how difficult it is just trying to get into the program.
Oh yes I am so upset, okay for my program it’s really, really competitive. I am fine with that but right now I finded out that there is just 50 space per year and it’s like ahh!

Because just in one class of chemistry we are minimum 32 students and it’s like maybe five class per day, so multiply it all students that…, that are, that they are going to apply. So for me it’s crazy that just 50 students, pick 50 students can get in the program. I mean, it make me feel a little bit upset and make me feel like maybe I’m ahh… not wasting my time but maybe I study so hard or you know spend here one hour doing the pre-program that maybe I cannot get in the program. So like I need like… I need like answers. I need to know if it’s like a waiting list or something and I need to know exactly if I want to I’m going to get in the program or not. I have to wait on my advisor to tell me. But I know they’re gonna tell me yes study hard, you can get in. But maybe if I get… Imagine if I get A, A, A and one B+, maybe I cannot get in the program because of this B+, you know what I mean? So I’m a little bit upset right now I’m like almost melting but (breathes deeply). So that’s the reason because maybe I have to try to think another, another school to get in the program like NYU or Metrotech…

Both Maria and Danielle discuss having definite future educational plans related to their career choices. Maria wants to become a Dental Hygienist and Danielle plans to become a Physical Therapist, both of these students seem extremely committed to achieving these goals. As they discuss their plans with the rest of the group, it is clear that an associate’s degree is just the first step towards their future careers, “Associative degree and then I will… my plan is transfer to another school that his the bac… The Bachelor’s that’s gonna be three, and maybe, maybe. I will be doing some special…specialty.” Here Danielle elaborates on her plan to become a Physical Therapist,
Right now the course that I’m taking, like Physical Therapy, Psychology… it have to do a little bit with it. After, let’s say I pass the class hopefully I will take biology 140. When I graduate here… once I go to Lehman that’s how I would get like into the real course about physical therapy. After that I have to pass the state license. You know that state test. I get my license in order to come the real physical therapist. So it is a lot of work it need encouragement and courage.

Knowledge of cooking/ goods/ foods and planting/farming/agriculture. Several students spoke about their knowledge and skills related to the themes of cooking, goods and foods, in addition to the theme of planting, farming and agriculture. Many students used our conversations as a setting to discuss and enact their knowledge about these topics. For example, Danielle spoke about pottery from Chad. Also, Tony spoke about making tamales in his household. He also states that the practice of cooking serves to keep the family together. However, the students spoke of cooking as a way through which they can contribute to household practices. According to Tony, “cooking is a big thing for Mexican Mom’s. Oh you can find this… you can find this tortillas, this corn or leaves or whatever for the seasoning from back home.”
Tony (personal communication, December 9, 2014) stated that this picture represents making tamales but it also represents that his Mom’s food always reunites his family, no matter where life takes them.

In a similar tone, Jada discusses cooking and food as a way of staying connected to family, to her family history and familial knowledge. She believes that the main way of doing this is by gathering her family’s recipes. In the following statement she expresses how food and gardening is a metaphor for her family’s value of persistence.

…the type of knowledge that it has like it gives me is… to… how can I… how can I like [mash it up]… to be more hands on when it comes to things that are important to my family and the culture, and their culture. So food is important, well food is always important, but food is important for them because it brings the family necessarily together and the flowers are important because it gives me that type of knowledge of hands on because you keep working at the stuff that you want to see flourish you don’t just take the easy way out and just say oh you know what I give up. They kept working at it so...
therefore it’s like in this way where I didn’t necessarily see at the level now I do. It’s like you wanna keep working. This is not something that you just want to give up because once you give up you no longer have these skills and you know no longer can protect them

In another example, Danielle describes how her knowledge of farming and agriculture comes into play in school. She reflects on her grandmother’s planting of rice on her farm in Chad. She claims that this information has been useful in her planning and writing a research paper about organic farming and animal husbandry.

This is, it (really) too, it use a lot because actually I’m writing a research paper about organic and about conventional [meat] or organically produced meat so this one is like kind of organic because it’s natural and we really grow it to eat it, it’s not that we put some how you call it… how you call the stuff like that. From this knowledge I can bring it in my research. I can put like for example, rice we grow rice like from organically, but then if we have to put chemicals and stuff like that. Then it would be part of the conventional. Then I feel like I can bring this knowledge to school because I already know what is… What farmers already know and how they feed the cow and how they grow stuff. So, I then feel like it would really help me when I’m writing my paper so that I can try to fit it in and put a little example to tell them how really organic. Because it’s like the persuasive speech. I have to persuade them to eat the organic food. So I have to know how persuade them, so I can tell them how it is to grow the clean stuff, what kind of water to put under there to grow stuff. So I feel like this, this knowledge is really in school Right now at this point
Knowledge of other cultures. During our sessions, students displayed much knowledge about other cultures (other than their own), presumably because they are exposed to a multitude of people on a daily basis in New York City. However, they displayed this knowledge in different ways. Fanny spoke about her knowledge of different religious groups and her desire to learn more about the histories of other cultures. Conversely, Linda spoke about how she came to develop a broader perceptive of other immigrant groups. She mentioned that Jamaicans were the first people to befriend her and so in order to learn the English language she associated with her Jamaican friends. She would learn their food and customs, and they gave her a form of support. As she relates below:

This part you may just think this is a restaurant. This place was the first restaurant I went to go experience different cultures in the United States. I learned that Jamaicans have the same food as my country, Ghanaian people. We like a lot of spice, they do like a lot of spice. We have a lot of rice, they have a lot of rice

Here she continues her discussion of Jamaican restaurants and Jamaican culture while elaborating on the image below:
Figure 35. Linda’s Golden Krust image
Linda (personal communication, November 27, 2014) used this picture to show Golden Krust as a place where she goes to study.

She states:

I go there to study, to study their language, because you guys speak patois, so I want to learn that so I’m like… it’s like I’m learning in a way, how they speaking and how they presenting stuff. I try to learn it at the same time. So my friend… most of my middle… high school student friends, they’re all Jamaicans, so I was like (unclear). She… they keep speaking patois when there alone, and I’m like what are they talking about. The only thing I hear for me is food, so I was like okay, let’s go. She said we’re just going to study and I said okay.
Linda’s discussion not only highlights her curiosity towards learning about new cultures, but she also relates how other groups helped her to assimilate as a newcomer into the mainstream culture.

**Knowledge of health and healthy living.** Another theme that emerged from the data analysis was related to the issues of health concerns, well-being and healthy living. It included knowledge, skills and practices relevant to maintaining a healthy lifestyle, the use of vitamins and the eating of healthy foods. In the image below Maria shows us her juicer, which she uses to make healthy drinks.

![Maria’s Juicer Image](image)

*Figure 36. Maria’s Juicer Image*

Maria (personal communication, November 30, 2014) stated that being healthy is important to her, so she has a juicer to make healthy drinks.

Some participants spoke about how maintaining a healthy lifestyle was a practice that was valued in their households. For example, Danny says, “so, this is on top of my drawer. There
are many things here, I have vitamins.” He also believes that there is a connection between doing well academically and well-being. He expands on this idea in the following statement:

My mother believed in achieving greatness academically, personally, and economically through varies methods. Brain supplements, fish oil, as well as drink nasty olive oil were unusual to me when I was younger. I didn’t accept the idea at first, well into college. But, now I have done my research, on those supplements and today she laughs at me and also tells me I told you so. And she did, but I had to mentally and physically accept the concept on my own to comprehend how it was beneficial (Danny caption for Vitamin Shoppe image).

**Knowledge of the arts: art, music, poetry and dance.** This category refers to the bodies of knowledge, skills and practices derived from participating in organized creative activities and practice. Student discussions provided several examples of knowledge related to the arts, including drawing and painting, music, poetry and dance.

Here, Tony recalls engaging in art class in high school. As a newly arrived immigrant, the experience was meaningful because he was given the opportunity to showcase his knowledge without being stymied by his limited English language skills.

And that’s where I’m going. I was in that high school and I was comfortable. I was a straight A student. I was… A lot of art in that high school. A lot of drawing, reading. A lot of about cultures. I remember I did… I remember I did Michelangelo. I paint Mona Lisa. The DaVinci Mona Lisa. I painted Mona Lisa and… and... Yeah, so that was my first high school but then because we had to move and then because my mother…

Fanny discusses in her interview how she learned to write poems in her one-on-one interview and the important role it plays in her life, with regards to self-expression.
The book called modern… modern poetry (unclear). We had to study for CXC’s, yeah we had to learn like. Because you never know what they going to give us until like 11th grade. The send out the poems that we’re learning used… I snap my poems and I send it to my friends, and they be like why weren’t you like at poetry night? Because I’m afraid to like read my poems and people will be like oh you mad deep or whatever [laughter] you know… I just do it on my own. In my spare time. Everybody has that thing that they love.

At another point in our conversation, Fanny speaks about her love for dance:

I like to dance, I’ve been dancing since I was small and then I took up cheerleader and I started doing stunts and martial arts for three months. But when I came here they didn’t have… my high school was so small, it didn’t have those stuff. It didn’t have cheerleading, and gymnastic here class was so expensive… is so expensive. So I do it at home, I stretch it at home. It makes me feel relaxed.

Knowledge about “getting jobs.” Earlier in this Section a statement by Danny about finding information about jobs from community newspapers was highlighted. This category highlights the importance of social exchange within the immigrant community. This proved to be one means of getting jobs for this group. However, Tony identified a practice of job getting that fits well with the original research on funds of knowledge. He brought up the idea that he would find out about new jobs from his friends and friends of friends from within his Mexican community.

Before my jobs, before my jobs. I heard… I heard… of jobs with my friends… I used to talk to my friends, and hey I need a job I need to help my Mom. I don’t have nothing to do, can you help me get a job. So my friends used to call me and say a Tony, they need
somebody here. You have to wash dishes or you have to clean this. So because I didn’t
know how to get a job, like a better job I used to take them. Why because my friend used
to take me there. So it was guaranteed that I was gonna get the job because my friend…
It’s my friend’s job, so he recommended me in a way or something. So before I didn’t
have a resume so to seal the deal we used. I used to shake hands with the manager. So
nothing written. He used to tell me Tony, the job is there. If you wanna do it, it’s up to
you. Come at 5 and I’ll train you. So that was it. I shook his hand and yes I’m gonna be
here at 5. So yes Tony, I’ll see you here at 5.

Although Tony doesn’t see his connections as useful funds of knowledge, Moll describes
this type of resource as an important form of social exchange within the Mexican community,
related to the idea of confianza or mutual trust. This was a necessary element in Danny’s
relationships that allowed him to get his work opportunities through his friends, their vouching
for him and a handshake agreement to confirm the hire. What is more interesting is that, when
asked if this kind of social exchange existed in their immigrant communities, the other students
stated that it did not occur. Instead, they claimed that people stick to helping their immediate
families. This idea is also apparent among students’ career decisions. That is, they maintained
that their educational career achievements were in some way a form of reciprocity, but only to
help their immediate family members.

**Knowledge about practical math.** Practical math was discussed in several ways, as
mentioned earlier with regard to saving money (Danny and Tony). In another conversation,
Danielle mentions how math is involved in the family business. She talks about cutting and
selling fabrics, as well as making her own money by adjusting the fabric prices.

STACEY: What you used to do there?
DANIELLE: She used to sit there and I watched her. So when people come asked me to order those prints. I helped them and then I sell them the prints.

STACEY: Really, so you used to measure the cloth and stuff like that too?

DANIELLE: Yes, let’s say if it’s $200, I put it $250. So the fifty is mine [laughter]

DANIELLE: Even though they didn’t buy the 200, if she come she might give me fifty or hundred. That’s how I used to earn my money.

Danielle demonstrated that she gained particular kind of math skills as related to the selling of fabric. This finding shows that what counts as math is varied, and that “doing” of math in immigrants’ everyday lives may look quite different from “doing” math within academic environments, but that it is still as valuable.

Knowledge of technology and social media. This category of knowledge is seen as the funds of knowledge, skills and practices derived from interacting with a number of technologies including taking of photographs, social media, and video games. The students maintain much versatility with different kinds of digital technologies as digital photographers. Students discusses using the Internet for gathering information, as Danny mentioned when he was interested in finding out more information about healthy living, “I really had to research them myself and see exactly what I wanted for my body.” Also, students used Facebook to maintain relationships with friends. Like many millennials, Danny dreams of taking his talents to the Internet: “I wanted to be an online personality, I’ve seen a lot of YouTube videos where… people are just sharing their lives and sharing their opinion about products.” Facebook acted as a resource where they could find out information about social issues, like poverty. As Jada mentions during one of our conversations:
…and it’s crazy, they have a video. I know you guys have to see this video on your personal Facebook. But there’s this girl, she’s on public assistance. Sorry to say she’s a Spanish girl. She’s on public assistance and she wasn’t saying in the video how she doesn’t even need to go out and find a job because she gets money every month from the government. I think she has like kids too, so she gets more for the kids. So she was like she don’t see a need to go out and get a job. She’s getting money for free.

**Summary of funds of knowledge findings.** This section describes different bodies of knowledge, practices and skills related to the contexts of their immigrant households, communities and their school life. It addresses the research question as to what kinds of funds of knowledge in relation to academic learning are present and utilized by ethnic minority immigrant college students. The participants described, utilized, enacted and reflected upon their knowledge during our group conversations. Primarily these include bodies of knowledge, skills and practices related to the college-going process. More specifically, students enacted and reflected upon knowledge about registering for classes, financial aid, transferring schools, student skills, and academic subjects. However, in reflecting on the types of funds of knowledge identified above, it seems that the more salient question to ask would be about how academic learning could adapt to build on the funds of knowledge that students bring with them into the classroom.

In summary, the Photovoice method proved to be an effective and efficient means of eliciting the students’ cultural funds of knowledge. Through sharing their images and personal and collective stories this method became a tool for self-reflection and self-expression. In addition, the students used the Photovoice techniques to foster a sense of connection through which they generated a supportive space of caring, respect, recognition and validation. As the students became more supportive of each other, they began to take over the Photovoice activities
on their own, therefore acting with agency within the group setting. Although it was never a goal of this project to be an intervention, it was clear that it began to take on an intervention mode, particularly in the effort to get students to recognize their own funds of knowledge. This task was addressed with a multitude of scaffolding moments on the part of the researcher. As the project went on, the students themselves began to appropriate several validating statements and behaviors that allowed them to support each other’s emerging funds of knowledge. This operated as a mechanism that allowed the students to reflect on their own and others’ knowledge as they used it within the group setting. Over time, they became more confident in their use of this knowledge and eventually began to take ownership over what they knew, which led them to seeing themselves in a different light—that is, as competent knowers.
Agency

The research focus in this dissertation stems from the overarching research question: *How do ethnic minority immigrant college students agentically recognize and activate their funds of knowledge as they position themselves towards learning in college and in constructing learning identities?* In addressing this question, it was necessary to unpack how the students worked to negotiate their learning identities within our group setting. Accordingly, I had to treat the transcripts in such a way that would allow for extrapolating this notion of agency. *Agency* is typically defined as an active doing (moment-to-moment enactment) of the strategic making and remaking of the self (Moje & Lewis, 2007). In order to discover those moments when students *enacted* agency, it was necessary to examine the transcripts for moments of identity making, within which students would negotiate, pick up and contradict certain identity positions, particularly by activating their cultural funds of knowledge.

It became necessary to find a method of analysis that would allow the transcripts to be read on two levels: (1) a structural level, which requires an examination of the context that afforded such “agentic” behavior and (2) the internalization of cultural resources by individuals to take action. After completing both preliminary and secondary coding of the transcripts using the constant comparative method, it became clear that this method was not the most suitable one for examining these agentic moments. As such, finding a different analytical method became a priority. I decided to use a discursive analytical technique used by Moje and Lewis (2007), which drew heavily from Gee’s discourse analytic perspective (2000) and Fairclough’s critical discourse perspective (1992). Both of these perspectives give insight into how individuals construct identities within shared activities, particularly how constructed identities are made.
available or recognized, and how these identities emerge across spaces and time and in relation to connections across people and relationships.

This analytical technique allowed me to examine the participants’ opportunities to co-construct their learning identities during our group interactions. Applying this technique begins with the researcher reading, commenting on and coding the transcript utterance by utterance, and paying attention to every turn of speech, including interruptions. Additionally, a speaker’s turn is considered to be two utterances even if interrupted by a second speaker. After the selected text was read, coded and commented on, the next task was to define or identify the activity itself. Activities were defined in terms of the observed actions, goals, motives, needs and desires of the participants as they were engaged in these activities.

A Critical Sociocultural Analysis of Agency

The Activity: A Conversation about Language and School.

The purpose of the group discussions was to get students to reflect upon “what they knew” and to actively engage them in using their cultural funds of knowledge. Although group discussions were organized by main themes (for example, School, Home and Community), they were not guided by conversational scripts. Instead, students were free to discuss a variety of topics and issues that they felt were relevant to their learning within these contexts. Our conversations typically started with students presenting their selected photographs for a particular theme. On one occasion, the photo topic discussed was school. Present during the discussion were Danny, Maria, Linda, Danielle, Jada and myself.

Our conversation began with Danny presenting his images to the group and relaying his experiences as a student in both public and private educational settings. At the end of his presentation, he concluded by stating that in public school there is a wide range of knowledge
held by students, which he thinks is unlike private school, where most students, in his opinion, are on the same level academically. Following Danny’s line of thinking, I (the researcher) proceeded to ask the group about their thoughts on whether people in their classes at Hostos have different levels or types of knowledge. This led to several students commenting on their language skills and showcasing their language abilities in various languages. This example was chosen because it represents a protracted exchange where students work to take up certain positions in relation to language identities—that is “language knowers”—across the timeline of the conversation. As such, the way that these students take up, resist or contest these identity positions also shifts across the timeline of this conversation.

As the conversation progressed, several students made bids for recognition (identity work) within the group. As they negotiated their identities by speaking and displaying linguistic competency, they responded by validating these bids. In the group setting, validation means students’ agentic moves were either supported or backed up by the group; alternatively, they were challenged and even negated by group members.

01 STACEY: How does that play out, do you think you have a different kinds of knowledge from

02 other people in your class?

03 MARIA: Yes

04 DANIELLE: Yes, I can give an example of course in my Public Speaking class

05 STACEY: In your public speaking class?

06 DANIELLE: I think I might be the only person that my English is a little low because

07 most of them their English is like 110, 111, because I’m in English 92 but even that,

08 even though the English I had sometimes I keep—trying harder to be at the same levels
as them. Like sometimes it might be the words that I cannot pronounce and then the person whose English is kind of higher than mine they tell me no you can’t say that word that way or that’s the word that it says. Then sometimes when I don’t understand let’s say the structure. I do understand but sometimes when the professor keep putting pressure or some stuff, when I don’t get it, I ask that they describe to me more. Those one’s that the English are a little higher than mine [positioning as “non-knower” by using binary of little low and higher]

STACEY: But you speak French right?

DANIELLE: Yes

STACEY: Do you use your French to help you in school?

DANIELLE: Actually yes when I was taking the reading exam. That was... I took a workshop.... The workshop was for four days but I just attended for like one day and a half because I am in and it was like about four hours but I did only one day and a half and I passed the reading test because most of those vocabularies they were kind of similar in French because there’s a lot of words in English that is similar in French also. So is..., it really help me a lot, as test (...) test [reflecting on knowledge]

STACEY: Like what words are kind of similar?

DANIELLE: Laisser, what is this Laisser Faiser you know that right?

STACEY: Laisser Faire? [validating by questioning, causes Danielle to explain]

DANIELLE: Laisser faire means let it go in French. Like laisser faire. You know what is laisser faire right? So words like laisser faire I would know them
because it the French word [demonstrating knowledge]

STACEY: So in French laissez faire means like let it go or free for all [asking for clarification]

JADA: (...) the translation that they taught us in high school and in Junior high school is a little bit different [contradicting Danielle’s definition, challenge]

STACEY: What is the translation? [asking for clarification, but pushes students to negotiate the definition]

JADA: The translation, because you said let it go, but when they refer to laissez faire they usually refer to somebody who have a… say for example management, it goes from the strictest to laissez faire attitude. They mean like somebody who has like a relaxed attitude. They just let you do whatever you want to do. [demonstrating a contradictory definition term]

DANIELLE: Yeah, that’s why it is let it go [reiterating her stance]

JADA: But it… I guess that’s exactly what it is [Jada backing off and acquiescing to Danielle’s definition]

LINDA: They put in a different… [also contradicts Danielle’s definition]

DANIELLE: They different, they put it sometimes in a different context but you just want to like… translate the meaning of the words like… [maintaining her position]

JADA: Yeah, like exactly, it means—yeah [again Jada acquiesces to Danielle’s definition]

DANIELLE: Like word, it means let it go. If you get it into like laissez faire the real laissez faire they teach us in high school I know I went to high school
here in America too. They were teaching us, so if you trying to go there that’s
the way it kind of explained (...) [she suggest that her definition is real, while Jada’s is
not]

STACEY: So your French is a helpful thing for you?

DANIELLE: Yeah

STACEY: So how… how might…? It helps you with your reading? What else might
this help you with? Has it helped you with…? [pushing reflection]

DANIELLE: Well I can give you an example. I translate for people a lot.

Especially my work, every day. Every time I go to work, there’s a lot of people
from Paris. From…. I mean French. When I say Paris sometimes people don’t
know. From France. From Canada. Mostly from Montreal, when they come,
they don’t know no English. I’m the only one who speak French over there at
my work place so they just put finger one me. They point finger like hello,
she’s here, she’s going to help you. It help, my help not me because they don’t
pay me extra for that, it only help the company not me. (...) Sometimes [places where
knowledge is used]

STACEY: And what about here in school?

DANIELLE: Yes, actually there’s French speakers in my class. Two Africans,
but from different countries, one from Togo and one from Congo. So the one
from Congo sometimes he have little difficulty of understanding English, so
sometimes I explain to him when the professor say something. I explain to
him in French. How people around here speak? [demonstrating competence]

FANNY: One
DANIELLE: You don’t get it [dismissing Fanny’s statement]

LINDA: Yeah [backed up by Linda]

STACEY: So that gives you... a kind of skill that you can use?

DANIELLE: I use it daily with my father also, with my Dad sometimes when they call him and he don’t get it, right? I’ve been helping him or (...). Like document that they send like… try to fill it out. I help him sometimes because we speak our own dialect at home and sometimes we speak Arabic and sometimes we speak French also. Because French in my country is the first language and Arabic is the second. [demonstrating competence]

STACEY: So you speak four languages? [validation]

DANIELLE: You can say that. Besides those there are different dialects, because we have a lot of dialects. You know Africans they have a lot of dialects. Besides my own dialect, Arabic and French, I can speak three [shifting identity]
different dialects. In my country only, you people don’t understand. So we have a lot of dialects [displaying competence]

STACEY: They have names, these dialects? [clarification]

DANIELLE: Come on [emphasizing that she speaks too many languages to name] [shifting identity]

LINDA: Don’t get her started! (Laughter) [validation by challenge]

STACEY: They do… but they do have different names? They say things and they have different words and stuff?

DANIELLE: Yes
JADA: Wow, so that’s a huge vocabulary you have [validation by support]

DANIELLE: You can say that [acceptance/recognition]

STACEY: What about the other people, are there other languages, right?

LINDA: I could relate to her a little bit [validation by support]

STACEY: You could relate to that

DANIELLE: Three you speak three [validation by support]

LINDA: I can speak Arabic too, (...) too [demonstrating competence]

STACEY: So other dialects that... So you speak English? [pushing reflection]

LINDA: And I Ga and I speak Chi and I speak French and I speak Spanish [positioning herself as a language knower]

STACEY: You speak Spanish too

LINDA: A little bit

DANIELLE: How cool are you! You have more, mucho! [challenge] [demonstrating knowledge] [constraining Linda’s identity move]

STACEY: So how many languages is that? [reflection, validation]

LINDA: So in my country I speak like four back [there] and I’m trying to learn different language like French and Spanish too [describing knowledge skill]

DANIELLE: If you want, I speak Spanish too. That’s not a joke, is the reality. [challenge] [constraining Linda’s identity move]

STACEY: So..., do you... but... that’s... I mean. So when you learn... you’re learning Spanish now. So now do your other languages help you with Spanish?

LINDA: Sometimes it affect it because you trying to say it in other languages and it’s the opposite of... and I’m like oh. Because when I was speaking
French it is similar to it and I confuse the two words with the French and the Spanish. Yeah, it affects it a little bit. Sometimes I’m speaking with somebody oh you understand that too, like they join in and speak. I get confused a little bit. [contradictory view of her language skills, negation]

DANIELLE: Okay say something in French, if you speak French. Say it! [challenge]

LINDA: I’m not saying it, you already know it. [challenge] [validation]

DANIELLE: No

LINDA: I don’t want to say it in front of people and they don’t understand it. [backing off]

DANIELLE: Okay say it in Spanish. [challenge]

LINDA: No. [backing off]

DANIELLE: So you don’t speak it. [constraining Linda’s language knower identity claim]

LINDA: I speak it but I’m not saying it anyway. [backing off]

DANIELLE: Why, you have to practice in order to… [challenge] [constraining Linda’s identity bid]

LINDA: Yes but… [backing off]

STACEY: Yes, go ahead

(Cross talk)

STACEY: So, MARIA you too, you speak another language?

MARIA: Spanish, yes, and English [mentioning language skills]

STACEY: … and English
MARIA: I speak the real Spanish and yeah I understand French and Italian \[positioning herself as a knower\]

STACEY: You understand French and Italian? \[validation\]

MARIA: Little bit. Bonjour or Je m’apelle Maria (...) that’s… \[demonstrating knowledge\]

STACEY: But you guys are taking Spanish

DANIELLE: but when she speaking, she have an accent of people from Paris right away. Because due to French and Spanish, it’s a little bit similar. Not kind of a lot… \[validating Maria's identity positioning\]

MARIA: and Portuguese too \[positioning as knower\]

DANIELLE: Yeah, they mix. There’s Portuguese, what is it? Spanish, Italian and French. Those four-… I mean language. They can be a little twisted. A little similar \[validation & identification with Maria\]

JADA: I find that Italian and Spanish are like real similar to each other. Like if you can understand Spanish fluently then you can get Italian \[validating Maria’s language positioning\]

DANIELLE: I heard that out of all these languages, all the romantic ones. The romantic is French \[validation of Maria’s language positioning\]

LINDA: That’s what I heard too \[validating Maria’s language positioning\]

DANIELLE: It’s true \[validating Maria’s positioning\]

JADA: Romantic languages

DANIELLE: Because you see how she say, oui, oui. You might think she might be telling you something. All she say is yes miss. Yes, really! (Laughter, Crosstalk). If
somebody ask you speak French you bit like (imitates American accent) Oh My God, you speak so good. Amazing! [validating Maria’s positioning]

JADA: I think that everybody’s I guess their impression when you speak another language. They always want you to say something [challenging Danielle’s positioning][challenging Danielle’s constraining of Linda’s positioning]

LINDA: Exactly, I hate that [supporting Jada’s challenge]

(Cross talk).

JADA: Like you’re a puppet. Like, oh my God can you say something. (Laughter) [challenging Danielle’s positioning] [challenging Danielle’s constraining of Linda’s positioning]

LINDA: Yeah right [supporting Jada’s challenge]

Analysis of the Conversation

The analysis of this conversation (following Moje & Lewis, 2007) yielded several patterns in relation to the primary research question posed at the start of this section. Here, identities were enacted and recognized in particular ways throughout the exchange, and the identity moves had implications for what the group members said and did. Students made claims to be recognized in particular ways throughout the group conversation. These enactments and recognitions (including challenges) carried implications for what each student and the researcher said and did. For example, Danielle’s identity trajectory across the exchange showed a shifting sense of positioning that started off as being that of a “non-knower” to that of a “language knower” by the end of conversation. In making her claims to this identity, she demonstrates her linguistic knowledge, describes places and relationships within which she used this knowledge. Other students who had much linguistic knowledge sometimes maintained silence throughout the
discussion, like Danny. Yet, others worked to constrain Danielle’s re-positioning as a knower but with little success.

Another shift in positioning revolved around Linda backing away from her early positioning as a French speaker, as a result of being challenged by Danielle’s attempt to get her to say something in French. Although she resisted those requests she continued to remain silent while Danielle continued to insist on her linguistic expertise through demonstrating what she knew, and by continuing to point out how her linguistic expertise is valued both at work and in school. Like Linda, other students who were certainly knowledgeable about language(s) remained silent throughout much of the discussion. Remaining silent could also be seen as enactments of identity, and did inform the discussion as well. Again, Linda purposely chose to remain silent when being called on by Danielle to show her knowledge of French. Her silence speaks volumes, as an active form of resistance. In another example, Jada acquiesced to Danielle’s point of view and remained silent for most of the discussion on French but later in the conversation, she began to stand up for Linda by stating that when you claim that you speak a language, others often call you on it by forcing you to be a “puppet” by asking you to “say something.”

Throughout the exchange, the students worked to take up, resist and constrain several identities in relation to language knowing within our group discussion. During this session, identities were enacted primarily through students reflecting on and utilizing of their funds of knowledge in terms of language expertise, to make a “bid” to be recognized as a “language knower.” Unlike Danielle’s bid for recognition as a language knower, Maria’s bid for recognition as a language knower was not challenged, but rather accepted with immediate
validation and support. Students validated Maria’s positioning by aligning themselves with her positioning (lines 136-139).

**Constrained and invited identity enactments in the activity.** The conversation starts off with Danielle taking up the position of someone who is “not good at English.” To begin (lines 6-14), she places herself a less-than English speaker and claims that she needs help in her classes because she often has a hard time understanding what is said. She acknowledges that learning English is a challenge for her. However, over the course of this conversation, she moves from positioning herself as someone who “can’t do” to someone who “can do”. In other words she moves from enacting ways in which she is not a language learner (in terms of English) to being recognized (and recognizing herself) as a language learner (in terms of French and other languages).

When asked about being a French speaker, she takes up the position of being knowledgeable about the language and proceeds to draw on her knowledge of French words. She claims that having this knowledge has allowed her to do well in English, which is in contrast to a few sentences back, where she took up the position of “struggling English student.” She describes how knowing French has helped her understand English. She proceeds to inform the group (as if in a teaching mode) about the phrase “*laisser faire,*” which she translates into English. In doing so, Danielle enacted the identity of “a knower” or “an expert,” but she also enacted the position of someone who was willing to teach others. As conversation continues, her knowledge French is supported by the researcher, but challenged by Jada (line 33) who offers an alternative definition for the term *laisser faire* (lines 36-40).

Jada’s move here was agentic. Not only did she challenge Danielle’s interpretation of the phrase, she also positioned herself as someone whose knowledge of French words came from the
context of school and, more specifically, from the field of business management. Her critique places an emphasis on school knowledge, and serves on the one hand to downplay Danielle’s definition (and knowledge) and on the other hand, to legitimize her own understanding of the phrase, therefore allowing her to take up a position as a rival French “expert.” These moves fit in well with Gee’s notion of making bids for recognition as “certain kinds of persons,” yet to these students these bids seem to go unnoticed.

Danielle restates her position by saying, “Yeah, that’s why it is ‘let it go’” (line 41) to which Jada responses (in line 41) “But it… I guess that’s exactly what it is,” which appears to be her hedging her previous claim (knowing French; lines 36-40). At this point, Jada seems to become doubtful of what she knows. In line 43, Linda supports Jada’s claim by saying, “They put in a different,” trying to get he to consider Jada’s bid again. However, Danielle holds strong to her position as a French speaker and repeats her definition of *laisser faire* in addition to criticizing Jada’s school-learned definition of the phrase. In a move of “claiming authority,” Danielle informs Jada that she too went to school in America, and knows of her definition but claims that she knows “the real *laisser faire*” (line 47-48). In doing so, Danielle depicts Jada as someone who does “not really know French,” which in some way she acquiesces to, because she remains silent at this point. Here, to know French would mean that one is a native speaker, regardless of school learning.

At this point, the researcher shifts the conversation away from Jada and onto Danielle’s use of French. In lines 55-62, Danielle continues to support her claim that she is French speaker by discussing how she uses her French knowledge at her place of work. She argues that she is the go-to translator there, even without compensation. This strategy seems to allow her to maintain her French speaker identity within the group. In lines 64-68, she explains that she even uses her
language skills at school to help other students. She continues (in lines 73-78) to expand on her claim by explaining that she speaks French at home as well. At this point she has defined herself as a native speaker of French, someone who uses French at work and at home. She goes on the claim that she speaks other languages by informing the group that she speaks Arabic in addition to several other African dialects. In doing so, she pushes the boundaries of the original conversation by incorporating multiple languages into the identity of language speaker. At the same time, others in the group remain silent about their language skills. This seems to aid Danielle in maintaining her positionality, since she is quite vocal about her skills and what she knows. In some way, the remaining students’ silence may actually reflect their recognition of Danielle’s French speaker identity.

Later in the conversation, Danielle receives some critique from the other participants, as is evidenced by Linda’s comment in line 87, “Don’t get her started!” This comment seems purposely snippy, as if Linda is tired of hearing Danielle promote herself as an “expert.” However, in line 91, Jada does appear to support Danielle’s claim by stating, “Wow, so that’s a huge vocabulary you have,” therefore legitimizing her bid for recognition.

The researcher then attempts to include the other participants in the discussion by asking them to discuss their language skills. At this point, Linda asserts herself as an Arabic speaker as well. Then in lines 99 and 101, she posits that she also speaks Ga, Twi, French and Spanish. This elicits a snarky comment from Danielle who says, “How cool are you! You have more, mucho!” This is evinced by Danielle’s harsh, almost sarcastic tone when she says this to Linda. Also, her use of Spanish here seems to be an attempt to let Linda know that she speaks Spanish, as if to show off. It seems that she was rubbing it in here, because Linda was taking a Spanish class at the time and she was not doing well, which was known to the group.
Linda continues to claim that she speaks four languages and is learning French and Spanish as well. To which Danielle challenges, “If you want, I speak Spanish too. That’s not a joke, is the reality.” The researcher then redirects the question to Linda who proceeds to contradict a point made earlier by Danielle, in which she claimed (Danielle) that French complemented her knowledge of English (lines 18-24). Here, Linda, argues that her knowledge of French has actually hindered her acquisition of English. Almost immediately, Danielle fires back by bringing Linda’s knowledge of French into question and by demanding that “if you speak French. Say it!” Linda responds by doing two things; first, refusing to speak French and second, placating Danielle by saying “you already know it.” Danielle proceeds to interrogate her, at the end of which she declares, “So you don’t speak it!” (line 121), positioning Linda, like Jada, as a “non-knower.” However, Linda continues to refuse to speak in either French or Spanish. This refuting of Danielle’s request is also an act of agency. Here it seems that Linda’s taking up the position of resistance and refusal to be a “puppet” (line 154) reflects that she doesn’t need to prove herself to Danielle.

Near the end of the conversation (lines 134-140), Danielle and Jada both seem to be working to align themselves with Maria, by commenting that French, Spanish and Portuguese are all similar sounding languages. It seems that they are working to place their abilities on the same level. However, in doing so, they also continue to legitimize Maria’s knowledge of these languages. In the next turn, Danielle shifts the conversation back to her and her knowledge of French, by stating that to her French is the most romantic language, which of course she speaks. She contends that people like to hear French accents. Surprisingly, both Linda and Jada support this claim (lines 143 and 145). However, Jada presents as counter argument in (line 150) that brings to mind Danielle’s challenge to Linda to speak French if she knows it. She states that “I
think that everybody’s I guess their impression when you speak another language. They always want you to say something.” Here, she takes to task Danielle’s position and is quickly supported by Linda who says, “Exactly, I hate that!”

Through these statements, Jada represents a set of agentic enactments, going against Danielle’s positioning. In creating this counter argument, she positions herself in opposition to Danielle’s belief that one should prove their language expertise by being willing to speak the language. Jada likens this behavior to being a “puppet.” At this point, Danielle does object to Jada’s example, but Linda completely sides with Jada. These statements almost appear to be antagonistic and serve to recast Danielle as somewhat of a bully. This move is not surprising since early on in the conversation Jada’s resigned her position as a French speaker because Danielle labeled her as “a non-native” French speaker. As such, Jada reintroduces the issue possibly as a way of strengthening her position in response to these earlier situations.

Moments of agency and constraints. A number of moments of “strategic making and remaking of selves” occur throughout the discussion. One such moment appears when Danielle (in line 41) restated her definition of the term \textit{laisser faire}. Her definition is one that works to simultaneously reconfirm her position as a “language knower” and constrict Jada’s own claim to being a language knower. At the same time, Jada’s reframing of the definition of \textit{laisser faire} is also a move of agency. She too wants to show her competence in the French language. However, her backing down from the claim and allowing Danielle’s definition to be accepted, legitimizes Danielle’s linguistic identity. Linda’s claim to a language knower identity is also constrained by Danielle’s displays of linguistic competency.

Maria represents another set of identity moves that are worth exploring as well. When the question of linguistic ability is shifted to Maria, she quickly asserts that “I speak the real
Spanish” (line 130), a declaration that went surprisingly uncontested by the other students. Their acceptance of her position as “a real Spanish speaker” probably stems from the fact that, being from Spain, she is an “authentic” Spanish speaker. She also added that she understands both French and Italian and she proceeds to demonstrate her knowledge by saying a few words. It is possible that she does so to avoid any challenges from the other participants. She uses this accepted identity to further position herself as a knower of multiple languages like French and Italian, which seems to impress the group. As Danielle reflects when she says, “she have an accent of people from Paris right away. Because due to French and Spanish, it’s a little bit similar.” This could be because Danielle, who comes from a former French colony, Chad, privileges French spoken in France, as being the real French, and she acquiesces to Maria’s point that she speaks the real Spanish, thus legitimizing her position in the group. It would have been interesting to see how Maria’s identity-work as “a real Spanish speaker” would have played out if Tony was there. He is also a native speaker but he is from Mexico.

**Enactments of Agency**

*Student-generated images as representations of agency.* The seven students who participated in this study took a total of 107 photos across the contexts of school, community and home. Of these, 31 were taken in the school, 33 were taken in the community and 43 photos were taken in the home. Not only did the number of images differ across these contexts but also the photos differed in terms of their modality. One activity involved “pile sorts,” with students sorting paper print outs of photos from their Facebook pages. In an examination of the themes compiled during three pile sorts of the images by topic, the students identified a variety of themes that represented their activation of several funds of knowledge related to the school environment, practices, goals and values. Although they displayed much hesitance and confusion
about taking photographs at the start of this study, it was surprising to see that they took so many images related to the first photo topic—school.

**Agency as co-constructing a story during pile-sorting.** Over the course of semester, the students engaged in three separate pile sorts, where they organized a stack of printed pictures for particular photo topic into themes, and identified areas of strengths and challenges. Although they had activity sheets, the students were free to organize these images in whichever way that they felt made sense. It should be noted that the group setting was a place where students’ cultural knowledge was privileged and used to cultivate a dialogic and activity based space within which their voices could emerge and be expressed. As I took on the role of facilitator, I consciously attempted throughout our sessions and in particular during our pile sorts, to relinquish my role as an “expert,” which allowed the students to assume control of their discussions, their decision-making, and the arrangement and display of their pile-sorts. The pictures below are of students engaged in the pile sorting activities.
Figure 37. Pile sorting starter piles

Figure 38. Students engaged in pile sorting activity

Figure 39. Students at Whiteboard Displaying Their Themes

Figure 40 Student Discussing Themes
The following is an observation of the agentic moves made by Danielle and Linda in arranging their images during our first pile-sort, for the photo topic “school.” Danielle and Linda worked together to make sense of their pile of images. At first, they kept asking me questions about whether they were doing things correctly. I thought that they did not fully understand the task but their line of questioning was not about how to go about sorting the pictures but rather, about whether they were “doing it right,” meaning, “Are we getting the right answer?” After a few times I told them that it was going to be okay, and that there is no right or wrong answer. This simple statement helped to validate what they were doing, and made them feel that they were capable of completing the task. After resuming the task, Danielle and Linda began a dialog about how they were going to group the images.

After a few minutes, I walked within earshot because they were deeply engrossed in conversation about these images. As I overheard the conversation, I noticed that in arranging their images about “school,” they were creating a story that linked the images together in a cohesive manner. Consequently, they had created a character, a student just like them, and they fit the images into this person’s story. This act of arranging a coherent narrative via storytelling is quite agentic. In doing so, they stepped away from using the activity sheet and utilized a possible cultural fund of knowledge, that is, storytelling. What was interesting about this act was that these two African immigrants used cultural knowledge evident in their particular cultures to make sense of a large number of images some of which they did not take. In African cultures, the tradition of folk stories is used to acquire a sense of the history, values, and traditions of the African culture, and is one of the most ancient forms of sharing information. Emmanuel Matatayou contends that storytelling is an integral part of the cultural life of the African people,
because “storytelling like rhetoric is the exercise of the mind. The words have great power” 
(Utley, 2008.)

Prusak (in Denning, 2001) argues that stories can powerfully convey norms and values across generations and contexts. By creating a shared story the students were able to exchange their cultural knowledge and created a lens through which to create some meaning of the images, and they also did so by validating each other’s points of view about the images. As the researcher, I maintained a “hands off” approach to this task and let them think about and decide what was meaningful within the images. I refrained from imposing what I felt were my “western sensibilities” on how things could be ordered. Another pair that I observed was Maria and Danny, who were engaged in the same task. However, they never asked any questions and they maintained a very “formal education” approach in arranging their stack of images. They followed the activity sheet to the letter and created piles by themes of challenges and strengths (as listed on the activity sheet). At the end of the task, both groups produced similar lists of themes.

**Agency and “Taking action” or “Making a Difference.”**

Varying definitions of agency exist within the literature. For example, agency can be understood as “the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices” (Sairanen & Kumpulainen, 2014, p. 143). Several other works emphasize agency as connected to individual autonomy and self-fulfillment, and a force for change or resistance to structural power (Eteläpelto et al., 2013). Others see agency as a practice of choosing the problems that one can engage with through varying degrees of engagement (Billett, 2006). Yet other theorists maintain that agency is the realized capacity of people to act upon their world and give significance to their actions. Following this line of thinking, individual identity is forward-
looking and “constructed via meaningful life agendas and oriented toward pursuits of changing something in and about social practices including in ourselves as agents of these practices” (Vianna & Stetsenko, 2011, p. 318). However, within these definitions, agency is taken as something that one has in order to effect change in one’s life. It is arguable that agency has to be recognized and fostered within situated activities and across contexts. This view makes agency a work in progress, co-constructed within the dynamics of the affordances found within social practices and how individuals see themselves in relation to these social practices. These varying perspectives all premise agency as an individual taking action in their lives with the goal of bringing about change in their life.

In analyzing the varied data sources for instances of agency, it was clear that for the students, agency took on a somewhat different connotation. In some ways, being agentic did not always take on a “doing” or a “making a difference” sensibility. As I will explain, they positioned themselves in varying ways across the contexts of immigrant life, student life and within our group setting, and sometimes there was crossover. In bringing their cultural knowledge to our group setting, they also brought an understanding of the imposed identities, pervasive stereotypical views, embedded discourses about immigrants, and constricted perceptions about what they were capable of doing (Nasir et al., 2012; Ogbu, 2003; Steele, 1997). It seems that they were well on their way to developing their learning identities, and in doing so, they held varying degrees of agency or self-direction that they possessed at this point in their journey. In reality, it takes a shift in one’s perception towards perceiving that one can be agentic, be that having a voice or making a decision, especially if one’s social and individual history has not really allowed for such perceptions.
Students (and teachers alike) may believe in prevailing negative stereotypes about themselves and their capabilities (Delpit, 2006; Murrell, 2002), which is expected to be left at the college doors. However, it is clear that as students take up their learning identities, they do not put down their immigrant and racialized identities. Embedded within larger discourses of immigrant culture are negative perceptions. In particular, there are negative perceptions of what these ethnic minorities are capable of achieving academically. Unfortunately, students incorporate these negative views into their own self-perceptions, which affects their dispositions towards learning and their participation in learning perceptions. In other words, just as immigrants cross boundaries to get to school, so do the negative stereotypes of them. As Jada put it:

Yeah, and then anybody else who happens to be somebody of not African descent or African ethnicity. To them I’m just, I’m just plain old Black American. It doesn’t matter, I can just come straight from Jamaica, they would really care, because they just [don’t], you’re not Jamaican.

She goes on to say that being perceived as “just plain old Black American” means that she feels an immense pressure to prove to others that she is not that stereotype. Having to do this on a constant basis is exhausting to her as she expresses in the following statement,

I feel pressure all the time, and it kind of gets annoying because at a point in time… I know you wanna say something… at a point in time it gets annoying because you just want to give up because it’s like, who are you proving this too? Because nobody... it’s like they always say you’re responsible for your own happiness however if you have outside forces influencing your happiness or what you consider happiness… what is there to do? You can’t really prove too much to yourself. Do you want to give them your soul
too? Like what else [laughter] what else can you do? You can’t do anything about it. So it gets frustrating at a point. It’s like… there’s time when I’ve just was like just gonna drop out of school.

Danny describes a similar feeling of constrain in terms of his racialized identity as well, which is something he also mentioned when speaking about the Eric Garner case.

It’s just negative, the way I think about myself from the past and where I grew up from and that negative stigma of being an African-American Black man…yeah, stuff like that. It’s mostly just the stigma in America, about-- against African-American Black men and put that together with the passive-aggressive racism sometimes and the positions that I had to put myself in when going to a private school. Interacting with White individuals, they’re not fully aware of where I come from sometimes.

These two students highlight how negative perceptions of African-Americans and Black immigrants constrict their everyday interactions with others and force them to take up positions of opposition. In this way, students feel forced to constantly be on the defensive, which can leave them feeling exhausted in trying to be more than these stereotypes. As Jada clearly put it, it takes the “happiness” out of life and replaces it with frustration, so much so that it becomes unsatisfying.

Recent shifts in theorizing the links between identity and learning have reconceptualized the development of identity as a fluid, dynamic process dependent on sociocultural environments. More specifically, identity development is contingent upon being recognized by social others within the sociocultural environments. Furthermore, as individuals construct and negotiate their identities they can be recognized or constrained by social others. It is also arguable that as one participates within social practices, one is “double-recognized.” In other
words, if we look at agency as being in transition, then an individual’s agentic moves act like bids for recognition (Gee, 2000), which require recognition and validation from social others. If these agentic moves are recognized and validated by social others, then the individual becomes more likely to perpetuate those agentic moves and begins to incorporate them into her or his developing ways of knowing and being. This viewing of agency as engaging in practice, and developing identities-in-practice takes on a developmental connotation—and directs our attention towards fuller forms of participation. In this way, agency is a work in progress that is co-constructed within the dynamics of the affordances found within social practices and involves how individuals see themselves in relation to these social practices, in varying degree of participation, yet it also requires some level of self-awareness. At the social level, for agency to emerge, individuals have to be afforded the opportunity within participatory contexts in enacting such agency or making agentic moves. Nasir and Cooks (2009) believe that agency also requires the appropriate situated resources to become enacted.

Agentic actions can move towards or move against situated practices (Nasir & Cooks, 2009); however at individual level, the individuals must also recognize themselves as capable agents in their own lives, thus making the formation of agentic thinking (or self-efficacy) an important element of agency itself, which can be fostered through cultural resources and through social interactions with others. In other words, to take action requires that individuals themselves recognize that they can take action. This leads to the question, what physical and social spaces would support this kind of agency and what kinds of agentic moves and identities need to be developed within such a space?

Agency, Learning and Validation
In terms of learning, agency is related to students maintaining an openness to learning: to “the new,” to “the things that we didn’t know,” and constructing a belief that they are capable of learning. Therefore, what seems to be missing within the above noted definitions of agency is a sense of self-recognition as a certain kind of person in learning, along with the validation for enacted funds of knowledge. It is arguable that in order for students to be agentic they would first have to perceive themselves as having agency, and that others must also perceive them as having agency. Taking this position, agency also develops in relation to the ways students are afforded moments of agency within a particular setting, and whether they are validated for producing such acts.

If agency is viewed as “making a difference,” then these students did not enter into our group setting as major “doers of change.” Rather, they were reluctant and somewhat pessimistic about their lives and did not see themselves as agentic persons, as is evinced in the amount of time they spent in recounting their immigrant stories, which were primarily filled with depictions of loss, sadness, disruptions and acculturative tension. Retelling these stories became a major task for each student, and not surprising, they allowed them the opportunity to feel connected with each other. It was a challenge to get them to talk about/reflect upon the kinds of things that they knew. Early on, it was more difficult to get them to see that what they knew was valuable, in particular, knowledge and values that were useful in their homes and communities (that is, besides the typical things like cooking and foods). In reality, they maintained a fragmented view of their figured worlds, privileging school as a place of knowledge and teachers as the holders of valuable knowledge, and that they were merely receivers of this information.

At the beginning of our project, the students positioned themselves mainly as “non-knowers.” As such, my line of questioning was quite confusing to them at first, because they did
not see the things that they knew to be valuable. It is understandable that the students probably participated in learning contexts where they took up passive positions in learning, and where their voices and choices were not validated. However, their images told a different story—mainly that they knew a variety of things, although they were not capable of recognizing them as valid forms of knowledge.

In the beginning of the project, I thought that the students would take initiative and run with the idea of taking pictures, mainly because they expressed much interest in doing so before the study’s start. However, they were stymied in their ability to reflect on their own knowledge found within their communities and homes. I had to scaffold their reflective thinking in several ways, which was something that I did consistently throughout the study. I attempted to get more information about agency in several ways, by asking the students both open ended and direct questions, and by paying close attention to interactions with each other in the group setting.

In terms of learning, they were, in a developmental sense, in the process of developing their agency—or in the process of developing identities towards learning. In this way, their agentic moves maintained two main ways of enactment. First, in terms of their everyday immigrant lives students took up identities that seemed fixed. With respect to their immigrant life, students were “pessimistic” and “closed off,” and it was a chore to get them to reflect on funds of knowledge, because they were historically invalidated in this figured world, as highlighted earlier in the section on figured worlds of ethnic minority immigrants. Subsequently, their bids as knowledgeable people were constricted by a variety of existing stereotypes and negative perceptions. In the figured world of everyday immigrant, they seemed to be more aware

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24 An alternative reason why students could have seem hesitant to take pictures could be that they were asked to refrain from taking pictures of faces. Considering the popularity of selfies, it’s possible that being ask to turn the camera away from people might have constricted their ideas in the beginning of the project.
of the implications of being both immigrant and ethnic minority in New York City, and how these factors hampered their identity explorations and acts of participation within this space. In terms of learning, they took up positions and enacted agentic moves related to being “successful,” because their funds of knowledge are valued in this social space. However, in the group setting, the students took on myriad ways of being agentic, they were seen, by myself and each other, as “knowledgeable people,” with much to contribute to the space. Here, they were most open to possibilities, at least towards the end of the project. Looking across the timeline of this project, it was clear that they had shifted in their perceptions of what was possible for them, in terms of agency, identity and the use of their funds of knowledge.

In terms of funds of knowledge, when we first started our group discussions, students were asked in several ways about the types of knowledge that were present in their homes and communities, and these questions were generally met (more or less through the first month of the project) with some variation of the word “No!” (Fanny). These comments reflected a sense of confusion, not necessarily about the question itself but rather the concept behind it, which could be rephrased as, “What kind of knowledge do you have?” I then felt that is was necessary to scaffold their thinking process, because what was missing among them was a sense of self-awareness about the things they knew. In reality, they approached school as if it was the place to get knowledge, so why would I expect them to have knowledge entering a place in which they were supposed to gain knowledge. They could not fathom that it was possible for them to derive any valuable knowledge from their homes or immigrant communities.

As I examined students’ agentic sense in terms of the transformative activist stance (Vianna & Stetsenko, 2011), and their related identities could be understood as “developing.” Seeing identity-as-agentic here would mean that identity is understood as developing on a
spectrum and that there would be no defining moment of agency achievement. For example, as individuals, the students positioned themselves in unique ways in relation to agency, especially when it came to answering the questions: *where do you feel that you make a difference?* And *where do you feel that you matter?* These questions were geared at addressing students’ perceptions of agency from an activist stance. These students maintained an aspirational stance in regards to agency, rather than an activist stance—meaning that in terms of agency, they positioned themselves as “aspirants,” or not yet having achieved identities to which they aspire. In constructing this kind of identity, students crafted a self-depiction in which they position themselves as earnestly desirous of being/becoming a particular kind of person, and may be pursuing that identity, but may not have much idea as to how to get there.

**Agency as Students’ Creating Aspirational Identities-in-Learning and Persisting by Using Them**

In getting to know these students, it was clear that they were *persisters*—meaning that they embraced college with a sense of striving, they were future-driven and career-focused. Moreover, they showed a sense of passion and purpose towards learning, despite facing several difficulties related to their everyday lives. In order to create their identities of persisting, they constructed two distinguishable types of narrative: narratives of persistence and counter-narratives of difficulties. However, these narratives worked hand-in-hand to support students’ notions of immigrant striving. The students described persistence in several ways. For example, being hard working, believing in oneself, overcoming, never giving up, being perseverant, having direction and working to achieve goals, doing what you have to do and studying hard. Counter to this narrative of persistence is also the notion that immigrant life is difficult, that the
deck is stacked and that chances are slim. This counter-narrative worked not as a means to 
stymie their aspirations, but instead it motivated them.

Here, Fanny views her education as an investment in her future and talks about how 
money affects immigrant students’ decisions to attend college. In her mind, money should not be 
a deterrent in obtaining her education.

I mean, money shouldn’t come in… in my perspective money shouldn’t be the reason 
why you’re not in school. Because if you say that you’re gonna go to school so you could 
obtain this degree that you want and you know that you’re gonna work. You should take 
that loan out and pay back for it, because you know you’re gonna be making more money 
and it’s just like a little stipend every month that you’re gonna pay back. It’s like a bill, 
it’s a bill to your future. So if you gonna be oh I don’t want to go to school because I 
don’t get financial aid…

This statement may be seen as an exaggeration possibly because Fanny seems willing to 
put herself in debt to get an education. The reality is that many immigrant students do, especially 
if they are not eligible for student aid. However, Fanny’s statement draws a connection between 
persisting and attaining one’s goals. To her, having an education is worth the cost no matter 
what. This way of thinking fits in well with the narrative of the “hardworking” immigrant, with 
respect to never giving up, working towards one’s goals and sacrifice, where the narrative and 
the counternarrative work hand in hand.

Narratives of persistence positioned immigrants (and immigrant striving) in a positive 
light. By viewing themselves as persisters they created and appropriated counter-narratives that 
allowed them to distance themselves from narratives that viewed them as culturally deficient, 
academically disadvantaged and lacking in terms of academic potential and knowledge. As such,
they as a group worked to espouse these negative stereotypes on the one hand, but simultaneously posited positive view of themselves as immigrants by creating narratives of persistence, perseverance and future goals, careers and success. Often they did so by creating career goals that were about contributing to their families. Students discussed goals at several points during our discussions about the “purpose of learning” but more specifically during our individual interviews.

For example, Danielle sees herself as:

…a hardworking person, a believer like you believe, like… how you call it…. You believe in yourself thinking that you will do it, no matter how like... Let’s say that there’s something (...) that you can overcome and become what you wanna become.

The significance of persisting as “not giving up” is also addressed by Jada during our one-on-one interview. Jada presents the two images below (“Jamaican Food” and “Flower 2”) as part of her 10 “most representative” images. She references these images as she discusses the kinds of knowledge that exists in her family. She also uses these images to talk about how persistence works in her family.
Jada (personal communication, December 3, 2014) stated that food ties her family together through the recipes that are passed on from one generation to the next.

Figure 42: Jada’s Flower 2 image
Jada (personal communication, December 16, 2014) used this image to discuss her family values related to being persistent.
In the statement below, Jada describes the notion of persisting, which she explains is about “not giving up”:

[Breathing out heavily] It plays out like as I said, you have to… keep at it and don’t give up because there are plenty of times where you’re sitting in class and you’re just wondering like oh my God is… is this really worth it? Is this really worth the headache and the constant sleepless nights, is it worth shit? Is it just worth anything? But then you also just have to remember like this is something you have to keep going at. It’s not necessarily instantaneous results. The work that you put in now it will give you the results that you want later on in the future, in the near future or the distant future. So, by the food and the flowers [her chosen images] and then the knowledge that my grandparents and my mother and father have given me it just shows you like the underlying tone of it all is that no matter how hard it is to just don’t give up what you’re doing.

Here, Jada struggles with the idea that reward of getting a higher education may not outweigh the costs. Yet to counteract this fear, she draws on her family’s teachings, in particular the metaphor of planting flowers, which helps to reinforce her sustained effort, and remind her that there is an endpoint. She uses the food image to remind her that she is doing this for her family, to be able to pass things on to them, to leave a legacy, which is something that they have done for her.

Creating counter-narratives. The narratives created by the students about immigrants and immigrant culture sought to express much skepticism about larger narratives that claim some authority in knowing their experience, and by extension knowing themselves as immigrants. Using counter-narratives allowed them to construct and re-construct ideas about immigrants that
went against existing negative stereotypes about immigrants and at times racialized storylines. In a broad sense, counter-narratives are stories that present opposing views of “widely accepted truths about people, cultures, and institutions as well as the value of those institutions and the knowledge produced by and within those cultural institutions” (Matua, 2008, p. 132).

As is evidenced in Tony’s statement below, he creates an opposing explanation of why immigrants come to America. In this statement he attempts to counteract stereotypical belief that immigrants (in particular Mexican immigrants) come from impoverished households and economies. Here, he states that his home life in Mexico was quite comfortable and that he wanted for nothing back home.

No, we don’t run away from nothing, and we were fine. To me we were fine because my father was a teacher and he… we… and he, he went to school, he had his diploma and everything. My Mommy was always… was always of the house because the Mom always takes care of the house. So to me, we were good. Nothing was missing, but my parents… my Dad, because he was a teacher, he wanted me to be bilingual. That’s what he said.

This idea of homeland nostalgia was something that permeated the early conversations in the group, and here it gets incorporated into Tony’s counter-narrative against negative immigrant stereotypes. It allowed them to draw sharp contrasts between their lives in America and their lives “back home.” Yet, their stories of “back home” were mainly positive, and they worked in two ways. First, they worked to create an emotional anchor from which they could hold strong, so that in general they felt good about their home countries and their upbringing there. Second, they served as a filter through which the students could view their current everyday experiences.

Danielle presents a different type of counter-narrative, in which she positions herself as a “hardworking” immigrant, who looks for and takes advantage of whatever opportunities she can.
In doing so, she is contrasting her story with her American-born counterparts, having identified them as “time wasters.”

That’s why you’d say that sometimes that most immigrants when they come here and they see this opportunity, they don’t be letting any time to be wasted because some of the immigrant countries you have to struggle in order to go to school. Sometimes even though by struggling and then at the end you can still don’t make it why because you can’t afford it. You can’t be working at the same, working hard at the same time and going to school because at one moment if you don’t pay that tuition, you get kicked out of school and then to go back and too you’re gonna have to start over meaning that things that you might already know you might forget them or due to that money you’re gonna lose the lack of time and it’s not really easy, that’s why as soon as you step out here, you don’t even let any time waste.

In this statement Danielle distances herself from African-Americans through buying into positive immigrant stereotypes. These positive stereotypes help immigrant students like her to persist. They believe that the harder they work, the more they will achieve. She works nights and goes to school during the day, and is trying to let the group know that she is not a “time waster.” She is also saying that if African-Americans want to be successful they need to become hardworking as well. However, in doing so she simultaneously positions immigrants and African-Americans in opposing positions.

**Agency as Activating Cultural Funds of Knowledge in Designing a Class**

Near the end of our project, I felt that the students had displayed much expertise in relaying information about their college-going experience and their immigrant lives. In addition, they had spent much time discussing how they wanted others to get to know more about
immigrants and immigrant life so much so that I wanted to activate this knowledge by engaging them in a task that would put together these two types of knowledge. My hope was to also allow them to reflect on their own experiences while simultaneously projecting themselves into the role of “teachers” or at the very least “class designers.” This activity came about by chance. Since students were open to drawing and mapping, I decided to ask them to think about designing a class for the Psychology of Immigration. Danielle, Tony, Danny, Maria and Jada were present for this, our final meeting, which took place on December 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 2014. For this exercise, I asked them to consider the following ideas when designing their class.

- The kinds of activities they think would be the most useful in teaching others about immigrants.
- The kinds of things they would like to learn from other immigrants
- How they would teach someone who knew nothing about immigrants, immigrant life and culture.

In mapping out their classes, the students did in fact bring their funds of knowledge to bear on this activity in particular ways as they identified several activities, topics, learning tools, language components, group work and services relevant to how they would design their classes, in meaningful ways. Below is a table depicting some of these class design elements. The students’ class design drawings follow this illustrative table.
Table 12. Class Design Elements by Student

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities/Topics</th>
<th>DANIELLE</th>
<th>TONY</th>
<th>MARIA</th>
<th>JADA</th>
<th>DANNY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reciting weekly lessons in either English or French</td>
<td>Bring something that identifies your background</td>
<td>Lessons on healthy foods</td>
<td>Interactive discussions</td>
<td>Administer a survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Outdoor Activities: Learning about farming &amp; produce</td>
<td>Assignments about what immigrants do (besides work)</td>
<td>Cultural Activities: What’s good and bad in your culture?</td>
<td>• Where are you from</td>
<td>Interactive Presentations</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Taking a trip to local shops</td>
<td>Taking pictures of their Neighborhood</td>
<td>• Culture</td>
<td>• Culture</td>
<td>• Customs</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indoor Activities: Learning different languages</td>
<td>Education non-immigrants</td>
<td>• Honoring cultures by interacting with practices from other cultures</td>
<td>• Honoring cultures by interacting with practices from other cultures</td>
<td>• Clothing</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teach about customs &amp; community</td>
<td></td>
<td>Have a cultural day</td>
<td>Have a cultural day</td>
<td>• Instruments (Musical)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Honor immigrant traditions</td>
<td>Honor immigrant traditions</td>
<td>• Food</td>
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<td>• Photos</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Music</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group work &amp; Interaction</td>
<td>Group work (in French/English)</td>
<td>Group work to make students comfortable</td>
<td>Small groups</td>
<td>Putting students in groups at start of class</td>
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<td>Student/teacher interaction</td>
<td>Mixing up up groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning tools</td>
<td>Videos</td>
<td>Translators</td>
<td>Study guides that cater to individual needs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Bilingual syllabus</td>
<td>Dictionaries</td>
<td>Cultural similarities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Dictionaries</td>
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<td>lesson plan</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Student diaries of immigrant life</td>
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<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Bilingual French and English</td>
<td>Identifying particular languages spoken among students</td>
<td>More time spent learning English</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teaching American students foreign languages</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 12. Class Design Elements by Student Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities/Topics</th>
<th>DANIELLE</th>
<th>TONY</th>
<th>MARIA</th>
<th>JADA</th>
<th>DANNY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
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<td>Programs for green card/citizenship</td>
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<td>Information about:</td>
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<td>• Laws</td>
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<td>• colleges</td>
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<td>Jobs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student Class Designs

Figure 43. Danielle’s Class Designs Image 1
Danielle’s classroom seems to be located in either a school or a house—whichever it is, it is clearly “homey.” Of all the designs hers looks most like a drawing. At the center of the image is a person, possibly a student or maybe even Danielle herself. The person stands with a smile and arms outstretched. At the bottom center she has drawn a door; although it is closed it could symbolize that a step must be taken to access learning in this space. She writes words to bring attention to the things she wants done in her class, and they involve being bilingual and having language assistance by means of a dictionary. Also in her class, teaching Americans about immigrants is very important (also it could be why she put this at the door).

*Figure 44. Danielle’s Class Designs Image 2*
In her second part of the class design, Danielle identifies her methods for teaching this class. She prefers exploring both indoor and outdoor cultural activities, including growing fruits and visiting local shops. She also sees learning different languages as important. In her third slide she gets more specific by indicating that her class will be in Psychology. She also incorporates specific academic structure like those she is probably accustomed to as a student, like showing videos and making a syllabus—which for her class is bilingual. She would offer translation services as well. She will use group work and the class will be required to do work in both English and French, including reciting lessons in either language on a bi-weekly basis, this looks like homework.
Maria’s class design focuses on the use of technology and books as shown in her drawings of a computer/translator and a dictionary. She focuses a lot on informing her students about what the class is about. Her class seems inclusive of all languages. She will use activities to examine students’ cultures and languages. She, like Danielle, wants to educate Americans about foreign languages. At the bottom of the page, there is a section that gives the indication that there will be linguistic competitions to help students learn more about the languages being learned in the class. This can be seen in the section called “French vs. America.” Finally, it seems that she wants her students to leave the class feeling like they are a part of a new community.
For his class design, Tony draws on his own classroom experiences to highlight his familiarity with group work, student interaction and show and tell, which are all important elements in his space. Also, he wants his students to bring cultural artifacts to class and use them to tell others about their culture. He thinks this will help non-immigrants to get to know one another and to understand their similar experiences. He wants people to know that immigrants do more than work, she he wants an activity that will let people find these things out. Maybe drawing inspiration for our project, he wants his students to go into their neighborhoods and take pictures. Like Maria and Danielle, he wants other people to know more about immigrants.
Like the other students, Jada also uses social interaction as a major activity in her class design. Also, like Tony, her class design seems to reflect her experiences with formal education and its structure. She too designs her class with a focus on telling others about immigrant customs and knowledge. However, in her class, students will learn in English, this is different from the other class designs where there is some sort of equal language exchange. Also, her class will focus on the honoring of varied cultures and she wants her students to interact with one another’s cultures by having a cultural day. In her class the students will guide each other. She plans on having lesson that relate to immigration law and protection. As well, her class will provide access to the kinds of services that immigrants need like citizenship, especially those about gaining papers. Interesting, her classes will take place both in high school and college.
Figure 49. Danny’s Class Design

Like the other design, Danny draws on his own experiences of being a college student, and he is also drawing on his love of music as well, possibly as a means to find some common ground among his students. He structures his class in such a way that he would gather a lot of information about his students, and he plans on using that information to help the students get to know each other. He plans on doing so by administering a survey to his students. He wants to engage his students in the discussion of broad topics and he would put students together based on their survey scores. He would then “mix it up.” It is unclear what he means by this, but he does
plan on getting his students to do presentations, like he did in our group project. In these presentations students can discuss information about their customs, clothing instruments, food and photos.

**Summary of class designs.** Several ideas were put forth within these class designs that seem primarily related to promoting a better understanding of immigrant cultural funds of knowledge, particularly directed to non-immigrants, and most designs maintained an element of cultural comparisons. Doing so, would be predicated on changing others’ view of immigrants that is, seeing immigrants as holders of valuable knowledge. In terms of pedagogical approaches, these designs identified several student needs, including creating leaning spaces where students are provided with a variety of learning tools and activities, which can help them unearth the taken for granted cultural knowledge within everyday activities. In addition, across the designs, an important component was fostering relationships both within the classroom settings and between the classroom setting and the immigrant community. In depicting course work, several students highlighted the importance of building language skills, but only in terms of fostering multilinguality. It is noteworthy that, with the exception of Jada’s design, these designs do not advocated the inclusion of several languages as part of teaching methods, like English, French and Spanish, and students would have access to tools like dictionaries to assist them. Also of note, some of the class designs focused on including course topics related to current issues affecting immigrants on an everyday basis.

Although these class designs reflected students’ college-going funds of knowledge, they also showed much new information gained through participating in this *third space.* The class designs showcased producing and presenting a variety of cultural artifacts like photographs, telling immigrant stories, group work and presentations of cultural customs.
It should be noted that the students' new found capacity to generate these class designs speaks to the power of the co-constructed third space to afford the students with various opportunities to re-position themselves (see Figure 52) in positive ways in terms of learning, and in particular with respect to “who counts as knowledgeable” and “what counts as knowledge.” As is evidenced within these class designs, they students took up new available learning identities as “class designers,” “teachers,” but also as contributors to the learning process, which stands in opposition to their earlier learning identities as “receivers of knowledge” and “non-knowers.”
CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

The goal of this study was to investigate how a group of ethnic minority immigrant community college students would agentically leverage their cultural funds of knowledge in constructing learning identities, that is, in how they see themselves as “learners.” In doing so, this study sought to document the everyday funds of knowledge this group of students drew upon as they participated in a collaborative photovoice project. Additionally, it aimed to elucidate the pertinent barriers and supports found within students’ figured worlds and intersecting immigrant and academic lives. This project used digital photography, group discussions and in-depth interviews with ethnic minority immigrant students to explore the various aspects of their everyday immigrant lives, the analysis of which was guided by the theoretical framework depicted in Chapter 3. In this chapter, I present my conclusions to this study, which is divided into several themes. This discussion also contains a review of the main findings and connects these findings to previous research literature, followed by a consideration of pedagogical implications and future directions for this research.

What emerged from this study was not a complete view of the lives of these ethnic minority immigrant students. Yet, the stories presented in Chapter 5 represent a compelling understanding of the uniqueness and the complexity of the students’ lives, experiences, and knowledge as they navigate their immigrant and academic figured worlds. What has been captured in this study is a small segment of a much larger picture about the lives of ethnic minority students. However, the ethnic minority immigrant students in this study negotiated the rigors of living at that intersection of multiple figured worlds, while attempting to carve out their unique learning identities. Not surprisingly, the students’ immigrant experience was filled with a host of feelings that often bordered upon unhappiness and stress. However and most remarkably,
the students were perseverant in their commitment to getting an education and establishing a
career, against the background of having a range of intrinsic and extrinsic motives related to
doing so.

At its core, this study was about learning and identity and the role that funds of
knowledge play in the development in these intersecting processes. Although the focus was not
on any particular content area like science learning (Tan & Calabrese-Barton, 2009), or literacy
(Moje et al., 2004), this study did examine what counts as learning to Ethnic minority immigrant
students, what barriers and supports are related to the learning process and how they see
themselves in relation to learning itself. Learning can be viewed as an extremely complex
activity that involves a multitude of contextualized, intersecting social and psychological factors
and influences. It is also important to acknowledge the many different funds of knowledge (Moll
et al., 1993) related to the contexts of the home, the community, the school environment and
other systems and networks of relationships that permeate everyday immigrant life and shape the
students’ learning identities, including their perceptions of learning and its purpose, their
perceived possibilities for agency in relation to learning and their perceptions of the value of
their funds of knowledge vis-à-vis learning itself and, in particular as these student traverse
learning contexts.

Revisiting the Research Questions

This study was designed to learn more about students’ everyday practices, skills and
bodies of knowledge, the types of barriers and supports present in their immigrant lives, and how
they would use their cultural knowledges in agentic ways to construct learning identities. These
concepts were explored by using a qualitative approach and through Photovoice techniques. Via
a series of student-generated images, group discussions, individual interviews, journal entries
and field notes, this study attempted to unveil and interpret the funds of knowledge held in these immigrant students’ homes, school and communities, and examined how learning took place within these spaces. In addition, this study also documented what everyday life was like for them. Using a sociocultural approach, and the frameworks of funds of knowledge, learning identities, figured worlds and agency, three research questions were addressed:

1. How do ethnic minority immigrant college students make sense of academic learning and the pursuit of higher education as they participate in a collaborative student group?
2. What experiences do ethnic minority immigrant college students perceive as barriers to and supports of their learning, engagement and achievement?
3. What kinds of funds of knowledge in relation to academic learning are present and utilized by ethnic minority immigrant college students?

These questions were guided by one main research question related to how ethnic minority immigrant college students agentically recognize and activate their funds of knowledge as they position themselves towards learning in college, in constructing their learning identities. The most interesting and unforeseen outcome of this group project came from our mutual construction of third space.

Creating a “Bridge” Across Figured Worlds by Building Third Space: The Group Setting

This dissertation work began by questioning how educators could find better ways to serve the educational needs of an ever-growing and diverse immigrant student population, particularly those students at the college level. This problem is reflective of the ongoing national conversation about education reform in America; in particular, it speaks to the major concern of bridging the achievement gap between immigrant students and their native-born counterparts. The project further conceptualizes this disconnect as situated within a larger educational
narrative within which, students from ethnic minority immigrant backgrounds come from disadvantaged backgrounds and immigrant households deficient of useful academic knowledge. Consequently, learning then becomes a process of remediation, resulting in learning spaces where ethnic minority immigrant students’ cultural funds knowledge often go unrecognized and untapped.

The current project enters into this conversation by proposing that closing this gap requires a shift in thinking towards recognizing and legitimizing ethnic minority immigrants students’ cultural ways of knowing. However, this study examines this issue from the student’s perspective; it considers that students enter into learning spaces carrying with them similar, limiting perceptions about their learning abilities and potentials, causing them to take up non-knowledgeable learning identities. Such a negative disposition towards learning is compounded by the existing marginalizing stereotypes about ethnic minority immigrants and is further perpetuated when students continue to see themselves as receivers of knowledge, instead of contributors to the learning process.

Taking an asset-based stance towards learning informed by the conceptual literatures of funds of knowledge, learning identities and figured worlds, this dissertation work sees education as transformative and grounded in creating third space opportunities for learning. As such, the most interesting phenomenon to come out of this project was the co-construction of third space25, and its important function was in allowing students to reconceptualize themselves as learners—through collective validation and self-recognition as holders of valuable funds of knowledge. Gutierrez and colleagues (2008) define third space as:

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25 See Figure 50
A particular social environment of development in which students begin to reconceive who they are and what they might be able to accomplish academically and beyond... a place where people feel a sense of shared humanity, a profound obligation to others, a place where difference is celebrated without being romanticized about or questioned (Gutierrez, 2008, p. 148).

Our co-constructed third space occupied a liminal place between the figured worlds of immigrant life, academic life and home life, and embodied collective practices (see Figures 50 & 51) that actively drew upon students’ funds knowledge (across these settings), and created zones of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) by capitalizing on the knowledge that students brought with them into the space and therefore expanded learning. The creation of third space within this group helps to see that learning spaces do not simply happen; instead, they have to be made.
Figure 50. Model of Students’ Figured Worlds in the Ethnic Minority Immigrant Project

Understanding how third space emerged requires seeing it as existing amidst the backdrop of students’ figured worlds. Again, figured worlds (Holland et al., 1998) are “as if” contexts within which people live, exist and participate. In these figured worlds we have ways of acting (and roles) that are valuable to others within particular settings. As such, as we participate within figured worlds, be that of school, home or community, we take up particular identities relevant to that setting. Although figured worlds contain elements of the imagined, they are real and everyday spaces, and as a result, they contain rules and constraints indicating how we should act within them. Yet, what this study has shown is that although people inhabit various figured worlds, they may not be afforded the opportunity to shift their understandings of themselves.
within these spaces. The co-construction of third space merges people’s varied figured worlds, as in this case of these students, intersecting academic life and home life. It also brings together through contrast and contestation, formalized and non-formalized practices. However, the third space constructed within our group invited the reconceptualization of these seemingly disparate spaces and afforded the re-evaluation of students’ implied either-or ways of thinking that posit narrow ways of knowing. In this way, students questioned, “what counts as knowledge” and “who counts as knowledgeable” within and across their lived worlds.

More important, third spaces are generated when people engage together, for a particular purpose, in and through language, building mutual support, reframing and producing artifacts, and bringing together both everyday and academic knowledge. In terms of learning, third space is used to explore learning as a bridge or scaffold to move students through dynamic zones of proximal development (Pane, 2009); in this way the third space becomes a “bridge” for connecting everyday funds of knowledge with academic knowledge. Through this process, third space becomes a tool for students to challenge, contest and expand upon everyday funds of knowledge and practices that are typically valued in the academic context (Moje et al., 2004).

In this study, the students traversed the figured worlds of immigrant life, academic life and home life, and maintained predominantly fragmented identities as a result. Invariably, they also maintained an uncritical view of their figured worlds. For example, despite inhabiting a figured world where successful immigrant identities and models existed, students maintained a pessimistic view of their educational futures, which were bounded up with means-end career goals. Additionally, students perceived their cultural knowledge as holding little value, which caused them to take up identities as “non-knowers” early on in the group setting. This shows that simply inhabiting figured worlds with models and discourses of ethnic immigrant success may
not be enough to engender shifts in students learning identities. As was evidenced in this study, students did not readily pick up or enact these kinds of learning identities that were “available” to them in their academic figured world. This was an interesting phenomenon especially considering that the students maintained such positive views of their school. Mainly, they saw their school as a “safe space” and a “second home.” One would assume that they would appropriate the identities possible in that space, however this was not the case.

In explaining students’ conceptualizations of “safe space,” the term “holding space” seemed to make much sense, mainly because as a figured world, Hostos embodied a space where students could try things out, especially in terms of career, while simultaneously not having to commit to a particular path or career. It was a place where students could prepare themselves for the next step in their lives, but not necessarily cultivate learning identities. One possible reason for this phenomenon could be that in everyday college classrooms, the focus is on completing curriculum and gaining knowledge that can be applied to a job or career, rather than on identity development. The idea behind this is about filling students’ heads with enough information to take up worker positions, rather than aiming at self-discovery. As such, it is no surprise that students find themselves developing fragmented identities in terms of learning.

As this project highlighted, connecting learning and identity development requires constructing a space within a space that is, a third space—a liminal place, where students can collectively engage in social practices that allow them to carve out, against the backdrop of their figured worlds, their learning identities. In this space, students can create new trajectories for participating in learning, and they can take up new positions in relation to learning, in addition to learning new things. It is a space “in which people negotiate what is known, for example, local cultural knowledge and linguistic registers, [and it] occurs when people attempt to make sense of
[their] identity in relation to prevailing notions of self and cultural practices” (Gutierrez et al., 1999, p. 288). Such a space relies upon providing students with a variety of learning opportunities where they can explore and contribute to learning processes in novel ways.

In terms of funds of knowledge, third space becomes a mutually constitutive space comprised of joint actions for exploring often taken-for-granted cultural knowledge held by students by bridging “official and unofficial spaces of learning contexts” (Gutierrez et al., 1999, p. 287), in this case, connecting the figured worlds of school, home and community. However, this current work distinguishes itself from the original funds of knowledge research conducted by Moll and colleagues by creating opportunities for students’ joint and self-explorations of cultural funds of knowledge by critically examining their figured worlds and the embedded valued and unrecognized cultural knowledges. This was achievable by placing critical consciousness at the center of our group practices, which was engaged in through the photovoice techniques of taking photographs and engaging in group discussions. Through this process, students could problematize their everyday experiences and create narratives of contestation and contradiction and, in turn, becoming aware of, reconceptualizing, valuing and appropriating in new ways their existing funds of knowledge as part of the group process. In doing so, students were able to be agentic in using their funds of knowledge by leveraging them as they participated in group activities.

As was highlighted in this study, third space practices can be mutually constructed if we view ethnic minority immigrant students outside of existing stereotypical and disadvantaged ways. Maintaining a third space way of thinking challenges these limiting notions, and is only possible if the learning space, collaborative relationships and practices can merge and actively draw upon students’ funds of knowledge in ways that challenge these discourses by fostering
critical and reflective thinking. However, as similarly reflected in the funds of knowledge research, the third space literature places the teacher (in this instance the reflective teacher) as the instigator of change, in terms of creating learning opportunities for creating third space. However, this study demonstrates that third space also relies on students becoming active participants and leaders within collaborative practices and the teacher should take up the position of facilitator.

This group setting offered a backdrop of choice, agency, collective story-telling, mutual trust (confianza), valuing of cultural knowledge, reflective thinking, competence, producing shared artifacts, making room for contestation and problematizing everyday experiences. All of these ultimately led them to create shifts in how they saw themselves as learners. More important, practices within the third space offered a springboard for creating new ways of thinking and new forms of agency among the students.
In our third space, agency was exemplified through student-generated class designs for an imagined Psychology of immigration class. It is only through shifting in their self-perceptions as learners and transitioning from “non-knowers,” as people who positioned themselves as receivers of knowledge, to “class designers” — that is, people who could contribute to learning by creating a class for other immigrant students, and others interested in knowing more about immigrant life — was it possible for these students to produce these cultural artifacts. Such a shift was only possible within our mutually constructed third space. By engaging in the reflexive processes of third space (see Figure 51), the students were now active agents in their own
learning. Through these class designs, the students demonstrated a deeper understanding of the learning process as well as a new appreciation for their cultural ways of knowing.

Agency (individual and relational) as the realized capacity of people to act purposely upon their world, and in relation to others, was evident in the following ways. The development of these forms of agency worked through the group process of validation and recognition, as a transactional process, whereby the group processes “worked back” on individuals, causing shifts in how they enacted agency within the group. Relational agency developed through collective acts and particularly through story-telling and, involved collective reflection, validation of funds of knowledge, mutual trust (confianza) and the development of deeper critical understandings of everyday immigrant lives.

These processes resulted in the sharing and valuing of cultural knowledge, the transformation of cultural artifacts and narratives, and the contestation of existing stereotypical immigrant perceptions. Individual agency developed through active internalization of collectively recognized and validated funds of knowledge once directed towards others, but which became used for the individual self (Holland et al., 1998). Though this reflexive action, students began to take ownership of their funds of knowledge and displayed growing competence in group practices.

This study focused on elucidating the funds of knowledge that students brought into and generated within a collaborative group project and how students used these funds to leverage their learning identities. The group project succeeded in presenting the students with a learning space that was outside of a specialized area of study, and draw upon their perceptions of learning itself, rather than a particular content area. Yet, it afforded them with the opportunity to foster a dialogic and collective space where they could re-conceptualize what counts as knowledge (or
knowing), and by extension, who counts as a learner. Therefore, forming a “bridge” across their figured worlds and creating a space where they were empowered as legitimate experts (in the group), and had access to valuable resources while expanding their roles within the group practices. This gave the students novel opportunities to negotiate their group participation and created shifts in their learning identities. This was accomplished by taking an anti-deficit stance towards the students and their cultural backgrounds, and through the emergent processes of recognizing and validating their funds of knowledge via critical reflections on a variety of artifacts such as images, captions, identity maps and class designs that counted as legitimate forms of knowledge. Agency was fostered through strengthening collective critical consciousness, which was achieved using a series of group discussions, and creating collective immigrant stories. The outcome of this was students’ increasing contribution to group practices and greater appropriation of control within the group.

Several scholars have highlighted the importance of building collective third spaces by incorporating students’ every day and academic figured worlds. Gutierrez (2008) defines these spaces as “particular social environment[s] of development [where] students can begin to reconceive who they are and what they might be able to accomplish academically and beyond” (p. 148). She also posits that the collective third space “captures both vertical and horizontal forms of expertise; this includes not only what students learn in formal learning environments such as schools, but also what they learn by participating in a range of practices outside of school” (p. 149). This perspective highlights third space as a bridge between community and home-based cultural knowledge to school-based knowledge. Within “bridge” perspective, the third space is a hybrid space that becomes a scaffold used for moving students “through zones of proximal development toward better honed academic or school knowledges,” (Pane, 2009, p. 2)
rather than a space in which new types of knowledges are generated. This perspective fits well with the funds of knowledge concept of validation, whereby teachers come to validate immigrant students’ cultural knowledge by engaging students in practices that tap into these varied sources of information (Moll et al., 1992).

For example, Tan and Calabrese-Barton (2009) examined the building of a collective third space in a middle school science classroom, where students were empowered as legitimate experts in the community with valuable resources (p. 39). Similarly, the group project in the present study presented a learning environment that was “radically different” (Tan & Calabrese-Barton, 2009, p. 39) from a typical class. The roles of the students and the researcher were switched; the students became experts as the researcher relinquished her position of expertise in the group. Consequently, the students began to take up these expert positions by collectively producing artifacts and knowledge through Photovoice. Doing so allowed them to participate in learning practices that were inherently grounded in the diverse communities and knowledge that are relevant to their lives, affording them the opportunity to examine their lives and learning across multiple settings, including across and within the institutions and communities they inhabit. Gutierrez (2008) believes there is much overlap across boundaries, tools and practices, because people travel across many contexts that are contradictory and different, therefore requiring that learning and development be understood as occurring as these “different communities meet, collide, and merge” (Gutierrez, 2008, p. 150).

Moje et al. (2004) posited that funds in which knowledges are generated are essential elements of the third space and they also contend that these “funds help to make visible the social construction of knowledges and Discourses.” (p. 41). They argue that if the social nature of all funds—be they school, community, work, or familial are not recognized, then “the
knowledges and Discourses generated in each seem to take on a life of their own, as if they are somehow natural constructions that exist outside the human interaction and relationships” (p. 41). More relevant to this work is their assertion that the active integration of multiple funds of knowledge (and Discourse) is important to supporting youth in learning how to navigate the practices necessary for survival and thriving in learning contexts. I would like to argue that those contexts include terrains that are beyond the boundaries of the school environment and include the problematic contexts of everyday immigrant life.

The current study also focused on elucidating the funds of knowledge that were available to these ethnic minority immigrant students rather than on the instructional practices of the classroom. Although as an educator I have an understanding of academic learning spaces, I entered the study with the main goal of documenting the diverse funds of knowledge, particularly the hidden and often taken-for-granted funds of knowledge that are embedded within immigrant communities, and which shaped students’ interactions within learning practices. To that end, creating a collaborative shared space where these funds of knowledge could emerge and be reflected upon by the students themselves was a main priority of this study. As outlined in the theoretical framework section of this dissertation (Chapter 3), this work proceeds from the assumption that we must study every day and community funds of knowledge to understand how ethnic minority immigrant students construct their identities vis-à-vis learning, and how they could become agents in their own learning.

**Recognition and Validation as Key Elements of Generating Third Space Built Upon Valued Funds of Knowledge**

A surprising finding of this study was the central role that validation played in allowing the students to recognize themselves as legitimate holders of knowledge. In this study, validation
was viewed as being recognized by the group as holding value, and was evidenced within the groups’ use of and collective re-evaluation of story-telling for the purposes of building mutual trust, competence and demonstrating of funds of knowledge. In addition, recognition was regarded as the individual student’s recognizing (self-awareness) oneself as a holder of valuable funds of knowledge. Within the third space, recognition and validation worked in a transactional relationship in which personal stories became taken up as group stories. These stories were then reframed within the group as students became more willing and competent in sharing them (mutual affirmation of value) so that they began to take on new meanings. Finally, these re-framed stories were re-appropriated by students as personal stories.

Although hesitant at first, like the students in Moje et al.’s (2004) study, but in being supported with positive regard, and using their cultural knowledge in discussions, photo-taking, and writing, the students became eager to demonstrate what they knew and what they were experts at. The process was authentic, student-driven, and moreover, inquiry-based, whereby students brought their familial, immigrant, community and cultural histories to bear on these group activities, and in turn made them applicable in novel ways to their own lives.

This collective process was further enhanced by the creation of third space. Moreover, students developed a stronger sense of self-awareness (recognition) about their cultural knowledge, and began to leverage these unique and varied types of knowledge in new ways within the group. Using this newfound self-awareness, students began to seek out recognition from others in the group, often by demonstrating competence in relevant knowledge and by performing practices valued by the group. Additionally, validation was a central element in creating third space in several ways throughout this study. It provided opportunities for students to see themselves as capable learners by engaging them in novel photovoice activities. It also
gave the students the chance to validate each other by fostering friendships, and a comfortable environment for students to express themselves. Additionally, students allowed each other and themselves to be recognized as knowledgeable persons via showing mutual respect and by affirming each other’s cultural ways of knowing.

The notion of recognition is also informed by Gee’s theory of identity (2000). He defined identity as “the ‘kind of person’ that one is seeking to be and enact in the here and now” (1999, p. 13). He adds, however, that one cannot claim an identity all by oneself that is, being someone requires “the participation of others” (Carlone & Johnson, 2006, p. 1190). Thus being seen as a “certain kind of person” requires that “one makes visible to (performs for) others one’s competence in relevant practices, and in response, others recognize one’s performance as credible” (Carlone & Johnson, 2006, p. 1190). However, the criteria for credibility is ever-changing, meaning that being recognized as a “learner” is dependent on the context within which learning takes place. This construct is what I refer to here as validation (as being a certain kind of person who is recognized by social others). Gee’s definition of recognition sees identity as self-reflexive, in that as one is recognized by social others, so too does one recognizes him or herself as a “certain kind of person.” However, it is possible for one to recognize himself or herself as a particular kind of learner, yet not have a deep understanding of the learning content, which results in students not being recognized as such. The reverse is possible, that is, someone may not recognize himself or herself as a certain kind of learner, but they may be competent in his or her understanding of the relevant learning content. For example, Tonso (1999) in an ethnographic study of elite U.S. engineering program presented the cases of four engineering students who were very competent and excellent performers of engineering practices, but who were rarely recognized as legitimate engineers by their faculty and their potential employers.
Additionally, a theory of validation is also posited by Laura Rendon, and refers to validation as the “intentional, proactive affirmation of by social agents that sees students as creators of knowledge and as valued members of the learning community. Thereby fostering personal development and social adjustment” (Linares & Munoz, 2011, p. 12).

**Building Collective Third Space Within and Across Figured Worlds to Position Students as “Knowers”**

An important pattern noted in the findings was that the group setting allowed for the drawing upon practices that traversed a range of figured worlds, evidenced by a multitude of demonstrable kinds of knowledge and competencies. Within this space, the students could take up a range of positions other than that of traditional students (or the binary of “good” versus “bad” student). They could be knowledgeable people in several ways as immigrants, storytellers, photographers, writers, artists, Facebook portfolio makers, investigators, presenters, career-driven and class-designers among others - thus, providing the students with a wide repertoire of learning identities. By embracing what students brought into the group as legitimate ways of knowing, they were afforded a range of entry points into project activities. As such, access to new social network was not bartered for solely by being a student in a traditional way, that is “being smart” or a “good student,” but instead students built relational expertise with each other by engaging with the project activities.

For example, in the beginning of the project, I had to ask students to discuss their pictures and I guided our conversations by asking a multitude of probing questions. However, by the middle of the project the students volunteered to lead the conversations and were eager to go to the front of the group to present their pictures. Additionally, some students like Maria and Danny chose to bring in artifacts from the neighborhoods during our community phototopic. They both
brought in local newspapers to show the group that these newspapers represented a way to get information about the immigrant community, including events and jobs. As the study progressed, the students began to show more expertise in this informal space and fostered relationships with each other and myself, which translated into them becoming better positioned to participate in more central ways in this group setting.

Also, recognizing students’ figured worlds allowed them to have more possibilities to leverage and validate their funds of knowledge within the group, which opened up novel ways for them to participate in the space by broadening their purview of who can be engaged in learning. For example, in Chapter 5, I present an observation of Danielle and Linda’s use of storytelling as a way to make sense of the pictures during one of our pile-sorts. By relinquishing my role as an expert, the students were afforded the opportunity to draw upon this fund of knowledge and use it to organize their pictures. By bringing this knowledge into the group, they realized that it was useful and then, when they explained to the group how they went about making sense of the images, the group validated their technique by using several confianza statements as discussed in Chapter 5. This seemingly simple act facilitated students’ assertion of themselves in novel ways by activating their cultural resources. In terms of figured worlds, their demonstrated competence in storytelling as a method of grouping, assisted in creating shifts in their participation within group activities, thus allowing them to reposition themselves, as experts.

**Learning, Third Space and Shifts in Identity**

The affordances of the group setting contributed to agency in learning and the development of relational identities in the following ways. First, the students were able to tell their immigrant stories by drawing on their transnational memories of place and culture, they
were able to construct a collective sense of agency by perceiving themselves as efficacious, and over time they began to share their beliefs about immigrant life. This act of storytelling worked to bond them together, but it also worked to create a sense of equity within the group, and drawing a shared sense of history and purpose, despite them coming from different origin countries. In terms of relational identity, students began to identify with each other because there was a sense of acceptance in the group, and they began to value each other as having valuable knowledge. In addition, as the study progressed, the students negotiated more meaningful personal interactions and supports with each other—they became friends. Their interactions with others in the space was supportive and equitable and therefore, making this a space where they could all position themselves as knowledgeable. According to Stetsenko (2005), in joint actions, participants bring to bear their different subjectivities and sets of conceptual tools on the problem at hand and therefore expand upon its interpretation, thus creating a deeper understanding of the problem, which then works back on the mindsets of the participants. This may in turn be enriched by the interpretations of others or may unfortunately remain constrained.

The students shifted away from looking to me for all the answers (that is, as being the holder of knowledge) to becoming people who recognized and leveraged their own knowledge in the learning interaction within this space. The multiple learning interactions with each other solidified their sense of connection to one another and allowed them to reflect on and challenge their assumptions about immigrant life and academic knowledge (or what is valuable knowledge on the whole) in ways that allowed them to experience ontological shifts in their identities and roles as learners (and knowledgeable people; cf. Kasworm, 2010). Simply put, as the students continued to interact with each other in positive ways, their perceptions about what they knew began to take on a different value and, at the same time, they became more interested in applying
these skills in novel ways. This shift afforded (by the end of the project especially) a space for more pedagogical imaginaries to emerge where the students could “try out new ways of knowing, being and becoming” (Gutierrez & Barton, 2015, p. 205) as learners in higher education. There was a clear sense of them being open to learning, by recognizing that learning could take varied forms, and that as learners they had agency in their own learning.

Bandura (2000) states that perceived efficacy plays a key role in human functioning. He posits that unless people believe that they can produce desired effects and forestall undesired ones by their actions, they have little or no incentive to act. This sentiment is applicable to the sense of efficacy demonstrated by the students at the start of this project, when they maintained a sense of pessimism about learning and thought that school was the only place of learning, unlike a basketball court, or an immigrant grocery store or at a job. Yet they were driven to do well, that is, to pass the class rather than learn, which was coupled with a failure to recognize themselves as holders of valuable information. That is, they maintained a relationship towards learning that was driven by the goal of passing classes, rather than learning itself. In fact, they felt that they had little to contribute to the learning community because teachers were the holders of valuable knowledge.

**Emergent Funds of Knowledge**

*Third space* is a learning space created by its different members contributing their diverse expertise and where learning takes place through exchange and cooperation (Civil, 1994). Again, this study expands on the concept and the use of funds of knowledge by incorporating the notion of third space which, by connecting to figured worlds, promotes this perspective by building on the notion of validation and agency.
In the funds of knowledge literature, little is understood about these constructs beyond the K-12 level. Additionally, even less is understood about the relationship between funds of knowledge, agency and learning identities. This study represents one of the first attempts to apply a funds of knowledge perspective 1) in learning setting outside of a K-12 classroom (community college) and 2) across learning settings (school, home and community). Not only does this study provide practical applications of the framework to college level learning, it also provides an opportunity to expand the theory and literature beyond its current capacity. In this study, I presented examples of the different types of funds of knowledge present within ethnic minority immigrant households, thus expanding upon the ways in which funds of knowledge were previously documented in homes. Researchers can begin to understand how a funds of knowledge perspective may work within third spaces and as a means of connecting learners’ figured worlds.

To summarize, this study goes beyond the traditional funds of knowledge theory in four ways. First, it goes beyond the K-12 educational setting. Second, it moves beyond examining one immigrant group by including a variety of immigrants in our group project. Third, it sheds light on the connection between funds of knowledge and agency. Fourth, it elucidates how funds of knowledge can be leveraged within the co-construction of a third space, by shifting power relations, generating group validation, respect and promoting individual recognition and appropriation and competent performance of Funds of knowledges.

After coding within each of the varied categories, the data was analyzed across categories for patterns in the nature and use of the emergent funds of knowledge. Funds of knowledge were examined, in particular, for ways that students leveraged them within the group setting and how they appeared to traversed figured worlds. There were patterns in (a) the ways in which these
young people used multiple everyday funds of knowledge and (b) students’ own lack of recognition regarding their funds of knowledge.

**The Use of Multiple Funds of Knowledge**

Becoming a college student often involves a process of enculturation which, simply put, is appropriating the values, norms and practices found within the school context (Aikenhead, 1996). Often this process also involves adapting to a culture that narrowly defines valid knowledge and experience. However, enculturation is more complex, so that when the student is an ethnic minority immigrant, this process is further complicated because their border crossing into higher education becomes transnational in nature. Therefore, becoming a college student can involve the need to adopt narrowly defined and imposed ways of being and knowing. When the students entered into the group in this study, they privileged school as the place where valuable knowledge existed and they felt that to be educated they had to go to school, unlike to a basketball court, a neighborhood market or a cultural parade or in some cases—home.

However, an interesting finding supported a main theoretical assumption of this study, which was that immigrant households do hold useful knowledge. Indeed, the students in this study were already drawing upon several types of funds of knowledge in the everyday lives, within and outside of the school environment. Perhaps the most important fund of knowledge tapped into by the students was that of storytelling. Each student in this study spent much time sharing their lives and journeys as members of our group. In a critique of the school curriculum, Gilbert and Calvert (2003) suggest that rather than focusing on just the content of learning, it is the responsibility of educators to open up spaces that allow students to engage with the construction of knowledge—to explore what counts as knowledge (in academic spaces). The
data presented in this study makes a case for viewing the construction of knowledge as occurring across learning spaces.

The students in this project also displayed a very unique New York knowledge base, which they drew upon as they navigated this complicated terrain. For example, they used social networks to get jobs, translated for others at their jobs, knew how to navigate New York City and its environs, and they held much information about their surroundings, in particular about who lives where in the city and how to access information in their communities, among other things. During one of our early sessions, Danny coined this kind of everyday knowledge as “adaptive knowledge.” In reality, their varied knowledge base did allow them to adapt and survive in the context of their everyday life. Their families, communities, peers, workplace and social networks all represented sources of knowledge about and ways of knowing their unique figured worlds. Many of their funds of knowledge have direct connections to learning, in a non-academic sense, as Jada stated when she expressed that she was a “traveller,” “New Yorka,” and “so Brooklyn” in her identity map and in her depictions of knowing how to get around New York, by mediating her immigrant identity with this “adaptive knowledge,” while seeing herself as having expertise in these everyday things.

The students demonstrated that their funds of knowledge were not only adaptive but that they were also transnational. They discussed several types of knowledge that they brought with them from their home cultures, or which they learned in their families. This included knowledge of art, music, the family business, health and healthy living, cooking and foods, agriculture/planting/farming, dance and cultural history/politics. The students also displayed much expertise related to being college students. For example, they demonstrated how they used their language skills to translate for other students (they also spoke about this in terms of work)
and speaking, reading and being multilingual, their college-going knowledge with respect to
taking class, grading, being organized, public speaking and their use of technology and social
media.

These findings show that the students did, in fact, bring these funds of knowledge to bear
within the group setting through their images, writings, drawings and group discussions. In
addition, they used these varied funds of knowledge to carve out unique dispositions towards
learning itself and they did so in strategic ways. As illustrated by Danielle’s discussion of
agriculture and farming, she described that this knowledge came into play during her Public
Speaking class where she applied many concepts that she knew in a practical sense to an
academic research paper. In this way, her family knowledge appeared to mediate her
understanding of organic and conventional meat production, potentially merging both worlds, if
only for this activity.

Within our group, the students brought many funds of knowledge to bear on our activities
that purposefully shed light on the often hidden knowledge found within immigrant household.
By taking pictures, and sharing and discussing them, they became creators of third space that
potentially linked their everyday and academic practices and therefore, suggesting that the
distance between everyday funds of knowledge and academic funds of knowledge is not vast or
immutable (cf. Moje et al., 2004). Moje et al. (2004) suggest that the distance is an
epistemological one–and relies primarily on identifying “what counts as knowledge to be
organized, predicted, tested, expressed, or explained, and what counts as warrant for validating
claims and expressions” (p. 66).

Funds of knowledge researchers have often questioned why students are unwilling to
bring everyday funds of knowledges to bear on academic learning (Moje et al., 2004). From this
study, it was evident that these students were no different. At the beginning of this study, the students spent much time discussing the degree to which they “didn’t know” things. Their sense of “not knowing” was bound up with their notions of being immigrants and was often depicted in the immigrant stories. Therefore, during the early sessions it was difficult for them to position themselves as “knowledgeable people.” They were strategic in how they used their cultural knowledge to navigate their varied figured worlds, but they were unable to see their immigrant cultural knowledge as valuable. They maintained a compartmentalized view of their knowledge base, because they saw their figured worlds as disconnected.

Moje et al. (2004) explains that this could be because students subscribe to the notion that a binary exists between academic and everyday contexts. However, the findings of this study show that it may also be because students have not had the opportunity to share and reflect upon their funds of knowledge, neither have they been recognized as holders of valuable knowledge, nor have their use of their cultural knowledge been validated across contexts, affording the students the opportunity the create shifts in their perceptions of whether their knowledge is leverageable. Therefore, it is no surprise that they bought into the idea of an existing binary between their figured worlds, as it stems from their inability to access and engage in opportunities where they can leverage their funds of knowledge across contexts.

At this point, I would like to present an alternative theoretical perspective on why students may not be so keen on displaying their cultural knowledge. The stereotype threat literature (Steele, 1997) asserts that ethnic minorities may perceive learning and learning spaces differently because of existing negative stereotypes about their perceived racialized and ethnic capabilities and that these perceived stereotypes can affect their performance and achievement.
Steele argues that regardless of having positive identifications about school, threats still impact their lives. He defines a stereotype threat as:

The event of a negative stereotype about a group to which one belongs becoming self-relevant, usually as a plausible interpretation for something one is doing, for an experience that one is having, or for a situation one is in that has relevance to one's self-definition...such that one can be judged or treated in terms of a racial stereotype (p. 616).

This pressure that is “in the air” (Steele, 1997) can cause ethnic minority students to feel a sense of “inferiority anxiety” stemming from a “myth of inferiority” (p. 617) that permeates their everyday settings, and thus pervades their perceptions about being judged inferior and is reconfirmed by their own fears of inferiority. The findings of this study suggest that the students (primarily at the beginning of the study) compartmentalized their figured worlds. Jada spoke to this notion when she related about being seen in a stereotypical way by the customers at her job who speak to her in myriad disrespectful ways because, as she perceives, they see her as “just plain old Black American.” She goes on to say

Like I have customers come in, they ask me my name. Like okay I work for Walgreens, right? I don’t necessarily like my job. I don’t like it at all. However, when I meet them. They’re like oh my God, you don’t ever smile and you’re just so like, you speak so well. You should be a manager, what? [laughter] I don’t want to be a manager at Walgreen’s. I’m like don’t you think I have more going for myself and when I tell them what I want, they’re like oh you want be an occupational therapist. Oh who taught you about that? Can you do that? Can you do that?

Jada’s statements of her work life indicate a possible reason for the students’ reluctance to see and recognize their cultural knowledge as valuable because of the stereotype threat. As a
second-generation immigrant, who others see as “Black”, Jada’s grasped that possibilities and capacities are constrained by negative stereotypes of Black people in America. Therefore, the prevailing stereotypes also get appropriated and come into play as she interprets herself or her behavior in an identified-with setting, in this case work and, by extension, everyday life (Steele, 1997). Steele contends that attempting to disprove the stereotype can be daunting, especially if the person tries to do so by over-performing. He states that even if the stereotype can be disproven, the pressure to keep doing so will be never-ending. Jada touches on this feeling when she discusses how pressured she feels to prove that she is not the stereotype. As described in Chapter 5, she even expresses that it gets so “annoying” and that sometimes she just wants to “give up because it’s like who are you proving this to?” Her statements is in line with Steele’s argument that as one clears away the stereotype at one level of performance, it may not be easy to do so at another stage of the domain, and that whatever exemption one gains at a previous level, it still must be re-won at the next proving ground.

In terms of funds of knowledge, it could be that the students in this study feel a sense of futility in maintaining their cultural knowledges (and as a result have negative interactions with learning) because of these constricting and pervasive stereotypes, which may also cultivate a sense of hopelessness among ethnic minority students especially if they do not have access to opportunities that present them with the chance to reconceptualize their cultural and ethnic backgrounds as useful, valuable and legitimate sources of knowledge.

However, in terms of figured worlds, Steele makes a relevant point about how threats may vary across settings, making it possible to reduce these threats by moving to another setting. With respect to this study, this would mean a setting that validates students’ ways of knowing. He gives the example of how “women may reduce their stereotype threat substantially by
moving across the hall from math to English class” (p. 616). In this way, it should be possible for minority immigrant students to avoid particular stereotype threats by shifting contexts. In some way this is evidenced as students cross over from the workplace, where their cultural backgrounds and knowledge are not valued, to the school environment where they are valued. As such, the potential to sidestep stereotype threats resides in providing a space that counteracts these constraints.

At the beginning of this study it was difficult for the students to “put down” their perceived negative stereotypes related to being immigrants and ethnic minorities, which indirectly helped to perpetuate the out-of-school and in school knowledge binary. In particular, Jada and Danny spoke the most about their racialized experiences growing up in New York City. Bandura (2000) argues that in order for people to create counter-scripts against prevailing negative stereotypes, they must see themselves as capable of making these kinds of changes. The school environment at Hostos Community College provided the students with a multitude of instances and models that promote a shift in their perceptions about existing negative stereotypes. To the students, these stereotypes existed outside of school, or what Danny called “the real world”. The school more or less created a holding space for them, where leave behind their limitations. However, this was not possible as evidenced in Jada’s statements above. More importantly, the group setting capitalized on this already existing holding space as we created our third space. Central to this space was the underlying tenet that, within this third space, these students were students with potential.

**Funds of Knowledge**

The continued influx of immigrants into this country—whether documented or undocumented—has resulted in important social and educational challenges. Yet, interestingly,
as the population of students has become diversified, the college settings and practices seem to remain unchanged. Consequently, this presents a type of mismatch between students’ home cultures and the cultures of schools, which can have an adverse effect on student achievement. Finding ways to educate the diverse immigrant student population is a complicated issue that requires multifaceted answers. Several studies (Gonzalez et al., 2005; Gutierrez et al., 1999; Kiyama, 2010; Moll et al., 1992) have shown that immigrant, minority and working class students can succeed in school if the classroom is reorganized in a way that provides them with the same advantages as middle-class students. In other words, when educators recognize, value and activate students’ knowledge, abilities and experiences as resources in their teaching practices, students become more engaged with learning, are better motivated and obtain better results. The problem is that usually, even if students’ funds of knowledge are valued in one context that value is not easily transferrable across context—for example, from home to school to work. As evidenced in the findings, as a result, students tend to devalue their own funds of knowledge and fail to use them across varying contexts, and furthermore position themselves as deficient when entering new learning spaces as a result.

In academic learning settings, ethnic minority immigrant students can experience reductions in various discontinuities between in-school and out-of-school contexts and practices when teachers recognize and accept students’ cultural backgrounds and knowledge. This notion is evident in the Hostos Community College school context. However, it appears that recognition alone may not be enough to close the gap between the levels of mismatch for immigrant students. From the data of this study, it appears that discontinuities can also exist between the community and school; therefore, creating fractured figured worlds for these learners. This discontinuity was also evident via students’ taking up and maintaining perceived negative
racialized stereotypes within the group space, and was further evinced by the creation of subject positions of “not-knowing.”

However, the group space also afforded students with new means by which to reconceptualize their positions towards learning within the group that is, by aligning themselves in different ways in relation towards learning and by bringing their funds of knowledge to bear in novel ways of participating within the group activities. This was accomplished, to some extent, in our group space by establishing new relationships with other students “who were the same.” This led to the development of potentially long term relationships, which can become the basis for further exchange of knowledge on a variety of matters, therefore, reducing the various discontinuities that students from diverse backgrounds can experience between the worlds they know at home and the world of school. Students from immigrant communities can experience much less discontinuity when teachers recognize their cultural heritage and family background.

Identity or “who one sees oneself as” is a socially constructed concept and involves an individual’s positioning in relation to the historical and cultural factors, and also includes how “others see us”. In this way, identity involves leveraging funds of knowledge within the group space and being recognized as a holder of valuable knowledge; creating such an identity means that this shared experience can be seen “in cultural terms and is stimulated and socialized by funds of knowledge” (Saubich & Esteban, 2011, p. 99). Cultural funds of knowledge and identities are mutually constituted. Identities-in-practice embody funds of knowledge and make experience culturally relevant. In this way, identities energize funds of knowledge (Saubich & Esteban, 2011) mobilizing them for use within everyday practices. They organize the form and content of identity phenomena. In other words, the funds of knowledge and identity are the results of the socially distributed funds of knowledge because identity is active, whereby people
accumulate specific funds of knowledge, but reject others. Kiyama (2010) talks about this in terms of capital. However, further research is needed to develop these ideas.

The research strategies used to investigate funds of knowledge and related identities are varied. This study presented quite a few of them, including group discussions, photographs, using technology (Facebook and presentations), journals, and student drawings. The aim was to build an empirical understanding of the lived experiences the students in order to spotlight learning in the everyday lives. From a Vygotskian point of view, education promotes human development and we need to design better cultural settings in order to improve learning outcomes. Integrating immigrant competencies and skills into schools contexts is a way of doing that. The challenge is to put students’ funds of knowledge and identities at the core of learning and teaching.

In summary, the cultural diversity of college populations in the U.S. has rapidly increased along with the issue of how to educate an ever-growing, ever-changing and continually diversifying population of learners. In general, school can be ineffective for a larger number of students because of contexts and practices that do not recognize their cultural legacy or wealth, but instead perpetuate dominant ideologies. In this way, funds of knowledge approach aims to improve education by involving students of all backgrounds. The overall aim is to recognize the cultural resources that students bring into the learning space in order to explore the ways in which these resources can be used to extend their sociocultural repertoires. I suggest that in order to provide students with an education of quality, school must recognize students’ funds of knowledge. I would even extend this appeal to places of work because, as indicated by the findings, the workplace is another place where cultural knowledge were not valued by others but used by students in the everyday work interactions.
The project described in this dissertation puts emphasis on the funds of knowledge that ethnic minority immigrant students have rather than what they lack, with the focus on cultural assets rather than cultural deficits. Additionally, it outlines specific methods through which researchers, educators and students alike can investigate, unearth, recognize, validate and leverage funds of knowledge that can be incorporated into varied learning spaces across a variety of settings to serve as tools of identity construction as capable learners.

**Implications for Learning and Teaching Practices**

This study calls into question how learning spaces should be structured to best allow for closing the educational gap between ethnic minority immigrant college students and their native-born counterparts, primarily by highlighting the need for recognizing, validating and drawing upon ethnic minority immigrant students’ cultural funds of knowledge within these spaces. Reflecting on the major findings of this study, I suggest the following recommendations. These recommendations center upon creating learning contexts that serve as third spaces where (a) ethnic minority immigrant learners are presumed to be holders of valuable cultural knowledge, beliefs, values and resources; (b) learning practices (including activities and discourses) actively recognize and validate learners’ cultural knowledges; (c) ethnic minority immigrant learners are afforded with many opportunities to reconceive themselves as learners through joint and self-reflection in contesting existing practices, knowledge and discourses; (d) “bridges” are created between what students bring into the learning space, expanding knowledge, future possibilities and goals, and learning identities; and (e) agency is fostered.

In this project, I proposed that academic learning spaces should privilege the cultural knowledge that students bring into the learning space. What I mean by this is not to give any special right or advantage to these students based on their cultural backgrounds, but rather, upon
entering the learning space ethnic minority immigrant students should be viewed with respect and in an equitable way and therefore, turning learning into practices of inclusion rather than exclusion. Taken in this way, students are assumed to be experts so that everyone can contribute to the shared activities.

Rather than seeing knowledge as transferrable or easily uprooted and transplanted from one context to the next, as was postulated in traditional funds of knowledge studies (e.g., Civil, 2003), it is instead oriented towards shared practices that students engage in, as they move across everyday settings (Gutierrez, 2013). As such, as students put on and take off contextual identities—as immigrant, students, workers and so on — they simultaneously utilize their cultural toolkits based on their involvement in a variety of cultural communities. Therefore, to cultivate this dynamic repertoire of knowledge and skills, students need to engage in concrete and enduring social networks, relationships—in institutions, community-based and in households that connect their social, academic and personal interests. What could afford this? As was evidenced in this study, students need a support system, including family, peers, faculty and staff, who validate their cultural knowledges and competence. More important, students need to be afforded authentic ways of contributing to shared practices in order to mobilize their skills and knowledge (Gutierrez, 2013). In this way, learning needs to be connected to the everyday lives, interests and goals of students, but this can only happen through practices, settings and relationships that support these students and their ways of knowing as legitimate.

Put in another way, in an academic learning setting, it should be assumed that all students can do something well, even if their skills and knowledges are not directly transferrable into (i.e., mappable unto academic context) or valued within classroom settings. This line of thinking also fits in well with the concept of culturally responsive teaching, proposed by Geneva Gay. She
contends that for student achievement to improve, teachers and educators must use what students can do well as points of reference and motivational devices to evoke students’ interest and involvement in learning and academic activities. In order to do so, teachers must be able “to recognize, honor and incorporate the personal abilities of students into their teaching strategies” (Gay, 2010, p. 1). Taking this approach to teaching students of color, including immigrant students, has the potential to move them beyond being in a position at risk, towards a position of promise.

**Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning**

The findings from this study and the proposed recommendations for learning practices fit well into the existing work on culturally responsive teaching, as proposed by educators Gloria Ladson-Billings and Geneva Gay in their research with African American students. These researchers assert that in order for teaching and learning practices to be meaningful for minority students, they have to be “culturally responsive” (Gay, 2010, p. 26) or “culturally relevant” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 17). Culturally relevant pedagogy is uniquely positioned to engage students intellectually and academically by situating classroom practices in the cultural knowledge and practices of learners. Gay (2010) argues that achievement should be understood as an experience or an accomplishment and that “it does not represent the totality of a student’s personal identity or the essence of his or her human worth” (p. 1).

However, the idea of cultural congruence or responsiveness does not suggest to replicate a home or community environment in the classroom. Research in this field recognizes that the home and school are different settings that maintain different functions in students’ lives. Genzuk (1999) writes that culturally congruent or responsive educational classrooms and practices should include features of the lives of students’ home culture but should not aim to
replicate activities and environments identical to those of the home. It should recognize that the home and school are unique environments with different functions in the students’ lives. Yet, along these lines, students are positioned as important contributors to the process of knowledge building because their culture is seen as valuable and legitimate both within and across multiple figured worlds.

Culturally relevant pedagogy is a useful perspective that supports recognizing the interaction between sociocultural factors and education. The concepts of validation is already embedded within this framework. Educators within this field believe in respecting what students bring to the classroom. However, this framework can also be strengthened by adding what was learned from this project about funds of knowledge, self-recognition, and learning identities. Future research may address how these factors come into play in the designing of specific curriculum for ethnic minority immigrant students, while at the same time keeping in mind the importance of shifting power differentials away from the teacher-centered pedagogy towards an authentic, student-generated one. This does not mean that the teacher plays a minor role in the classroom. Instead, as this study shows, as students see themselves as learners, teachers become more like facilitators of students’ own self-recognition, which can be done by scaffolding students’ reflexive skills, competence and affirming their cultural funds of knowledge. This shift in positions gives students more agency within the learning space to take more control over their learning, thus being able to contribute to the learning process, rather than being passive recipients of information.

**Reflections on the Use of Photovoice**

This dissertation presented the results of implementing a Photovoice project involving ethnic minority immigrant students and examined how they came to utilize their cultural
knowledges within a collaborative context to co-construct learning identities. Drawing on the previous works of Photovoice, cultural funds of knowledge and learning identities, this study modified the Photovoice process. This modified process provided grounds for the collective group (including myself) to listen to and discuss individual, group and community issues; to demonstrate a positive regard for ethnic minority immigrant perspectives; and acknowledge the participants’ knowledge and expertise as valued. These underlying principles afforded the participants the ability to take control and engage in decision-making within the group setting. Creating this open and flexible approach to the research process set the stage for the building of trust among the students, and also between the students and the researcher. The outcome of this sharing of power and trust building (confianza) was a greater sense of validation.

This project had two main goals: to investigate how ethnic minority immigrant community college students agentically leveraged their cultural funds of knowledge as they constructed learning identities in collaboration with others in a group project and to documented their everyday funds of knowledge. The photos taken by the students demonstrated that what they consider to be important were things most people value—family, home, work and friends, among other things. Yet these values were further complicated as the students negotiated their sense of self across varying figured worlds.

Photovoice is a participatory action research tool that is grounded in the literature about critical consciousness (Freire, 1993; Wang & Burris, 1997) and was well suited to explore student engagement as conceptualized in this study. In this study, an underlying premise was that in order for shifts in learning identities to happen, students would need to be afforded the opportunity to recognize for themselves that what they bring to learning spaces has value. The Photovoice method gave students the opportunity to re-make themselves within this shared space
by presenting their photos, engaging in group discussion, reflecting on their lived experiences and generating new ways of valuing their cultural funds of knowledge.

This study highlighted the role of validation and recognition as central processes in the co-construction of third space via affording new means of thinking critically about everyday cultural funds of knowledge. Added to this is the connection between validation and the fostering of self-awareness, through the competent enactment of cultural knowledge by individuals within the group. By becoming investigators into their own everyday lives, the students re-evaluated the usefulness and value of this cultural knowledge and its role in constructing learning identities. This process took place as students shifted from a place where their knowledge is considered to be of limited value, towards one where this knowledge was assigned great value—within a shared space. This dynamics included the process of becoming critically conscious beginning with reflection and the development of awareness (Goodman & West-Olatunji, 2009). The shared dynamics of working as a group resulted in a shift in the value of immigrant-based cultural knowledge from being invalid to being valid. This was only possible because self-stories afforded critical thinking about cultural beliefs, values, goals and purposes as legitimate sources of learning and development. These self-stories quickly became group stories and, as a group, students began to re-evaluate their meanings, which then “worked back” on them as individuals. In turn, they began to re-position themselves within the group in relation to learning—which assisted them in developing burgeoning new identities in relation to learning. In this way, Photovoice became an innovative means through which to facilitate the development of learning identities, competence, self-recognition, and validation.

An additional benefit of using the Photovoice method was the use of in-depth conversations, which involved the students in a critical reflective process whereby conversations
were centered upon things that mattered to the students, as brought forward through photo images and drawings. In this study, my role was mainly to facilitate conditions that enabled the students themselves to value and leverage their funds of knowledge in service of their learning identities development.

This process brought to life issues and narratives that were possibly buried or taken-for granted within everyday immigrant lives and the school context. More important, this group setting gave students a sense of belonging, and thus fostered the confidence to express themselves. Here students became comfortable because, as one student put it, they “felt part of the group because I felt that most of us have the same issues and experiences.” In some way, being part of this group helped the students to foster a sense of collective identity based in shared experiences in school and beyond. The other important element of using the photovoice method was that, by exposing and critically analyzing everyday knowledge, students gradually grew towards seeing them as having value beyond the household. In turn, they began to see themselves as holders of valuable knowledge, by gaining an appreciation for their cultural background and history.

**Future Directions**

As a researcher, I intend to continue to advance the understandings of building learning identities within third spaces, via fostering ethnic minority immigrant students’ funds of knowledge and agency. More important, the data derived from student-generated class designs warrants further investigation, and can be applied to future studies that link pedagogy, higher education, immigration, funds of knowledge and learning identity development. As such, continued research is needed to unpack how third spaces work to elicit funds of knowledge and shift students’ learning identities from passive to active positions. In addition, the data generated
in this study provides viable possibilities for generating concrete educational learning opportunities and methods for ethnic minority college students at the community college. Furthermore, further examinations of how best to critically examine funds of knowledge are also necessary.

More specifically, outlined below is the next step of this research project. I will use the student-generated data to create a class design for a Psychology of Immigration class at Hostos Community College. In doing so, this project will draw upon the identified processes and practices to generate pedagogical approaches for teaching this class. More specifically, I intend to continue working with the students in the current study to build upon their class designs and to construct learning modules based on their constructive input, the goal of which is to create a truly student-generated class design, which has the potential to transform student learning practices by placing their learning interests at the core of the learning design.
The findings from this study supported the idea that if students are provided with a supportive environment that validates the varied and unique knowledge they bring with them into the learning space, they could become agents in their own learning. One way to follow up on this research would be to incorporate the method of third space via Photovoice methods into everyday classroom practices. By carrying out the current study, I had the opportunity to explore with these students what it would be like to design a class. Surprisingly, they took to it with much enthusiasm. I would assume that other students might be as interested. Too often students come to school seeking knowledge, but they fail to realize that they bring much to the learning space. Placing students at the center of learning should also involve them as expert contributors to coursework, and as the class designs showed (Chapter 5), they are more than capable of
generating much useful information, activities and ideas. The study outlined as the next step, seeks to involve the current students of this research project in designing a class design, including syllabus and class activities, derived from the information generated in this current project (as outlined in Figure 52 above).

The literature on student-generated classroom designs is limited to student-generated questions, student generated wikis and webpages, and student generated text like comic books (see Gallagher, Sher, Stepien, & Workman, 1995; Yu, 2009). Yet, the education literature supports that teachers still hold the position of experts. In continuing this research project and using the class designs generated in this study as a springboard, I would like to work collaboratively with this group of students to create a course that is really student-generated, and which bridges that gap between home and school knowledge and more important, between figured worlds, as this warrants further investigation based on the limited data available so far.
CODA: STUDENT UPDATE PARAGRAPHS

After writing the Biosketches for the students, I met with each one of them individually to get their thoughts on the piece, and to get some general feedback about any inaccuracies they may have noticed in the Biosketches. They had the ability to change anything about the Biosketches that they wanted. During these one-on-one meetings, each student talked about how their lives had changed in the year since the project had ended. Danny actually inquired about whether I needed an update about his life for the dissertation, and I immediately thought this was a good idea. I felt that letting the students describe how their lives have changed or remained the same over the last year would be the most appropriate of closing this dissertation work. Below are the short emails they wrote to update me about their lives. These short statements have not been altered, as a way to keep true to the integrity of their own words and feelings. I think it is only fitting that these young ethnic minority immigrant students have the last word regarding this project. To them, I owe much thanks and gratitude!

DEAR PROFESSOR COOPER,

IT HAS BEEN A YEAR SINCE THE PROJECT, I AM STILL A PART TIME STUDENT. MY CLASSES THIS SEMESTER ARE INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND LATIN AMERICAN IMMIGRANT HISTORY IN AMERICA. LAST SEMESTER I HAD SOCIOLOGY AND PUBLIC SPEAKING. MY CLASSES HELPED ME IMPROVE MY SOCIAL AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS. BECAUSE I WORK IN COSTUMER SERVICE I COMMUNICATE BETTER WITH PEOPLE I AM MORE CONFIDENT. BECAUSE OF MY CLASSES I BREAK PEOPLE EASY NOW MEANING THAT IS MORE EASY FOR ME TO START A CONVERSATION WITH ANY BODY NOW. WHEN YOU ARE AN IMMIGRANT SOME TIMES IS HARD TO BREAK THE ICE WITH SOME ONE THAT IS NOT FROM YOUR COUNTRY OR THAT IS REALLY DIFFERENT THAN YOU, BECAUSE YOU DON'T KNOW IF THE PERSON IS GOING TO UNDERSTAND YOU OR UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU MEAN ABOUT THINGS.

TONY
Since the project ended, I been working and going to school at the same time. Last year I had a tough semester. I was working full time and going to school full time as well, but it wasn’t easy at all. I am still an immigrant student which I’m very proud of it, but things just changed a little bit from last year, such as me becoming an ASAP student, and focusing more in classes and working less. The bigger change in my life from last year is that I am in process of becoming the citizen of United States in one week and I am so happy about it. As of my school life, I am trying to work hard until I fulfill my dream of becoming a physical therapy...

Danielle

Good Evening, Professor Cooper

The past year since the research project has been an outstanding experience. In the spring semester I took five classes ranging from music to history. I had a wonderful academic semester, but the real meat and potatoes of the spring semester was my involvement as a president of the Diligently Resourceful Development Club here at Hostos Community College. In turn I was introduced to a CUNY organization that reaches out to students like myself, which is called the CUNY Coalition of Students with Disabilities. So, as a club president I advocated for students with disabilities on a local college level and together with the C.C.S.D. I advocated on a University level within New York City. I also, developed an association with the University Student Senate. The highest level of student governance at CUNY. This exposure fell into the summer where I volunteered as an active member on C.C.S.D on varies other campus for events that concerned the well-being of individuals as well as students with disabilities. Overall, the passed academic year has given me the chance to set a path for my future. For instance, I am a former president on D.R.D and now an active member on Hostos Community College Student Body Government. Also, a delegate on the University Student Senate and soon to be executive board member on C.C.S.D. The biggest change that I think I’ve had in the past year, is that I have finally found a place to setting down and get involved, similarly to my high school tenure.

Danny
It’s been a year since I have finished project. From that time, until now I have been focusing on school, work and myself. I’m trying to get everything in order so I can be focus on the important things so I could function properly. Hopefully, next spring I will be graduating from Hostos Community College to start a new path with the career that I want to go into. I have change my mind, again and now I’m going to attend nursing school after I’m finished with my Liberal Arts degree. I think it’s the best thing I can do at the moment because it will benefit me. So, that’s my update on my life so far, at least, for now.

Fanny

Hi Professor,

How are you?
I am ok. Finally, I finish this crazy week with 4 exams and now I can relax a little bit. I got accepted in Hunter, so this is my last semester in Hostos :) Here I am sending you the paragraph. I hope its ok, if not tell me and I will change or add more info ok?

From the last year my life hadn’t changed much, I am still working at the same place, living in the same apartment, but my professional career had been change. I decide to say not to the Dental Hygienist program, after I had been accepted because I realized that I can do better. Before started in Hostos I was so scared, thinking about my own limitations. I didn’t have the confidence to realize that I can be a good student. I always thought that because I didn’t speak good English or I am not born and raise in The States, I could not achieve a good grades or either less have degree. However, after my first year in college, I am not only improved in English I also feel more confident and ready to persuade a Bachelor Biology degree in Hunter college and after I am planning to apply for a Dental school.

Been a student in Hostos not only change my professional career, it also made me think that many people here I have the same goals that me and they fight for them like I do. For that reason I feel like I identify with many of them. Right now I don’t feel scared anymore because Hostos gave me the confident that I always needed to pursue my dreams.

I hope everything is ok.

Best,

Maria
Professor Cooper.

This year 2015 has been a real journey for me because I see how my life has taken a left turn, and I overcome my fears. This year I have been questioning myself and accepting who I am.

This year 2015, I applied to get United States passport because I was sick and tired of seeing of expired Ghanaian passport and I was tired of seeing my Ghanaian passport because it reminded of my past events in Ghana. The United States passport made me feel like an American and no longer to feel like a permanent resident. Even though, I am a citizen of the United States but the United States passport seized the deal.

Linda
Appendix A- 1: Photovoice Data organizing activities

**Adapted SHOWeD**\textsuperscript{26} and Pile-sorting\textsuperscript{27} activity for Group Discussions (60 Minutes)

1. We are going to take a look at the photos and short video that you uploaded this week to the shared Facebook page.
2. We will quickly go through photos/videos for each participant and you can pick out as many of them as you like to answer the following questions in depth.
3. On note paper (WHITE) you can write down any additional thoughts in 1-2 phrases that you may have about the photos. I will also be taking notes of the ideas/themes shared.
4. Using a sequence of probing questions (below) and the SHOWeD worksheet (attached), we will discuss the photo stream on Facebook (displayed in the room).

**Potential Probing questions for Photo/ Short Video Presentation in Working Groups**\textsuperscript{28}

**Clarifying Questions:**

1. Please tell me more about what is going on in this picture/ short video?
2. Please tell me more about what happens in this place?
3. Please tell me more about who are the people involved in this place and what activities take place here?
4. Why did you want to focus on this scene/ place?
5. What is the main issue/concern in this picture/video?
6. Tell me more about what you took this picture/ short video?

**Probing Questions:**

1. What does this picture/ short video reveal about your immigrant student experience?

\textsuperscript{26} Adapted from Wallerstein, 1994.
\textsuperscript{27} Adapted from Powers, Freedman & Pitner, 2012.
\textsuperscript{28} Adapted from Collective Leadership Works, The Innovation Center.
2. I see that this photo/short video shows (talk about the image/scene). Please tell me about this place and why it is important to you, as an immigrant student.

3. As you look over all these pictures/videos, how are they similar and how are they different?

4. What does this photo/scene **not** show? Based on the story (stories) you just described to us, what issues/concerns do you feel should also be told? What kind of stories are these pictures/videos not telling?
Appendix A-2: Photovoice Data organizing activities SHOWeD\textsuperscript{29} and Pile-sorting\textsuperscript{30} (Document 2)

**Pile-Sorting Activity Worksheet**

1. In groups of 5, think about all of the photos you took as well as the photos of others. From the collective images you looked at what main themes do you think they highlight?

2. Sort your words into common categories/ themes. (15 min)

3. On this worksheet– do this quickly. Write down the first thoughts that come to mind. (no more than 5 minutes)
   a. In the YELLOW column: Record 3-5 words or phrases that capture the main ideas/ themes that describes your pile of photos/ videos.
   
   b. In the GREEN column: Record 3-5 words or phrases that capture the main strengths that you/ your family/ people in your community may want others to know about that are depicted in your photos/videos.

   c. In the BLUE column: Record 3-5 words or phrases that capture the main challenges, or things that people may want to improve in the community that are depicted in your photos/ videos.

4. After they are sorted, record a title for each group of words.

Probing Questions\textsuperscript{31}: (10 min)

1. Can you tell me more about how these themes relate to the photos/ videos we discussed, what story do you think they tell?

2. Were there any new themes than those we discussed earlier? (In later sessions)

3. Are there any themes that we discussed before that need to be revised now?

\textsuperscript{29} Adapated from Wallerstein, 1994.

\textsuperscript{30} Adapted from Powers, Freedman & Pitner, 2012.

\textsuperscript{31} Adapted from Collective Leadership Works, The Innovation Center.
## Pile-Sorting Activity Worksheet (2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MAIN THEMES/ IDEAS</th>
<th>MAIN STRENGTHS</th>
<th>MAIN CHALLENGES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TITLE for the words listed above</td>
<td>TITLE for the words listed above</td>
<td>TITLE for the words listed above</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix A-3: SHOWeD activity worksheet

"Take 10" Worksheet\textsuperscript{32} (10mins)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S</th>
<th>What do you See happening here? (Describe what the eye sees) (write in the space below)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>What is actually Happening here? (What is the unseen story behind the picture?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>What does this photo tell us about life in your Community?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>Why are things this way? (Why does this situation, concern, or strength exist?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>How could this photo/images Educate people?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>What can we Do about it? (How does this photo provide opportunities for us to improve life in your community?)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{32} Adapted from Powers, Freedman & Pitner, 2012.
Appendix A-4: Next Session Task Sheet 1

EMI Photovoice Project
Tasks for Next Session Sheet
Session 2

Our Next Photovoice Session is:
Date: __________________
Day of week: _____________
Time: _________________
Location: _________________

Session 2 Photo-topic: *School*

Things I need to do for this Photovoice Session: (Photos to be discussed during session #2)

1. Take and upload photos related to the place of "school" to the shared Facebook page.
2. Caption in 1-3 (max.) sentences the photos you take. Note: Only use Instagram to take your short videos, which are only 15 seconds long.
3. When taking your photos keep the following idea in mind:
   
   Imagine you are telling your story of being an immigrant college student, using photographs/short video. Taking images only of the PLACES relevant to your immigrant student life and school, how would you tell someone about?

   - What is learning all about in this place?
   - What is it like to be an immigrant student in this place?
   - What kind of things from your own cultural background do you bring to (or take from) this place?
   - Who here goes to college?

Things I need to bring for our next session:

- My smartphone
- Any notes you took separate from your captions on Facebook.

---

Adapted from Powers, Freedman & Pitner, 2012.
Our Next Photovoice Session is:
Date: _________________
Day of week: ______________
Time: _________________
Location: _________________
Session 3 Photo-topic: The Community

Things I need to do for next Photovoice Session: (Session 3)

1. Take and upload photos related to the place of “the community” to the shared Facebook page.

2. Caption in 1-3 (max.) sentences the photos you take. Note: Only use Instagram to take your short videos, which are only 15 seconds long.

3. When taking your photos keep the following idea in mind:

   Imagine you are telling your story of being an immigrant college student, using photographs/ short video. Taking images only of the PLACES relevant to your immigrant student life and the community, how would you tell someone about?

   • What is learning all about in this place?
   • What is it like to be an immigrant student in this place?
   • What kind of things from your own cultural background do you bring to (or take from) this place?
   • Who here goes to college?

Things I need to bring for our next session:

- My smartphone
- Any notes you took separate from your captions on Facebook.

---

34 Adapted from Powers, Freedman & Pitner, 2012.
EMI Photovoice Project
Tasks for Next Session Sheet
Session 4

Our Next Photovoice Session is:
Date: _________________
Day of week: _____________
Time: _________________
Location: _________________

Session 4 Photo-topic: The Home

Things I need to do for next Photovoice Session: (Session 4)

1. Take and upload photos related to the place of “the home” to the shared Facebook page.
2. Caption in 1-3 (max.) sentences the photos you take and narrate all short videos. Note: Only use Instagram to take your short videos, which are only 15 seconds long.
3. When taking your photos keep the following idea in mind:
   Imagine you are telling your story of being an immigrant college student, using photographs/ short video. Taking images only of the PLACES relevant to your immigrant student life and the home, how would you tell someone about?
   • What is learning all about in this place?
   • What is it like to be an immigrant student in this place?
   • What kind of things from your own cultural background do you bring to (or take from) this place?
   • Who here goes to college?

Things I need to bring for our next session:
• My smartphone
• Any notes you took separate from your captions on Facebook.

35 Adapted from Powers, Freedman & Pitner, 2012.
EMI Photovoice Project
Tasks for Next Session Sheet 36
Session 5

Our Next Photovoice Session is:
Date: _________________
Day of week: _____________
Time: _________________
Location: _________________

Group discussion of Session 5 Photos
Things I need to do for the next Photovoice Session: (Session 6)
1. Think about the main strengths of your community, the challenges in your community.

Things I need to bring for our next session:
• My smartphone
• Any notes you took separate from your captions on Facebook

Appendix: B-1 Group Meeting Script

EMI PHOTOVOICE PROJECT ORIENTATION HANDBOOK

EMI PROJECT GROUP MEETING SCRIPT
Time: 2 hours 37

Part 1: Introduction Statement
Thank you all for coming today. My name is Stacey Cooper and I will be facilitating today’s discussion and this project. I am collecting this data from you as part of my research project that examines how ethnic minority immigrant students draw upon and leverage what they

36 Adapted from Powers, Freedman & Pitner, 2012.

37 The length of time required for this orientation session is approximately 2 hours; it is possible that this session may require an additional meeting.
know from their own background—that is, from their families, home and communities to create a sense of how they see themselves as learners. In this project, you are an important part in helping me to know more about the everyday lives of immigrant students like yourselves. Oftentimes in research, the voices of immigrant students are not heard, and so the focus of this project is to allow you a space to share your experiences and knowledge about what it is like to be an immigrant and a student in New York City.

We are here to find out about your experiences of being immigrant students and your perceptions of your cultural knowledges. The best way to do this is to talk to people like you who have the unique kinds of immigrant experiences that you have had. During this project you will use the resources of your digital photos and short videos, smartphones, Facebook and group discussions to express your thoughts about being an immigrant, a student and your community. More specifically, you will have the opportunity to express your ideas about what kinds of knowledge, talents and resources you believe exists in your households and communities, and discuss whether you think these knowledges can be brought into the school situations and learning experiences.

In these discussion groups, you can openly converse and bounce ideas off each other from which new ideas are sure to emerge. I believe that no single person has all the understanding of their particular group, so it is useful to have everyone voice their different opinions and perspectives so we can gain a better sense of what we all think about the topic. Also, your participation in this study is voluntary, and you may decide not to participate without prejudice, penalty, or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Again, I appreciate and thank you for taking the time to participate in this study.

At this point, everyone here has read, signed and returned a completed copy of their consent form, giving their consent to participate in this study. However, I just wanted to get verbal acknowledgement of your agreement to participate in this study. (Go around the room)
EMI PHOTOVOICE PROJECT ORIENTATION HANDBOOK

Part 2: Project Overview

In this project you will participate in the following activities:

- Take part in six weekly group sessions where you will engage in an ongoing discussion and Photovoice activities about the themes of immigrant life and higher education with other students.
- Use your own smartphone for taking pictures and short videos, using the applications Facebook and Instagram.
- Take pictures and short videos (with captions and narrations) of the physical places and settings in the school, community and home that depict your everyday life as an immigrant student.
- Upload your photos and short videos unto the study group’s shared and private Facebook page.
- Share and discuss your photos and videos with others in the group, organize them and identify common themes.
- Participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher.

***I just want you all to know that during our group discussions that I will be taking notes and the sessions will be audio and video taped. I hope this is okay with you.

Part 3: Ground Rules

- Regular and punctual attendance to all scheduled group meetings is required.
- During group meetings, everyone will speak by taking turns.
- During group meetings, everyone will listen to other people when they speak.
- Respect everyone in their group in their opinions, even if they differ from yours.
- Do not take photos or videos containing images of people.
- Only use the apps Facebook and Instagram when taking and uploading your images and short videos.
- Do not use the group’s shared Facebook page for reasons other than those related to this project.
- Do not submit material to the shared Facebook page that is not related to this project.
- Do not share private and personal information discussed within group meetings or the shared Facebook page with others who are not part of this project.

Part 4: General Breakdown of Project

Before we get into discussing your immigrant experiences, I want to go over some of the important information about the project.
1. **Group Meetings:** We are scheduled to have six weekly group meetings that will typically last about 2 hours. We will gather together to show each other the photographs that you have taken for that week. Each meeting will take a show and tell approach. The “showing” of the photographs will be followed by a discussion of these photos and short videos and you will “tell” us what these photos/ videos mean to you. Also, all group meetings will be held here in *(Room number)* and at this *(Time)*, on a weekly basis.

2. **Discussion Guidelines:** I would like the discussion to be informal, so there’s no need to wait for me to call on you to respond. In fact, I encourage you to respond directly to the comments other people make. If you don’t understand a question, please let me know. I am here to ask questions, to listen, and to make sure everyone has a chance to share their thoughts. If we seem to be stuck on a topic, I may interrupt you and if you aren’t saying much, I may call on you directly. If I do this, it’s just my way of making sure I obtain everyone’s perspective and ensuring everyone’s opinion is included. I hope you’ll feel free to speak openly and honestly. As discussed, I will be tape recording the discussion, because we don’t want to miss any of your comments. No one outside of this room will have access to these tapes and they will be destroyed after our report is written.

3. **Smartphones:** *(show your smartphone)* in this study, you will be using your smartphone to take your photos and short videos.

4. **Photos/ Short Videos:** Each week you will be given a worksheet that will contain a photo-topic (theme) and a series of questions that will guide your photo taking. You will have approximately one week to take your images and upload them unto the shared Facebook page.

5. **Facebook:** *(show the Facebook page)* When you take your photos/ short videos you will be required to upload them to the shared Facebook page. I just want you to know that only members of this group will have access to this Facebook page and I must ask you to not share the address to this page nor share any information including pictures that anyone in the group places on our shared page. Also, Facebook will be quite useful in allowing us to display the photographs during group meetings so that we can discuss them and the meanings/ issues they represent. The Facebook page also allows us to create albums into which images can be sorted and archived. If you do not have the Facebook application on your smartphone we can take a few minutes to download it now or you can download it later, at your convenience. However, you must have this application downloaded to your phone in order to participate in the necessary tasks in this project.

6. **Instagram:** We will also be using the Instagram application for taking short videos. Instagram allows you to take short 15 second videos which can then be uploaded to the shared Facebook page. If you do not have the Instagram application on your smartphone we can take a few minutes to download it now or you can download it later, at your convenience.
7. One-on-one interviews: After all the group discussions are completed, I will invite you to have an individual conversation with me, to continue on a one-on-one basis. In this interview you will further discuss your photographs by choosing ten photographs you think are most representative of you. Also, I will also ask you some open-ended questions about your everyday experiences.

Part 5: Important Information

- Getting to know your cellphone, discussing/ sharing how our cellphone takes pictures:
  - If you have your smartphone, please take it out; I just want to go over how these types of smartphones take photos/ videos.
  - Most smartphones have app or an icon that allows you to take photos/ videos. However, because they are smartphones they also allow you to link your photo-albums up with online sites through apps like Facebook. By downloading the Facebook app unto your phone, you can then upload photos/ videos directly to your individual Facebook page and group pages, like the one we will be using in this project.
  - Typically, in the settings app on your phone you can give access to other apps like Facebook to your photo-albums. When this has been done, you can submit any photos/ videos you like directly to Facebook. However, for uploading to the shared Facebook page instead of your individual account; when you choose the photo you want to upload on the Facebook app, you must go to the “MORE” tab, click on the group you want to upload the photo to, in this case our shared Facebook page, where you can either “POST” a status update/ caption and attach your photo or click on the “PHOTO ICON” to upload a photo (which will take you directly to your photo-albums or camera roll, where you can select the photo you like) and then caption it.
  - Now let’s take a look at how this works for our individual phones! (Interact with each phone, show and tell).

- Discussion of shared but closed Facebook page:
  - When you take your photos/ videos using your smartphone, you will upload them to the shared Facebook page for this project. At the same time as you are uploading these photos you are required to caption them, meaning write some comments describing the photo so that viewers can have some idea of what they are seeing and probably why you have taken this photo.
  - I have already sent you a link to this shared Facebook page and I will include it here (website address). Please do not share this information with anyone who is not participating in this study. Also, you cannot add other people to our shared Facebook page.
  - Also, I just want you to know that while everyone here is part of the shared Facebook page, none of us has access to your individual Facebook page. This can only happen if you “friend” someone on Facebook.
  - I also wanted to inform you that if you choose to withdraw from the study, I would like you to let me know because in order to protect the privacy of
information shared by other members of the group I would have remove your access to the shared Facebook page.

- Taking Photos and Short Videos 1: As a photographer/videographer you have a lot of power in deciding what images to take, when to take them, and what happens to your images. Your photos and short videos serve as visual depictions of the story you want to tell about your life, as an immigrant student. It is also a powerful way to tell others about who you are and the kinds of knowledge, talents and skills that you have and use. Your images also can tell others about issues that affect your lives that others, especially people in positions of power, may not heard of or have ignored. In this way, your photos/videos have the power to change people’s minds and yours as well.

- Taking Photos/ Short Videos 2: While the choice of what image to display in the photos/videos is yours, I want to caution you on a few ethical issues to keep in mind when taking your photos and short videos. Keep in mind that for this study you are required to only take pictures of the PLACES and settings that are most representative of your immigrant student experience. This means that images containing people are not acceptable.
  - Do not take pictures/ videos of people.
  - Any photos or short videos that contain the images of people will be removed from the shared Facebook page within 24 hours.
  - Do not put yourself at risk to take a photograph/ video. No photo is worth facing personal danger.
  - Do not manipulate or edit your photos/ videos using programs like Photoshop or other similar apps, including the app Instagram that change or add/remove images. Instagram will be used for the taking of short videos.
  - Video tutorial on taking photos with your smartphone: Let’s take a look at a videos that discusses taking photos with your smartphone

- Captioning photographs: Captions are usually texts that appear below an image that draws attention to something interesting in the image that is not obvious or to something relevant or important about the image. Here is some advice about captioning your photos:
  - Look at the photo you have taken and think about what message you are trying to communicate in the picture.
  - Ask yourself how this picture/ image is relevant to the topic or question you are trying to answer (photo-topic).
  - Once you have decided the main idea/ message behind your photo, write a simple sentence that describes everything that is happening in it. If one sentence is not enough use two. If you feel that two is not enough then use three and so on. However, try to keep your captions/ comments short.
  - Add to your sentences where the photo was taken, or what activities occur in this place. You can keep it short or be quite descriptive.

Here is some advice on taking short videos:
- Make sure the image quality is clear, so that others can see/ understand what you are depicting.
- Try to keep your hand steady as you film your scene (i.e., not containing people).
- As you film the video, try to describe verbally--in a sentence or two what the main message/ idea is in this scene.
- Ask yourself how this image is relevant to the topic or question you are trying to answer (photo-topic).
- You can also add written captions about you short videos unto the shared Facebook page. Again keep them short but descriptive.

Part 6: Getting to know each other

Let’s begin. Let’s find out some more about each other by going around the room one at a time. Tell us your first name and a little about your background, what classes you are taking, what year you are (I’ll start).

Part 7: Tentative Discussion Questions to be asked in the second part of the orientation meeting.

a. What do you consider the biggest issues that immigrant students face in going to college?
b. What are some of the reasons you think immigrants face many difficulties in trying to go to college?
c. What experiences, talents, strengths, and resources do you think you have in your household and community?
d. How can your personal talents and strengths found in your household and community (funds of knowledge) help in learning/ going to college?
e. What kinds of things do you think that people who are non-immigrants (in particular non-immigrant teachers) should know about what it is like to be an immigrant student?
f. What cultural resources do you think you have?
g. What languages do you speak?
h. What resources does your household have?
i. What resources are available in your communities?
Appendix C-1: Interview Guide

EMI PROJECT INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thank you for coming here today, as you know this interview is a follow-up to the group discussions that you participated in for the last couple of weeks. It will serve as a place where you can discuss your immigrant experiences on an individual basis and possibly express ideas that you did not discuss in the group setting. We will discuss your photos that you brought in—that you feel best tell your immigrant story.

Okay, so can you tell me about the photos that you brought here today and what story does it tell about your life, your home and community and your relation to school?

Part A: Where would you like to start?

Part B:
1) Can you show me a photo (photos) that shows where you see yourself as an expert?
   a) Can you tell me what this photo is about?
   b) Why did you choose this photo?
   c) Does this photo say something about what you’re good at?
      i) What? How?
   d) Where do those things (these knowledges) come from?

2) Can you show me a photo (photos) that depicts the knowledge you have in your home and family?
   a) Can you tell me what this photo is about?
   b) Why did you choose this photo? Or what’s special about this photo?
   c) What does this photo show about the types of knowledge that exists in your home and family?
   d) How does this home knowledge come into use in school? Or does it?
   e) How do you put this knowledge to use in school?
   f) How does what you know, come into play (play out) as you learn in school? How it does it not?

3) Can you show me a photo (photos) that shows the spaces/ situations where you feel that what you know is not valued (or considered important or useful)?
   a) Can you tell me what this photo is about?
   b) Why did you choose this photo? Or what’s special about this photo?
   c) What are the kinds of things that you know that are not valued in this space?
   d) You just showed me a picture that depicts spaces where you feel that you know is not valued; can you show me a picture that shows that contradicts this?

4) Can you show me a photo (photos) that shows what immigrant life is like?
   a) Can you tell me what this photo is about?
b) Why did you choose this photo? Or what’s special about this photo?

c) How does this photo show the kinds of issues that immigrants face?

d) How does this photo show some of the negative things that people might think about your background?

e) How is being an immigrant factor into your life?

Open-ended prompts: Meaning of Learning/College

a) Learning is important to me because…

b) In my family, going to college is…

c) Among my friends, going to college is…

d) In my community, going to college is…

e) Learning to me is about…

f) As an immigrant (who is Black/or Latino) going to college is…

g) As student I…

h) My goal of learning is…

i) School for me is…

j) I am going to school because…

Before we end this discussion, I would just like to ask you a few demographic questions:

PART C: Demographics (only ask if not already said)

a) Age

b) Gender

c) Household members

d) Type of Jobs held by family members

e) Language spoken at home

f) Country of birth

g) Year of arrival in the U.S./ Generational status

h) Year(s) of attendance at Hostos

Okay, again I would like to thank you for taking the time to have this interview today, before we end I wanted to you if you have any questions for me?

Thanks!

Do you have any questions for me?
CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
The Graduate Center
Department of Psychology- Human Development Training Area

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

Project Title: Exploring the Uses of Cultural Funds of Knowledge among Ethnic Minority Immigrant College Students in their Construction of Learning Identities using Photovoice Techniques, Group Discussions and One-on-one Interviews.

Principal Investigator: Stacey Cooper
Doctoral Candidate
The Graduate Center
Doctoral Program in Psychology, Room 6304
New York, NY 10016
718-536-8901

Faculty Advisor(s): Anna Stetsenko, PhD
Professor
The Graduate Center
Doctoral Program in Psychology, Room 6304
New York, NY 10016
212-817-8715

Joseph Glick, PhD
Professor
The Graduate Center
Doctoral Program in Psychology, Room 6304
New York, NY 10016
917-797-7934

Site where study is to be conducted: Eugenio María de Hostos Community College · 500 Grand Concourse, Bronx, New York 10451 · Phone (718) 518-4444
Introduction/Purpose: You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Stacey Cooper, Doctoral Candidate at the CUNY-Graduate Center, Human Development Training Area. The purpose of this research study is to gain a better understanding of how immigrant college students from minority backgrounds, like you, use what they know from their own cultural background—that is, from their families, home and communities, to create a sense of themselves as learners. The results of this study may increase awareness about the connections between cultural knowledge(s) and learning identities, and it and may offer new insight into the challenges that students face in pursuing a college education. In order to keep track of the information gathered during the study, in each group meeting I will take notes, and audiotape and videotape each session. I will also audiotape each one-on-one interview.

Procedures: Approximately 10 individuals are expected to participate in this study. In order to participate in this study, you must be 18 years and over in age. You will be asked to use your smartphones to take pictures and short videos of the places and settings that reflect your experiences as an immigrant student. These digital photo and short videos will become a tool to explore and recognize experiences associated with your cultural background and how these relate to your academic learning. Your time commitment will approximately be spread across seven weeks. You will participate in six weekly group meetings, which are expected to last for two hours. These meetings will involve the displaying of your and other participants’ photographs and short videos, taken over the course of the week, followed by open-ended discussion of these images. After concluding all six weekly group meetings, you will participate in a one-on-one interview with the PI, which is expected to last for one hour. All group meetings and interviews will take place at the Eugenio María de Hostos Community College campus.

As a participant of this study you will be asked to:

- Take part in six weekly group sessions where you will engage in an ongoing discussion and Photovoice activities about the themes of immigrant life and higher education with other students.
- Use your own smartphone for taking pictures and short videos, using the applications Facebook and Instagram.
- Take pictures and short videos of the physical places and settings that you feel tell your immigrant student story.
- Take pictures and short videos related to the settings of home, school and community.
- Upload your photos and short videos unto the study group’s shared and private Facebook page.
- Share and discuss your photos and videos with others in the group, organize them and identify common themes.
- Participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher.

Photographs and Short Videos: In order to generate a starting point for group discussions and the one-on-one interview, you will be taking a series of photographs and/or short videos depicting the places, settings and things that you feel are reflective of your everyday immigrant student life and experiences. Each week, the images you take will be guided by a photo-topic; for example, school, home and community.
Appropriate Images: In order to protect the privacy of others, suitable photographs and short videos must not contain identifiable images of people or faces, but must instead focus on places, settings and/or things related to the context of learning and immigrant life. Some examples of these can be a classroom, a street corner, a living room, or series of books. All images submitted to the shared Facebook page that do not fit this criterion will be removed within a 24-hr period by the PI.

As a participant, you need only document and share what you are comfortable with. All photographs that are submitted to the shared Facebook page will be considered final submissions, meaning that once they are uploaded to the Facebook page that you cannot edit or remove them from the Facebook page. Additionally, only the descriptions of the photographs and short videos generated during this project will be used in published material, unless the participant states otherwise (see Publication of Images statement below).

**Information about the Group’s Shared Facebook Page:** Participants are advised that only members of the study group will have access to the group’s shared Facebook page. This page will set to “secret”, which means that only the PI has the ability to invite members to the group. Also, only current members of the group can see: who is in the group, what members post in the group, the group description, group tags or group stories. The group page will not be visible to non-group members whether through Facebook searches or search engine searches (like Google or Bing). Additionally, other group members do not have access to information on individual’s personal Facebook page. In order for people to view your personal Facebook page information or timeline you would need to make them your friend. Participants should refrain from sharing any of the photos/videos that they or their fellow group members place on the shared Facebook page, with anyone who is not part of the group. You should be aware that you could leave the Facebook group at any point. If at any point, you choose to withdraw from the study please inform the PI, Stacey Cooper to inform her of your decision. However, in order protect the information shared by remaining group members, participants who choose to withdraw from the study should be advised that their access to the group’s Facebook page would be discontinued.

Moderation of shared Facebook page: Participants should be aware that all photographs and short videos submitted to the shared Facebook page would be considered final submissions, meaning that participants cannot edit or remove them after posting them to the Facebook page. In addition, to ensure that the photos and short videos that you upload to the shared Facebook page fit the criterion for appropriateness, the PI will monitor the Facebook page for photographs and short videos that contain images of people. All photographs and short videos that contain images of people will be permanently removed from the Facebook page by the PI within a 24-hour period.

**Possible Discomforts and Risks:** The risks involved in participating in this study are minimal since it concerns everyday experiences of participants as they relate to the contexts of their learning. The information will be provided by participants on a strictly voluntary basis according to what they feel is comfortable to share. There will be many precautions in place to protect participants’ privacy. There might be a concern related to the amount of time to complete the required activities. In this study, participants are required to take photos and short videos, participate in weekly group discussions and engage in a one-on-one interview over the course of a seven-week period. Each group discussion is expected to last for two hours, participants will have
about one week to take and submit their photographs and short videos to the shared Facebook page. Also, each on-time interview is expected to last for one hour.

As is always the case in all group discussions, there may be instances where personal information is shared among members of the group, albeit on a voluntary basis only. However, all participants will be asked to keep confidential any information that identifies or could identify a fellow participant and/or his/her comments shared in all group sessions. It should be noted that it is impossible for the researcher to control whether participants repeat comments outside the group at some time in the future.

Online information: Because online information (for example, emails, website postings and images) can be insecure, it is possible for participants to be identified via their online submissions at various websites, including Facebook and Instagram. As such, it is advisable that participants create new Facebook and Instagram accounts using pseudonyms, which can help to limit their identification on these public websites. However, it should be noted that doing so does not remove the possibility of your being identified in some way.

All these precautions are taken along the general rules of protecting participants’ privacy in any research. This study does not target nor aims to tap into anything that you your self would not want to be shared with the group of participants and the researcher. The results will be presented (and possibly later published) using only fictitious names so your identity is protected at this level as well.

It is possible that participants may experience moments of discomfort while relaying their personal immigrant experiences. If you are bothered, troubled or upset at any point in this study, you can withdraw your participation at any time. In case of any concerns, you have the option of consulting with the Carlos L. Gonzalez Counseling Center at Hostos Community College. It is located in the Savoy Manor Building, 120 East 149th Street, Room D-101, Bronx, New York 10451. They can be reached by phone at (718) 518-4319 or via email, infocounseling@hostos.cuny.edu.

**Benefits:** As a participant in this study, you may not directly benefit from this research; however, we hope that participating in this study may be enjoyable to you. In addition, you will be able to tell your own stories related to your photographs and short videos, as well as express your feelings and opinions about your immigrant student experiences. The proposed research may also increase our general knowledge of the higher education experiences of ethnic minority immigrant students like you. It has the potential to help educators to be more aware of the particular experiences of students like you and it can possibly help them to identify practices that are targeted to the learning experiences of immigrant students. By participating in this study, you have an opportunity to voice not only your own educational experiences but also you can express your needs with the educational field.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you may decide not to participate without any consequence, prejudice, penalty, or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to leave the study, please contact the principal investigator Stacey Cooper to inform her of your decision.
**Financial Considerations:** Participation in this study will involve no financial cost to the participant. For your participation in this study you will receive a MetroCard valued at $31. Also food and refreshments will be served at every group session.

**Confidentiality:** The data obtained from you will be collected via digital photographs and short video, audio and video recording, and written captions. The collected data will be accessible to only to the PI and her advisor, Dr. Anna Stetsenko and HRPP coordinator Kay Powell. The PI will protect your confidentiality by storing all study documents unto a password-protected computer in a locked office at CUNY Graduate Center, to which only the PI has access. All documents containing participants’ names and contact information, and consent forms will be stored in printed form in a locked file cabinet away from the data collected via audio and video files, this information is only be accessible to the PI. All group meetings will be audio and videotaped and one-on-one interviews will be audiotaped. The audio/ video files will be used to create hardcopy transcripts, which will be kept in a separate locked file cabinet at the CUNY Graduate Center. The identities of participants on the audio and video files will not be shared with the PI’s advisor; instead participants will be referred to only by ID code. All identifying information like participant names and contact information will be removed from all study documents, including transcripts. ID codes will replace participants’ names in all study documents. Information from the transcripts will be available only to the researcher and her advisor for further discussion. Participants’ names will not be used when discussing any information from this study with the PI’s advisor. Additionally, in writing the final report, the PI will refrain from using any quotes that could identify individual participants. The collected data will be stored for a period of 3 years and then destroyed.

**Contact Questions/Persons:** If you have any questions about the research now or in the future, you should contact the Principal Investigator, Stacey Cooper, phone: (718) 536-8901, email: scooper@hostos.cuny.edu. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact HRPP Coordinator Kay Powell, phone: (212) 817-7525, email: kpowell@gc.cuny.edu.

**Publication of Images statement:**
Are you willing to be contacted at a later date to discuss the potential publication of your photographs and short videos created during this research project?
☐ Yes  ☐ No

**Statement of Consent:**

“I have read the above description of this research and I understand it. I have been informed of the risks and benefits involved, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. Furthermore, I have been assured that the principal investigator of the research study will also answer any future questions that I may have. I voluntary agree to participate in this study.

By signing this form I have not waived any of my legal rights to which I would otherwise be entitled.

I will be given a copy of this statement.”
Printed Name of Subject                 Signature of Subject

_______________________________    _______________________
Date Signed

Printed Name of Person Explaining Consent Form
Signature of Person Explaining Consent Form

_______________________________    _______________________
Date Signed

Printed Name of Investigator
Signature of Investigator

_______________________________
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