

**CHAPTER FOUR**

**A Developmental View of ESOL Students' Identity Transitions  
in an Urban Community College**

**BY:**

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## SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

*Music, for Sonja, is both a pathway for communicating across cultures and a vehicle for the expression of her personal power. A vivacious 21 year old woman from Southern Europe, Sonja longs to become a radio broadcaster. Sonja expresses her conviction that she will “prove herself” by succeeding in her chosen career and playing the music she likes for broad audiences. Sonja, whose pragmatism matches her zeal for life, expresses excitement for the opportunity to pursue her dream in the U.S.—in her home country, there were no avenues open to her to study broadcasting. Here, she is enrolled in a community college that supports her goals through an interdisciplinary program in communications. Her personal ambition comes at a cost to Sonja, who left many friends behind in her home country. Because she values her friendships deeply, and requires of her friends “complete honesty,” she has sorely missed these close connections. She tells us she has had trouble making friends in the U.S. because her standards for open, sometimes confrontational, communication in friendship differ considerably from those of the young adults she meets at school.*

*In the U.S., Sonja relies on her mother for honest conversation. This trusting relationship, she believes, depends on her mother being completely informed of her social experimentation (of which her mother disapproves). Her mother, like Sonja, is frank in sharing her opinions of Sonja’s escapades but allows Sonja to make her own choices. In her second semester of community college, Sonja begins dating a man in whom she feels comfortable confiding. As we left Sonja in the spring of her first year, she had come to rely on his companionship and counsel.*

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*When we first met Gilles, a 23 year old Caribbean man, he was working through a decision to focus his studies either on journalism or pharmacy. Journalism, he believed, offered opportunities to help the people of his native country express their needs and views to a larger world. Gilles worries continuously about his native country, thinking about both the nation at large and the friends he left behind. Since he left home, he has coped with the tragic deaths of both friends and family. Both his parents have died, and he misses them deeply and often feels angry over his loss. His dearest friend from his home country died after an acute illness, and Gilles only learned of his death when he called his friend’s home to consult with him on a school-related dilemma. Another friend drowned after drinking heavily and falling into a river. Gilles’ worries extend to other friends whose risky behaviors make him fear for their well-being. Reserved and often morose, Gilles tells us that many of his*

*friends back home engage in “smoking, drinking, staying out late, acting crazy, drinking and driving.” By Gilles’ second semester, he has decided on a career in health care. Gilles has declared a major in biology, en route to becoming a pharmacist. His current goal is to transfer to a four-year college. He tells us he aims to earn enough money to take care of his own needs and those of his future desired family.*

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For the past two years, as researchers, we have been attending to the experiences of adult international ESOL students whose decisions to further their opportunities through expanding their literacy skills resulted in their enrollment in a community college program tailored to their own chosen purposes. To differing degrees and in various ways, the program they chose met their needs and often supported them in expanding their view of their own goals for themselves. This expansion of their personal horizons, through the encounter with larger views of their possibilities, and the acquisition of skills that scaffolded the accomplishment of novel goals, constitutes a form of what we think of as a “perspective shift”—a significant, qualitative change in the enduring cognitive, emotional and moral frameworks through which students make sense of their experience.

Perspective shifts are at the heart of both transformative learning as an experience and lifespan developmental psychology as a discipline. “In transformative learning . . . we reinterpret an old experience (or a new one) from a new set of expectations, thus giving a new meaning and perspective to the old experience” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 11). Understanding how students’ perspectives shift in the direction of perceiving greater possibilities for themselves and towards enhanced capability to accomplish those possibilities is a shared concern of both teachers and researchers.

As our research progressed, perspective shifts of different forms became the focus of our inquiry. For Sonja and Gilles, these shifts took unique turns and led to new pursuits in various life arenas. Sonja came to view her relationships in new ways, allowing more room for collaboration and nuanced communication in her friendships while gaining confidence in herself as a student leader. Gilles’ attention gradually shifted from a focus on the life he had left behind in Haiti to an emerging long-term plan for his new life in the U.S. that was grounded in a commitment to his higher education and professional future. With these shifts came losses in extant views of self and sources of self-worth, and new commitments to American value systems that compromised prior loyalties to the cultural mores of their home countries.

The focal point for our interest in these perspective shifts was the participants' experiences of themselves as adult learners. The question that drew our attention, enlivened our thinking and crystallized our interpretations of our data became: *How do the participants in our study come to believe in themselves as students, and through that belief, act in ways that make their learning more effective?* While such a question seems to assume that participants' lives would necessarily be enhanced by their U.S. community college experience, we let the participants make this interpretation for us. Generally, they expressed a satisfaction with their choices and the direction their lives were taking. However, their narratives of change were not as straightforward as the conclusions they drew for us about their overall experiences. We see it as our responsibility to present their stories of change as multifaceted, consistent with the ways in which they were told to us over time—emphasizing that every shift that allowed new possibilities also outlawed old ways of being that had brought comfort and consistency to their lives. Developmental psychologist Mary Baird Carlsen (1988) lends credence to the complexity of the participants' transitions in her characterization of the inner experience of personal change:

what made sense before, what held life together, what provided patterns of significance and intentionality, has broken apart thrusting these individuals into a transitional stage between the old and the new. This can be very frightening; after all, even though the old way is no longer working, at least it was known. (p. 3)

Change, as adult learners experience it, means the reconstruction of whole ways of knowing and the tentative embrace of new forms of meaning that have not yet proven their enduring worth.

Our orienting question also apparently preferences the study of personal agency over the exploration of institutional agendas and their influence over student experience (even though the two are very much intertwined). Educational institutions such as the community college we studied are often characterized (especially by critical theorists) as vehicles for the transmission of cultural mores or as agencies of reinforcement of existing power structures (Shaw, Valadez & Rhoads, 1999; Rhoads & Valadez, 1996). Nonetheless, the individual learner remains the recipient of these messages and the subject of these recreations of (potentially oppressive) cultural systems. Cultural and political systems of belief do flood the collective consciousness, yet individual students experience this influence in the domain of personal consciousness. The domain of personal consciousness is where we believe agency is housed. In other words, the individual's will to act is experienced as a personal choice and can be explored systematically as a personal choice. Our choice to explore individual agency as demonstrated by students in our

study does not negate the influence of powerful cultural forces. Instead, it assumes their presence and then asks how individuals, who are not yet beneficiaries of cultural revolutions that might obviate the need to act against the “system,” still manage to negotiate for themselves movements within the system which they personally characterize as life-enhancing. It is these life-enhancing movements that capture our attention.

Kathleen Shaw, in her exploration of identity development in community college settings, reflects our perspective:

Yet as theorists have begun to grapple with the somewhat deterministic relationship which these [critical] theories draw between specific social categories and identity, some have begun to express discontent, arguing that ‘race, class and gender are not . . . the bottom line explanation to which all life may be reduced’ (Denning, 1992, p.38). Indeed, there has emerged the sense that there are different kinds of difference, and that, along with both social categories and social structure, *individual agency*—that is, the ability to make conscious choices—has a role in identity formations . . . [T]his . . . theory of identity (also referred to as a theory of human agency) does not negate the power of race, gender or class in determining the ways in which we define ourselves and are defined by others; it simply adds a category of “difference” that is determined by individual agency, by choice. . . . (Shaw, 1999, p. 156)

By this, Shaw means that there are important forms of difference amongst those who share membership in underrepresented or oppressed groups that require our understanding if we are to make sense of how people purposefully pursue their dreams for their lives in spite of the conspiracy of class, race, cultural, or gender inequities. She continues,

Certainly, issues of oppression and domination are critical to community college students, and in some ways may be the most important aspects of identity to address. However, by focusing exclusively on identities as defined primarily in terms of race, gender, or class, institutions can become blinded to other critical aspects of students’ identities. (Shaw, 1999, p. 166)

In our own work as developmentalists we locate some of these important “aspects of identity” in the forms of perspectives (or systems of meaning) individual students bring to bear on their experiences. We are interested as well in how and when these perspectives shift. We associate certain telltale or characteristic forms of meaning making with particular levels of consciousness development. We imagine we can tell you something about the organization of an individual’s meaning system based on what we know about his or her cognitive, emotional, or moral

developmental position. And our framework suggests that there are important associations between the presence of certain levels of consciousness and the resultant power and flexibility of individual agency.

We take it as our task here to demonstrate, through argument and presentation of evidence informed by a developmental analysis, just how these differences in consciousness development matter to the forms of agency the students in our study demonstrate and what these differences might mean for their engagement in life-enhancing choices and activities. This chapter thus adds to the overall discussion threading through the monograph on the contributions a developmental psychological perspective can provide adult basic education. We focus on the perspective shifts the participants in our study recount, and on how a developmental framework accounts for the presence of certain important forms of change and the absence of others. To that end, we elaborate on our orienting question by also asking persistently:

- How do students' developmental positions influence the ways in which they negotiate common transitions (such as entry into a new culture of learning, or the accomplishment of life tasks associated with emerging adulthood)?
- What distinguishes students who make these transitions successfully from those who struggle to complete them?
- What forms of psychological risk do students associate with negotiating these transitions?
- In what ways does the community college support diverse students through common, desired transitions? In what ways does it create barriers to positive change?

And

- How might faculty, program developers, and policymakers anticipate the risks and barriers to change and thereby improve the supports they offer to diverse students?

This final question requires speculation on the application of our findings to the practice of developmental education in ABE settings, and will be taken up in our discussion of the implications of our study on future practice.

### Background on the Setting

Our study took place at Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC), a Boston-area urban college well regarded for its programmatic attention to supporting self-directed learning and for its pioneering programs for ESOL students. During the period when we were investigating site options, we learned of a pilot program being initiated at BHCC that would provide international ESOL students with an opportunity to register as a cohort for a set of courses that would reinforce English acquisition through both direct language instruction in ESOL coursework combined with application of English skills in a tailored, introductory-level psychology course. The program developers welcomed research in their setting to further their own understanding of whether and how enrolled students of various cultural backgrounds and educational histories made positive gains in English fluency and demonstrated transfer of literacy skills to academic work. Our research efforts got underway shortly after the fall semester began; we followed the cohort through the end of their initial academic year. (See Chapter Two for a complete description of our methods.)

The community college drew many of the participants in our study because of its proximity to the city, its welcoming stance toward international students, its numerous programs of study, and its interest in supporting students who aim to transfer to four-year colleges. All programs of study (including Associate in Arts (A.A.) degrees, Associate in Science (A.S.) degrees, and certificate programs) require coursework from four areas: General Education requirements, program requirements, career electives, and liberal arts electives. While participants were familiar with the range of requirements, they tended in all conversations with us to focus their comments about program content on the career electives. Those who aimed to transfer to four-year colleges matriculated in the Associate in Arts concentrations. Those who expressed an interest in moving directly on to work experience registered in certificate programs focused on skill training and “job upgrade opportunities” (BHCC Website, 2001). Of the more than 20 certificate options for students, most of the participants in our study focused on business, computer or electronics technology, health, hospitality, or office information management.

Participants at this site range in age from (18 to 39) and come from 10 different countries and four continents (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Background of Participants<sup>1</sup>**

Name	Gender	Age	Years in U.S.	Region of Origin	SOI Time 1	SOI Time 2 <sup>2</sup>	Other Information
Yousef	M	Late 30s	1 1/2	Africa	N/A	2(3)-2/3	Completed high school in Africa. Married without children. Lives with friends in U.S. Wife lives in Africa. Works at least part-time.
Xuan	F	Late teens	16	Asia	2/3	N/A	Lives with her family. Finished high school in U.S.
Minh	F	Mid 20s	2	Asia	3/2	N/A	Left Asia four months before finishing a university degree in economics. Lives with her family. Works part time.
Gilles	M	Early 20s	2	Caribbean	3ish	2/3-3/2	Both parents are deceased. Lives with aunt, two sisters, and a cousin. Completed high school in U.S. Works part-time.
Abdel	M	Mid 20s	2 1/2	Africa	3	3/2-3	Lives with his family. Completed high school in Africa. Works part-time.
Ling-Hui	F	Late teens	4 mos.	Asia	3(2)	N/A	Lives with aunt and uncle. Completed high school in Asia.
Jonas	M	Mid 20s	4	Central America	3	N/A	Finished high school in El Salvador. Lives with other Spanish-speaking young men. Works full-time.
Armand	M	N/A	1 1/2	Africa	3	3	Finished high school and two years of university in Africa. Lives with sister and her child. Works at least part-time.
Tak-Jang	M	Mid 20s	1	Asia	3	N/A	Lives with his family. Finished high school in Asia. Works at least part-time.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 2 for a description of SOI measure data collection procedures. Age and Years in U.S. are calculated from the time of our first set of participant interviews, 10/8/98.

<sup>2</sup> At the time of our last data collection, we were unable to contact 6 of the 17 participants. We do not have reliable information about whether these students were still enrolled at the college or whether these students had transferred or discontinued their studies. Of the remaining 11, one student elected not to participate in the entire set of interviews.

(Table 1 Continued)

Name	Gender	Age	Years In U.S.	Region of Origin	SOI Time 1	SOI Time 2	Other Information
Natalia	F	Late teens	1	Europe	3	3	Lives with her parents. Finished high school in Europe. Works at least part-time.
Fawzia	F	Mid 20s	1 1/2	Africa	3	3	Lives alone. Family lives in Africa. Finished high school in Africa. Works part-time.
Benetta	F	N/A	N/A	Central America	3 or 3/4	N/A	Lives with husband. Works part-time.
Gabriela	F	Early 20s	3	Central America	3-3/4	3 or 3/4	Finished two years of university in Central America. Lives with parents and brother, then moves to an apartment with other students. Works at least part-time, sometimes full-time.
Marie	F	Early 20s	N/A	Caribbean	3 or 3/4	3/4	Lives with uncle and cousins. Completed high school in U.S. Works part-time.
Sonja	F	Early 20s	1	Europe	4/3	3/4-4/3	Finished high school and started to study law in Europe. Lives with family. Works part-time.
Serge	M	Mid 20s	5	Caribbean	4/3	4/3	Lives with uncle and cousins. Completed high school in the Caribbean. Works full-time.
Fei-Wen	F	Late 30s	1	Asia	4/3	N/A	Completed high school in Asia. Married without children. Lives with parents and brother. Husband lives in Asia. Works at least part-time.

At the time of our first data collection, 17 students (seven males, 10 females) were enrolled in the ESOL/Psychology program. Virtually all had lived in the United States for only a short period of time (ranging from four months to five years); only one student had spent most (16 years) of her life here. Seven lived with parents who had also immigrated. One lived with her husband, near her mother and stepfather.

Of the others whose parents had not come to the U.S., three lived with other family members, such as siblings, aunts, uncles, and/or cousins. Three lived alone or with friends. All participants had completed high school, and four had continued with some form of higher education in their home countries.

Like participants in the parent education and workplace literacy programs discussed in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven, the participants in our study represent a mix of cultures and nationalities, chose to further their own learning through participation in an ESOL program, and were (for the most part) evidently struggling to communicate in English when their programs began. The participants in our study are unique across the broader study in that they are relatively younger, tell fairly positive stories of their formative educational experiences in their countries of origin, and have expressed ambitious educational goals for themselves beyond the ESOL program.

#### **Aspects of Identity and Forms of Transition**

Two other aspects of the participants' shared identity interest us in particular. First, they tend to be fairly new to the United States or to the American school experience and therefore inexperienced with its cultural norms for and expectations of how students and teachers ought to think and behave in learning environments. They are necessarily engaged in a shared process of acculturation that heightens their awareness of their existing perspectives while accentuating the changes in form these meaning systems necessarily undergo. Sociologist Howard London (1992) describes the process of acculturation non-native community college students go through as "requir(ing) a 'leaving off' and a 'taking on,' the shedding of one social identity and the acquisition of another. Usually this is a slow, incremental process, consisting of subtle and often tentative innovations in the conduct of everyday life" (1992, p. 8). As interested observers of these changes, we noted an unanticipated commonality in the ways in which participants described the perceived norms for study and participation in classroom life.

In one sense, this is evidence of the power of the forces of acculturation. The collective understanding expressed by the participants in our study of the expectations their teachers, peers, and advisors had of them suggests a rapid assimilation of social cues and, to some extent, an acceptance of these new norms as reasonable and even desirable. These new ways of understanding are in one sense invited by the participants in our study as they choose to enter the community college culture. Yet, it is equally true to say that forms of understanding are imposed on individuals by the culture they are entering. Recollecting her own transition from "the barrio to the academy," Mexican-American educational researcher Laura

Rendon (1999) reminds us that “pain . . . comes from cultural separation . . . To become academic success stories, we must . . . reject old values and traditions, mistrust our experience, and disconnect with our past. Ironically, the academy preaches freedom of thought and expression but demands submission and loyalty” (p. 62). For the participants in our study, the process of acculturation is thus met with a mix of motivated enthusiasm and resistance. We describe participants’ acculturation experiences later in this chapter, as a means for providing indirect access to a critical conversation about how immigrant community college students variously engage and disengage with the expectations of a new culture.

In another sense, which we pursue more directly, the common understanding of academic mores shared by the participants in our study is evidence of the power of the normative forces of consciousness development, which tend in early adulthood to organize people’s experiences around social norms and conventions for thinking and behaving. The participants in our study, whose modal developmental position places them near or at the “Socializing” stage of development, are highly invested in deciphering and acting through conventional forms of behavior and understanding. They demonstrate a developmental readiness for and inclination towards absorbing value systems and connecting to like-minded communities. We will explore how developmental position influences the participants’ experiences of acculturation, both through shaping their interpretations of its demands upon them and by enabling their participation in mutually reinforcing social constructions of experience.

A second aspect of the participants’ shared identity that shapes the direction of our analysis is the phenomenon of common life phase—most of the participants in our study, who differ greatly in cultural background and personal history, are collectively living through their young adulthood. In our own U.S. culture, we are somewhat fascinated by life phases, generational cohorts and all they signify about shared systems of value, and the normative tasks that accompany transition from one life phase to the next. In young adulthood, these tasks include establishing a community, determining a career direction, deepening intimate relationships, and forging an enduring identity. The participants in our study, when given free rein to speak on a topic of their choosing, endlessly return to these four domains of experience.

When we think of these domains as arenas for transition, we note that the participants in our study are actively engaged in making sense of how they might resolve emerging dilemmas and manage hoped for changes. Again, we were somewhat surprised by the collective urgent attention the participants in our study place on these four domains, as the phasic expectations commonly expressed by North American psychologists would not necessarily reflect the preoccupations of

non-North American young adults. These expectations are, of course, heavily influenced by cultural expectations for normative growth. And, because these expectations are normative, those new to a culture may not “fit” the new environment’s expectations for progress in relationship to a critical life phase or task. Conversely, those new to a culture may already have accomplished a phasic task “prematurely” by the normative standards of the new culture. The participants in our study are clearly engaged with these common tasks of young adulthood, yet their expectations for themselves do reflect still the norms of their home cultures. For example, many of the participants in our study express dismay at the perceived North American insistence on individuation from the family of origin during early adulthood.

In the U.S., initiating the college experience is often considered a phasic task, the accomplishment of which solidifies a young adult’s separation from home and family. In our study overall, the community college setting serves to illustrate some of the unique challenges immigrant young adults have in constructing an identity and choosing a life path while simultaneously encountering a new culture. We look in this chapter at how the participants in our study make sense of these challenges, employing a developmental interpretation of why certain tasks both fascinate and stymie young adults from diverse cultures who share a common developmental stage.

### **A Developmental Lens**

Developmental approaches to education fundamentally address processes of change and how they are supported. For the most part, developmentalists view change as potentially beneficial and typically non-negotiable (in the sense that there is much demand for people to continue to adapt to an ever-evolving cultural surround). Some forms of change are preferred as signaling desired kinds of growth in consciousness capacity and self-integration. The form and trajectory of these changes are said to be universal. The college experience is typically designed to intentionally support a form of consciousness change in students that moves them from an embeddedness in the norms and values of their families or cultures of origin towards a critical capacity to determine for themselves what they value and believe.

Students in community college are engaged in negotiating the transition to a new culture, to a new phase of life, and through a particular level of development. Our setting encapsulates all these types of changes. The demands placed on adult learners in this setting by these three forms of transition are considerable. Throughout the upcoming review of our findings, we will maintain that these three forms of transition intersect, yet that the forms of consciousness the participants in our study demonstrate are predictive of the ways in which they experience changes in cultural expectations or life tasks.

We also maintain that an unacceptable alternative to engaging in transition, as the participants in our study courageously do, is stasis. When change is required by the culture, life phase, or developmental agenda, stasis signals a threat to the balance of the individual psychological system. Sometimes, the energy required to bring about change comes from the pain initiated by failing to change. The participants in our study are asked to take up several forms of challenging change simultaneously. To manage this demand successfully, they will require an appropriate set of supports. The program we selected for study is designed to help students move through these critical transitions. We will also explore the developmental appropriateness of the forms of support provided by the program—how it functions as a “holding environment” for student transitions.

To successfully provide a meaningful analysis of how forms of transition are negotiated by adult learners, we need first to more fully outline what our framework entails and how we justify its applicability to our setting.

## **SECTION II: RESEARCH ON AND FRAMEWORKS OF ADULT STUDENTS' UNDERSTANDINGS OF THEIR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES**

In traditional settings of higher education the adult learner is expected to grow in her capacity to think critically while broadening her span of knowledge to include the core claims of diverse disciplines. Ideally, the adult learner will also master a particular discipline or trade that will form a foundation for later professional or personal development. In adult education more generally (in its various guises from community-based literacy centers to workplace training programs), there is not usually a similar emphasis on the growth of critical thinking or the transformation of mind. Yet, if there is a key learning from research on traditional settings of higher education that is broadly applicable to adult education in all settings, it is this: Adult learners can undergo important transformations of their perspectives that shape the way they understand, respond to, and (sometimes) resist education. Like children and adolescents, adult learners can anticipate having the ground of understanding shift as they engage in learning experiences that challenge their existing frame of mind. Like schoolteachers, educators of adults benefit from understanding the form these shifts will take and what forms of supportive instruction will elicit them. To expand the mission of adult basic education to include attention to transformations of mind, educators in these areas might benefit from becoming familiar with the insights of developmental research done in higher educational settings.

While developmental theory has looked at length at how intellectual capacity unfolds in childhood and adolescence, more recent work in the trajectory of adult development has begun to sketch how these stages unfold for adult learners. Developmental educators who have studied adult learning have concentrated on the transformations of mind college students undergo across four years of a liberal arts education. In the various frameworks constructed through research, developmental educators aim to explicate the stages or phases that learners go through (ideally or in practice) as they expand their possibilities for critical thinking. These theories replicate those of developmental child educators in their conviction that learners' minds undergo qualitative changes that are predictable and measurable, that certain environments support the gradual constructions of new ways of understanding, and that change overall moves in the direction from lesser to greater awareness of the core assumptions one brings to any learning engagement. While in theory development can be supported through varying stages for groups of learners, in practice we see that students come to school with differing needs for support, challenge, and pace of growth.

For educators who are aiming to make good design decisions about the content, rhythm, and structure of curriculum for adults, it is useful to have some guiding frameworks for how (and how quickly) adult learners tend to move through stages in understanding toward ever greater capacities for critical thinking and seasoned judgment. The primary lens through which a student encounters educational experience, and how he understands what the enterprise of learning and teaching is all about, will have much to do with his friendliness to certain ideas and the forms of their presentation, his readiness to shift his own perspective when it is called for educationally, and his willingness to reach for new forms of knowing that he may recognize but not yet preference.

Educators who interest themselves in the expansion of the learner's mind as well as the transmission of knowledge are fundamentally developmental in their orientation. Research that brings a developmental perspective to adult learners' experiences has been ongoing for over 30 years, in various settings with different populations of adult learners participating. Many of these studies bring to bear a "neo-Piagetian" perspective on the conceptualization of how learners move through eras of understanding. While Piaget himself concentrated on depicting the processes and stages of growth from infancy through adolescence, the basic premises of his theoretical perspective hold true for adults as well. These researchers take on the question of how students construct the educational enterprise, including a) how students understand the nature of knowledge (what are its sources; whose knowledge is authoritative; who constructs it; how does it change?); b) how they conceive of

their own and their teachers' responsibilities in an ongoing process of learning and teaching; c) how they understand differences in perspectives on knowledge among students and teachers, or disagreements among students or among the faculty; d) how they trace their own changes in perspective over time and what meaning they make of shifts in their own understanding.

Many researchers in this area (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Belenky et al., 1986; Kegan, 1982, 1994; King & Kitchener, 1994; and Weathersby, 1980) state their intellectual indebtedness to William Perry (1970), who was the first developmentalist to explore adult students' meaning-making and to cast his understandings into a predictive framework. Perry did much to set the terms of how later, parallel explorations of adult students' meaning-making would be designed. To understand student perspectives, he employed in-depth interviewing over time, looking to see how student frameworks might change as their education proceeded. Gleaning that the students were the best representatives of their own thinking processes, he let the data tell him how best to discriminate between "positions" the students took and how to represent the overall direction of their growth. (He named nine positions his largely male Harvard undergraduates described over the course of their four years of undergraduate education.) Perry was equally interested in the setbacks students encountered and how they described the challenges to growth that slowed or stalled progress. He named three "alternatives to growth"—temporizing, retreat, and escape—which students described in the course of trying to explain why they were not yet where they themselves thought they should be. And he named the processes and supports students described as being most helpful to them in their resumption of growth.

In later work, other educational researchers interested in similar questions largely followed Perry's lead in structuring their research, laying out their frameworks, and identifying critical success factors that support or prohibit growth. Later researchers also attended to perspectives that Perry's work did not sufficiently address, including those of women, students of different socioeconomic backgrounds, and students in nontraditional educational settings. In our own study, we add the perspectives of students from diverse cultural backgrounds who are ESOL students in a community college setting.

Each of these frameworks is built on the assumption that the positions identified emerge sequentially, predictably, and consistently within the population the researcher was describing. Because the researchers share a foundation in Piagetian psychology and an indebtedness to Perry's seminal work, there are evident similarities across the models. What follows is a thematic review of key claims

shared by these frameworks about the nature, timing, and process of adult development in higher educational settings. While each theorist makes particular claims about how students in their sample make sense of knowledge, educational authority, and their own participation in the educational process, the similarities among the core premises from which these researchers work are important. Fundamentally, these frameworks are useful to teachers and researchers who can apply the collective wisdom about how student understandings are transformed to practice or inquiry.

These frameworks have served to collectively guide our understanding of how learners in our study make sense of their experiences as students throughout the first year of their participation in a program somewhat tailored to their educational and developmental needs. They have been useful to us on three levels: first, they help frame our own expectations of how student development might proceed if the necessary supports are in place; second, they alert us to differences between the participants in our study and those in prior studies in the content of their concerns or the trajectory of their growth; and third, they provide a window into the expectations that are tacitly held by educators who are dedicated to transformational frameworks. Because the participants in our study are coming to American higher education from diverse international primary and secondary school experiences, and because American higher education does preference the development of critical thinking, we can see how the students in our study are effectively acculturated into norms of development as they absorb, communicate, and test the cultural mores being introduced to them through the learning and teaching process.

The spirit of this section is not an exhaustive review of each of these perspectives nor a rich critique of the important differences among them. Instead, it is an opportunity to set forth some formative claims about what is required of adult learners and teachers in higher educational settings. These claims will serve as a backdrop against which we will then set out our own data from international students at BHCC. Our experiences interviewing 17 learners from 10 countries who speak English as a second language both reinforce consistencies in the adult learning research to date and raise new questions for existing frameworks.

#### **Five Core Premises**

Developmental educators who derive their pedagogy from neo-Piagetian premises are fundamentally committed to seeing learners as active constructors of knowledge. Like Piaget, they are interested in the connections between what learners claim to know and how they think they know what they know. These are questions of epistemology as well as of education, and derived from them are a set of core

premises which most developmentalists would recognize as essential to their approach to making sense of the adult learner's enterprise. They include the premises that:

- 1. Students bring deeply held assumptions about the nature of knowledge to the educational enterprise. These assumptions are personal yet they mirror philosophical claims about the nature of knowledge that have been manifested throughout history which have driven larger cultural frames of meaning and inquiry.**
- 2. Students' assumptions about the nature of knowledge are epistemic commitments which influence their goals for themselves as learners, their understanding of the role of student and teacher, their interactions with knowledgeable authorities (texts, teachers), and their satisfactions with the learning enterprise.**
- 3. Students' understanding of the nature of knowledge does and should change as they become more sophisticated in their habits of mind. The change should be directed toward greater recognition of the constructed nature of knowledge and away from naïve conceptions of knowledge as received or instantiated. Students should increase their ability to consider and deliberate on the "goodness" of any claim to knowledge based on the premises behind it and the suitability of the argument made for it.**
- 4. Changes in students' epistemic commitments do not unfold naturally. Learners in general resist change in their ways of knowing and adult students sometimes experience injuries to their identity when change is facilitated.**
- 5. Because change is desirable but readily resisted, developmental educators have to facilitate change through the provision of appropriate challenges to students' current understandings. To offset the potentially damaging impact of extreme challenge, developmental educators must also structure useful and timely supports to students who are being asked to stretch their current conceptual frameworks.**

While developmental educators hold these premises in common, they argue for them based on very different sources of data. The forms of similarity in experience that emerge from studies of very diverse adult populations support the robustness of the core premises while outlining common needs among adult learners in different settings. Let's look at these one at a time, considering how a range of theorists define the essential message of the premise and how it is supported in their data.

**Premise 1: Students bring deeply held assumptions about the nature of knowledge to the educational enterprise. These assumptions are personal yet they mirror philosophical claims about the nature of knowledge that have been manifested throughout history which have driven larger cultural frames of meaning and inquiry.**

Beginning with William Perry, developmental educators have brought forward to the study of adult learning Piaget's central preoccupation with how queries into the nature of knowledge and the processes that drive human development are interdependent. Piaget's studies of how children make sense of their empirical observations of the natural and social worlds were grounded in his fascination with how systems of meaning unfold in formal disciplines such as logic, science, and mathematics. He took the young child to be the analogue of the scientist-philosopher, whose observations were constrained by the network of assumptions he brought to empirical inquiry. Piaget aimed to discover, through observation and careful interviewing of his young subjects, how they came to make faulty claims, so persistently and consistently, about cause and effect in natural and social phenomena. He saw these claims as based in naïve but internally consistent epistemologies; children were like primitive peoples in their understanding of how the world worked before the advent of more scientifically organized modes of thinking. He argued that the epistemic commitments that children brought to their observations and which changed throughout the course of their own development mirrored the evolution of different worldviews throughout history. Especially relevant to later studies of adult learning were Piaget's foundational explorations of children's social and moral worlds—how they made sense of social roles, rules, the origins of authority, and their underlying justifications for right action.

While many educators might argue that these concerns are only indirectly related to the processes of education, developmentalists maintain that they are central to understanding the development of the adult mind in educational contexts. As Belenky and her colleagues (1986) note in their introduction to "Women's Ways of Knowing,"<sup>3</sup>

We do not think of the ordinary person as preoccupied with such difficult and profound questions as: What is truth? What is authority? To whom do I listen? What counts for me as evidence? How do I know what I know? Yet to ask ourselves these questions and to reflect on our answers is more than intellectual

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<sup>3</sup> The book summarized their research with 135 women who were engaged in a variety of forms of adult learning. Roughly two thirds were enrolled in formal academic settings, roughly one third were affiliated with programs offered by community agencies.

exercise, for our basic assumptions about the nature of truth and reality and the origins of knowledge shape the way we see the world and ourselves as participants in it. They affect our definitions of ourselves, our sense of control over life events, our views of teaching and learning, and our conceptions of morality. (p. 3)

Developmental educators who work with adults view the transformation of mind as the primary aim of education. Schema for organizing how learners' minds transform are proffered by most researchers who study adults in educational settings. These schema are organized around positions students take in relationship to their views of themselves as knowers. These positions are then elaborated and their influence on students' views on learning and teaching more generally are articulated. These positions are commonly associated with particular levels of the students' consciousness development that can be systematically assessed. Fundamentally, it is the identification of students first as knowers that sets apart developmental schemes from other prescriptive models of adult learning. And, it is the claim that teaching in these settings is fundamentally about enhancing students' capacities to know in larger ways that marks the prescriptive mindset of developmental education.

The levels described by multiple theorists are roughly analogous, although special concerns of particular populations can result in the addition of levels or in the elaboration of multiple modes through which learners might describe their frameworks. Below, we summarize the levels identified by four models directly derived from studies of adult learners in primarily higher educational settings using a Piagetian perspective. Through the development of these schema, researchers both represent the real world of students' own descriptions of their knowing, while providing a rubric for locating students in the trajectory of their own development and for defining appropriate developmental challenges.

*Level 1*

Across these models, the descriptors vary, as do the number of levels represented. In the most global sense, however, it is possible to sketch a common trajectory that these schema share. Across the models, the first major “position,” “level,” or “stage<sup>4</sup>” is characterized primarily by the learners’ commitment to an absolutist stance toward knowing. Knowledge is seen as “certain or absolute” (Baxter Magolda, 1992), where there is “no recognition of problems for which there are no absolutely true answers” (King & Kitchener, 1994). Learners who are poised at this developmental level understand knowledge to have empirical correlates: It is directly observable and based on facts not subjected to multiple interpretations. Learners who view knowing through this frame are philosophical dualists: they perceive a polar distinction between the true and the false. “From this position, a person construes all issues of truth and morality in the terms of a sweeping and unconsidered differentiation between in-group vs. outgroup. The division is between the familiar world of Authority-right-we, as against the alien world of illegitimate-wrong-others” (Perry, 1970, p. 59).

Several theorists note that proponents of this first position make up only a small percentage of learners’ studied in adult educational settings. As a stance, it is highly undifferentiated. In Perry’s view, “this set of assumptions may indeed be the simplest which a person in our culture may hold on epistemological and axiological matters and still be said to make any assumptions at all” (Perry, 1970, p. 59).

*Level 2*

With growth and differentiation, the absolutist shifts to a qualified stance on dualism. In what Baxter-Magolda names “transitional knowing,” the learner recognizes that some knowledge is only “partially certain” (p. 30). This is a state brought about, in the learner’s view, not by the relative nature of truth, but by the incomplete state of knowledge in certain disciplines or sub-disciplines. Knowledge will be complete, but that ideal state has not yet been realized by authorities in the field. Movement to this level signals an awareness or acknowledgement that uncertainties exist in what is known, yet not necessarily a tolerance for the incomplete state of knowledge. Rather, the learner “accords pluralism of thought and judgment the status of a mere

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<sup>4</sup> The terms used by developmentalists vary, yet all represent an internally consistent frame of reference from which the learner interprets educational experience. Kegan’s model, which forms the backdrop for this study, currently uses the term “level” to describe distinct developmental frameworks demonstrated by adult learners. This is the term we adopt.

procedural impediment intervening between the taking up of a problem and finding *the answer*” (Perry, 1970, p. 78).

*Level 3*

With further growth, the learner comes to understand that uncertainty of knowing is not dependent solely on the *status* of truth but has more to do with the *nature* of truth. Models vary in the number of levels named between dualism and the full emergence of “relativism” but are fairly consistent in their descriptions of this framework. Here the realization dawns that truth is not ultimate nor singular “but multiple and infinite” (Belenky, 1986, p. 63). In an ironic twist, the learner who previously embraced authority’s perspective on truth as unquestionable now maintains that “all opinions are equally valid; everyone, including the self, has the capacity and the *right* to hold his or her own opinions” (Belenky, 1986, p. 63). The quality of the learner’s feelings and attitudes about knowledge shift; the perspective moves from one of fair rigidity to an openness that reflects the tentative abandonment of authority:

The word openness captures the essence of the core assumptions of independent knowers. They believed that knowledge was open to many interpretations, that people should be receptive to others’ ideas, that instructors should be open to students’ ideas, and that many possibilities existed in the choices confronting them. This openness facilitated the emergence of individually created perspectives because the risk of being wrong was eliminated. Because knowledge could be seen in so many ways, there was no obligation to make judgments about various views. Although independent knowers did make decisions about what to believe, they rarely identified criteria upon which these should be based. Thus, the independent knowers were free to think for themselves, and they could use their voices with minimum risk. Subsequently, they valued expressing their opinions in all realms of learning and expected others to do the same. (Baxter Magolda, 1992, p. 146)

The development of relativism makes possible the beginnings of critical thinking. To reflect on her own assumptions or on the precepts of her community, a learner first must be able to detect the multiple assumptions that comprise any claim to truth. Yet to bring critical faculties fully to bear on the determination of which truth to preference, the learner must further develop standards and criteria by which to assess multiple claims to truth.

*Level 4*

In a final move common to adult learners in higher educational settings, the learner shifts from relativism to a formal appreciation of how context affects interpretation of what is truth-worthy, and how evidence can be weighed based on its origins and the rigor through which it is arrived. “Contextual knowers incorporated the exchange and comparison of views in their learning process, which was aimed at thinking through knowledge claims and integrating information in order to apply it within a context” (Baxter Magolda, 1992, p. 177). The learner at this level makes use of authoritative views in a field as potential perspectives on which his own truth may be built, but not as voices which determine his view. Learners at this level have come to respect not the status of authority but the process through which an authoritative argument is constructed. Critical thinking is fully possible and the tools through which it can be readily applied are now meaningful for the learner.

The four levels briefly reviewed here collapse important transition steps and cloud interesting distinctions among models. Some models delineate multiple moves between these levels or identify differences in how sub-groups express their understanding of a position. For our purposes here, what matters is that the general trajectory of growth is understood, its epistemological underpinnings acknowledged, and prior work with adult learners who have substantiated these levels is recognized. The schema that researchers present to summarize their findings and to predict the developmental paths of learners in other settings prepare our understanding for the more particular implications of these models for how students understand the learning and teaching process.

**Premise 2: Students’ assumptions about the nature of knowledge are epistemic commitments which influence their goals for themselves as learners, their understanding of the role of student and teacher, their interactions with knowledgeable authorities (texts, teachers) and their satisfactions with the learning enterprise.**

A learners’ assumptions about the nature of knowledge can be assessed directly through probing conversations that ask learners to name and justify their own epistemic commitments. But for teachers generally, the more useful application of the insights of developmental perspectives lay with how learners’ developmental positions influence their broader experience of the educational processes. Often, the most compelling evidence for a student’s commitment to a particular position emerges from her expression of her expectations of her teachers, her discontent with her coursework, her stated confusion over academic requirements. What may first

appear to be disconnected commentary on an array of experiences can be made to cohere when viewed through the lens of developmental theory. In a pure sense, it is useful to sketch how students understand the nature of knowledge and to anticipate how their understandings will change over time. In a practical sense, it is very much worth knowing how students' developmental positions shape their daily experiences and set particular challenges for teachers who aim to support their growth.

A primary focus of our own research has been how students view their own role and that of the teacher (or professor). These views appear to vary in consistent ways across developmental levels. Our observations are supported by work done by other researchers in the field, whose schema often include descriptions of how learners' levels of development influence their understanding of their responsibilities as students and their expectations for their teachers. Marcia Baxter Magolda (1992), for example, describes the perceived role of learner and of instructor for students she followed through a 4-year baccalaureate program in the mid-west United States (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Levels of Development in Educational Settings**

Domain	Absolute Knowing (Level 1) <sup>5</sup>	Transitional Knowing (Level 2)	Independent Knowing (Level 3)	Contextual Knowing (Level 4)
Role of learner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Obtains knowledge from instructor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understands knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thinks for self</li> <li>Shares views with others</li> <li>Creates own perspective</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exchanges and compares perspectives</li> <li>Thinks through problems</li> <li>Integrates and applies knowledge</li> </ul>
Role of instructor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communicates knowledge appropriately</li> <li>Ensures that students understand knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uses methods aimed at understanding</li> <li>Employs methods that help apply knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promotes independent thinking</li> <li>Promotes exchange of opinions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promotes application of knowledge in context</li> <li>Promotes evaluative discussion of perspectives</li> <li>Student and teacher critique each other</li> </ul>

Excerpted from Baxter Magolda, 1992, p. 30.

With the emergence of new forms of knowing, the students in Baxter-Magolda's research shift not only their understanding of their own role but their preferences for methods of learning and for forms of instruction. At the extreme ends of the developmental spectrum, the potential discontinuities in learner

<sup>5</sup> The bracketed level names are added here to demonstrate the link between Baxter Magolda's theory and Kegan's levels.

preferences become most apparent. What is satisfying to an absolute knower who desires clear-cut information directly imparted from an authority will be a source of frustration for a contextual knower who wants to participate in the process of shaping what is known.

In learning environments where one position is implicitly preferred, learners at other levels will likely be dissatisfied with the learning experience. Similarly, instructors who prefer a particular teaching style may find that their audience of learners resists their approach. As Tennant and Pogson (1995) note, “It is difficult to establish a genuine, student-centered, participative, and experiential teaching strategy in an environment where the emphasis is on the expertise and authority of the teacher” (summarizing Usher, p. 127). While educators often assume that the learning environment is established by the culture of the institution, it is also shaped by the habits of mind brought to the experience by learners themselves. Given these differences, educators may make decisions on instructional strategies that provide a range of opportunities for students with varying preferences. Recognizing this form of difference among students aids the design of educational experiences that more adequately address not only learner variation, but also enable the strategic support of growth in the direction of greater capacity, regardless of momentary learner preferences.

The learning process and educational interventions—needs assessment and setting of objectives, determination of readiness for learning, program or curriculum development, instruction, and evaluation—are inherently different depending on . . . the intent of the learner . . . Although [multiple] domains of learning play a part in most learning experiences, emphasis on one or [a]nother calls for interventions appropriate to that domain. Education approaches appropriate for Instrumental learning often have been misapplied to communicative learning. (Mezirow, 1991, p. 226)

Mezirow’s observations are born out in our study, where students at different levels of development demonstrate important differences in their preferences for approaches to instruction.

**Premise 3: Students' understanding of the nature of knowledge does and should change as they become more sophisticated in their habits of mind. The change should be directed toward greater recognition of the constructed nature of knowledge and away from naïve conceptions of knowledge as received or instantiated. Students should increase their ability to consider and deliberate on the "goodness" of any claim to knowledge based on the premises behind it and the suitability of the argument made for it.**

The models developmentalists put forward are not value neutral. Growth in these models is desirable; higher levels of development are viewed as advances that learners would be well served to accomplish. As with education generally, there are goals inherent in the developmentalists' perspective, and these preference steady movement in the direction of greater capacity.

the word "growth" suggests that it is better to grow than to arrest growth or to regress . . . The values built into our scheme are those we assume to be commonly held in significant areas of our culture, finding their most concentrated expression in such institutions as colleges of liberal arts, mental health movements and the like. We happen to subscribe to them ourselves. We would argue, for example, that the final structures of our scheme express an optimally congruent and responsible address to the present state of man's predicament. These are statements of opinion. (Perry, 1970, pp. 44-45)

It is not, in other words, a commonly held opinion among this group of educators that a dualist's frame of reference and a contextualist's are equally adequate. It is probably fair to say that an adult learner who leaves a four-year college maintaining her dualism has been underserved by the institution. The normative stance taken by these models sets standards of accomplishment for learners and teachers both.

In research studies where data is collected longitudinally, data on the normative pace and timing of students' progressions through developmental levels is tracked. These benchmarks could allow comparisons across groups if participant cohorts could be considered comparable. To date, the various cohorts are so diverse as to make comparisons across studies and models difficult. Researchers who focus on previously unstudied cohorts, such as ESOL learners, cannot draw on prior work to determine normative levels for learners or to anticipate the timing of transitions to new developmental capacities. Given what is known, however, about the relationships between particular developmental levels and the emergence of critical thinking, we can assume that some of the explicit tasks of higher education will be better met by students who have demonstrated higher levels of growth.

**Premise 4: Changes in students' epistemic commitments do not unfold naturally. Learners in general resist change in their ways of knowing and adult students sometimes experience injuries to their identity when change is facilitated.**

Kegan (1994) reminds us that “only a fraction of the adults entering school programs do so with the hope or intention of personally growing from being in school. Most have what they (or we?) would consider far more *practical* goals” (p. 293). These do not typically include the complete reorganization of their fundamental belief system. “Learning is an ego threatening activity” (Weathersby, 1980, p. 21) in the sense that it can require that we relinquish the core convictions that we previously struggled to piece together and with which we have become fully identified. Challenges to our sense of our own knowing are experienced as threats to self. “Educators seeking ‘self-direction’ from their adult students are not merely asking them to take on new skills, modify their learning style, or increase their self-confidence. They are asking many of them to change the whole way they understand themselves, their world, and the relationship between the two” (Kegan, 1994, p. 275). Even the activity of engaging purposefully in self-change may feel alien to many learners, whose own developmental position may constrain their definition of education to exclude self-enhancement. Weathersby (1980) notes that the theme of self-development does not emerge in learners’ own perspectives on their educational aims until her “Conscientious Stage,” (similar to Kegan’s Level 3) in which “education (becomes) an experience that affects a person’s inner life” (1980, p. 13). Prior to this development, learners express far more utilitarian perspective on their aims for education. Perry (1970) suggests that “personal will” is required for learners to unmake and reconstitute their basic frames of awareness, and that teachers ought to recognize the moral scope of what students take on when they engage the developmental motion that education requires. “Since each step in the development presents a challenge to a person’s previous assumptions and requires that he redefine and extend his responsibilities, his growth does indeed involve his courage. In short . . . development resembles what used to be called an adventure of the spirit” (p. 44).

The challenges and risks associated with development are likely even more pressing when the educational environment is new and unfamiliar. For students in our research study, who are encountering not only new norms for understanding but a fully novel learning environment, the courage required to transform familiar assumptions and to engage willingly in the reordering of their worldviews is profound. The shifts in identity they undergo are heightened and serve to raise our awareness of how self-concept and epistemological structure are connected.

**Premise 5: Because change is desirable but readily resisted, developmental educators have to facilitate change through the provision of appropriate challenges to students' current understandings. To offset the potentially damaging impact of extreme challenge, developmental educators must also structure useful and timely supports to students who are being asked to stretch their current conceptual frameworks.**

The responsibility for students' progress through educational institutions and forward on their own developmental paths cannot rest only with their personal courage. The provision of a culture that supports students' advances toward their own intentions as well as those of the institutions is also the responsibility of their teachers and of the broader educational community in which they participate. Attention to the process of how learners make sense of their educational experience, an awareness of the different possible forms the experience can take on for learners at different developmental levels, and an assessment of curricular goals and methods from the point of view of the needs of the learner are all forms of support the institution can offer. Attention also to the students' experiences of how their self-understanding is impacted by the claims made on their minds by the educational process is an appropriate function of the institution. In each of these functions, the institution that holds the student as he moves through the process of taking on and letting go of ever new forms of knowing has to somehow simultaneously support and challenge this ongoing evolution. Kegan (1982) describes these functions as comprising "confirmation, contradiction, and continuity," (p. 258) suggesting that there are structures of "holding" that parallel the learners' own experiences of consolidating new ways of knowing.

This premise suggests that teachers and researchers who focus on the contexts in which adults undergo development are successful when they construct appropriate holding environments. In our own research, we are interested in how holding environments reach beyond the institutions' intentional designs to the social and personal spheres through which adult learners access both challenge and support to new ideas and new aims for themselves.

In exploring the perspective shifts we noticed among the participants in our study, we chose not to focus solely on their understandings of themselves as students. Since perspective shifts involve changes to the holistic frameworks that individuals bring to their understanding of all aspects of their lives, limiting our analysis to any one aspect would yield incomplete and perhaps skewed portraits. Instead, we looked for ways that these perspective shifts involved multiple and interacting transitions in several aspects of these participants' lives. We noticed how often participants

returned to the topic of their ultimate dreams and goals. They spoke about the difficulties and joys they experienced in leaving their native countries and trying to make a place for themselves in a new country, a new culture, and among new people. They described the importance of their families and their changing relationships with family members. They related their concerns and hopes about choosing a major field of study and a career path. Many talked about the loss of friendships and the struggle to develop new ones, and some shared stories of the changing shape of their most intimate romantic relationships.

It is when we consider these stories of transition, together with their transitions into the role of community college student, that we are better able to bring into relationship with each other the several dimensions of students' lives. We have new insights about the ways these students face the world, the challenges they face, the priorities they set for themselves. As Kathleen Shaw (1999) argues,

community college students are engaged in a juggling act of sorts with an array of identities. If these students are to successfully manage their various roles—that is, if they are to maintain their identity as students while they also function as parents, workers, and members of a particular racial or ethnic category—community colleges must recognize, embrace, and accommodate the complexity of these students' lives. (pp. 153-4)

Appreciating the many dimensions of students' lives can inform the ways that institutions structure holding environments which appropriately challenge and support their members.

### **SECTION III: TRANSITIONS RELATED TO AGE AND LIFE TASK**

The main purpose of this section is to illustrate the nature of one type of transition happening in the lives of the participants in our study. This transition concerns the specific projects that individuals undertake as they leave their adolescence and enter into the adult world. We make sense of these projects from the ways that students describe their current experiences, desires, and hopes for their careers, their relationships with their families of origin, and their intimate relationships. Listening to these participants' stories, we see interesting relationships between their stories and those of other emerging adults who have been written about by life span theorists.

According to life span theorists, the physical, social, psychological, and emotional changes that individuals experience at given phases of their lives are

interrelated and age-dependent, following a predictable and somewhat uniform course (Arnett, 2000; Erikson, 1964, 1968; Levinson, 1978; 1996; Scarf, 1980; Vaillant, 1977; Wigfield et al, 1996; Wortley & Amatea, 1982). These theorists generally identify the time of life which begins in the late teens and lasts through the mid- to late-20s as a period of entrance into adulthood (Arnett, 2000; Levinson, 1978; 1996; Scarf, 1980; Vaillant, 1977; Wigfield et al, 1996; Wortley & Amatea, 1982). They describe similarities in the types of changes occurring in individuals' lives—in their decisions and plans for their careers, families of origin, and intimate relationships. Our 17 original participants are largely within this same age range. Thirteen are between the ages of 18 and 25. Two are slightly older, at 26 and 27. And two are significantly older at 37 and 38. The vast majority of the students in our study therefore fall within the same developmental era, the late teens through the 20s, and we see similarities between their descriptions of the changes in their lives and those predicted by the literature.

However, we have also noticed that there are important differences, both among the various paths fashioned by the participants in our study and between their paths and those depicted in the life-span literature. By attending specifically to issues of culture, gender, and life experience, we are able to provide explanations for many of these differences. We are therefore able to draw a more complex picture of the ways that the participants in our study make sense of the transitions in their lives. Additionally, we bring a developmental perspective to these transitions. Examining not only *what* the participants in our study describe, but *how* they understand these aspects of their lives highlights other important similarities and differences in their perspectives. Individuals operating with different ways of understanding bring qualitatively different frames to their approach to the transitions in their lives.

The learners in our study also have many similarities in terms of their developmental capacities. Our research measures suggest that all learners share some features of the Socializing way of understanding (Level 3). In fact, for most of the participants in our study, this way of understanding is dominant. Therefore, it is difficult to draw clean distinctions about the differences among the way these students discuss themselves as students and their preferences for processes or approaches to learning. Instead, they seem to represent various points along a continuum, sharing some fundamental features, but also exhibiting subtle but important differences. For students at one end of the continuum, their Socializing ways of understanding are shaded with more Instrumental concerns (Level 2). For students at the other end, there are glimpses of Self-Authorship (Level 4). In order to distinguish between the ways that differences in developmental capacity underlie differences in individual stories, we have chosen excerpts from our interviews that

highlight the developmental differences among the learners. We recognize and remind our readers that in highlighting these distinctions, we downplay similarities, complexities, and subtle nuances in students' meaning-making systems.

Finally, this section serves another important purpose. In describing the major themes in these individuals' lives, we are able to introduce the participants in our study through their own words and stories. Focusing on their age-related transitions, we are also able to see marked distinctions between the preoccupations these BHCC participants bring to the learning endeavor and those at the other two sites discussed in this monograph.

### **Forming a Dream**

According to some life-span theorists (Levinson, 1978, 1996; Scarf, 1980), an important task individuals face as they enter adulthood is to begin forming a "Dream" for their lives. The Dream concerns one's goals and visions for the future.

In its primordial form, a Dream is a vague sense of self-in-world, an imagined possibility of one's adult life that generates excitement and vitality. Though its origins are in childhood, it is a distinctively adult phenomenon: it takes clearer shape and is gradually integrated within (or, often, excluded from) the adult life structure over the course of early adulthood. (Levinson, 1996, p. 238)

In its earliest forms, a Dream may not be fully defined and may not yet involve specific and detailed plans for the future. However, it does provide an initial sense of direction and purpose that can be nurtured and advanced in later years.

Many participants in our study speak explicitly about the importance of forming a Dream for the future, and by the time of our first interviews with them, most had already begun the process of setting goals and envisioning the path their lives will take. Many make explicit links between their ages and their ability to form and pursue these dreams. Armand remembers telling his father that he didn't want to begin college until he had a sense of his larger purposes.

Because, if I just come in and I start to go to school without knowing what is goal ahead, that's a waste of time. Because if you are going to do something you don't like, or probably you'll just do because you just want to do something, and that is a waste of time. You have to know the goal, why you go to school? That's why I'm not surprised to see some people who are older than college age, still coming to

school. That is good, because they know what they are looking for. There is a goal for it.<sup>6</sup>

As his words suggest, younger individuals may be less likely to have identified goals for their lives, while those students who are older are more likely to know these goals, to consider their college experiences in light of their larger life purposes.

A student in his mid-20s, Serge agrees that the process of forming plans and goals is important at his stage in life. However, he warns that these decisions should not be put off for too long; otherwise, individuals will be “miserable” later.

We have to plan how you want your life to be. I want to have a house, you know. A nice car. A nice family. But you gotta plan so that those things can go the way that you want it. You have to organize your life. Because if you don't, you will find yourself a little bit miserable, because you didn't organize your life. You know, when you are in puberty, like, 15 to 17 years old, you don't think, really, about organized life. You think, like, having girlfriends and that's all. You know, but when you are 19 or 20 years old, you going to college, and then you see that you can't do the same in life anymore. You have to change something. You need to organize things, and to plan the way you want things to be. You think about what you want to be in life, and how you can be successful, or how can you be useful for the society. And then you start by making plans for that.

Marie, who is in her early 20s, also feels that she is at a crucial point in her life for making decisions and preparing for her future. Like Serge, she believes that pursuing these goals cannot be postponed for too long, since her age currently affords her “opportunities” that she may not have later in life.

I want to go further in my career. I want to study physical therapy, and I want to be a physical therapist. And I think that my education is really important for me right now, especially at this age. I just turned [a year older]. Because when you are really young, this is when you got the opportunity to continue. When you wait for a certain age, it will be too late. When you have the opportunity to go further, it's when you take the opportunity. That's what I think my education is really important to me right now.

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<sup>6</sup> In this chapter, quotes have been altered to omit interviewer contributions, conversational spacers, and false starts. In places, participants' comments have been reorganized and/or language has been changed slightly to more standardized forms. We have made these changes to prevent readers from being distracted from or confused about the participants' main points.

Despite the slight variation in their ages, all three students see age as an important determinant of when individuals are ready to make important decisions about their goals for the future.

Two important components of the Dream include plans for career and family. These themes are also prominently featured in the life-span literature and are the subjects of important transitions that individuals must make as they move into adulthood. Predictions in the life-span literature about individuals' steps toward careers parallel the transitions the participants in our study describe in their own lives. However, predictions about individuals' increasing focus on intimate relationships, and their growth away from their families of origin, differ significantly from the experiences of the participants in our study.

#### **Career Transitions**

A clear transition the participants in our study describe is their process of choosing a career (see Table 3), a transition which is also predicted in the life-span literature. Daniel Levinson (1978, 1996) argues that the formation of serious career goals is a major task for males and career-oriented women who are in their twenties, often prompted by the need to choose a major field of study. For most participants in our study, choosing a major and career is very important to them and is often a subject they return to in their interviews.

**Table 3: Career Transitions**

Name	Career Transition
Yousef	Wants to continue education to get a better job with a good salary in order to buy a house and support his family. Has chosen computer information for his major. But may change it because the classes are difficult, he doesn't have a computer at home to complete his assignments, and it requires four years of study. Is considering X-ray technician because the coursework is easier, the degree takes only two years, but he can still make a good salary.
Xuan	Wants to be an administrative assistant and be paid well enough to support herself.
Minh	Wants to transfer to a four-year college because it will enable her to get a better job with a good salary. Wants to major in computer information systems. Plans to marry her boyfriend and open a small computer business in New York. A good income will allow her to support her family, so that her children can get a good education and won't have to worry about money like she does. Wants to own a beautiful house.
Gilles	Wants to transfer to a four-year college. In first semester, is deciding whether to be a pharmacist or a journalist. In second semester, wants to be a pharmacist and major in biology. Wants to earn enough money to take care of family and himself.
Abdel	Chooses to major in management because it provides many different career possibilities. Will choose specific career later.
Ling-Hui	Wants to transfer to a four-year university and then go to graduate school. Plans to major in computer science.
Jonas	Wants an education to be prepared for the future. Mentions he may major in accounting, but he isn't sure. Wants to be a good example for his brothers, sisters, and future children—to help them get good jobs, be happy, and treat people well. Wants to provide his future children with a good education.
Armand	In the first semester, he says he is thinking about a career and major in travel management because he enjoys thinking about how to help customers. In the second semester, he describes plans to transfer to a four-year college and is considering a major in international business.
Tak-Jang	Wants to transfer to a four-year university. During the first semester, he was trying to decide between pharmacy and computer studies. Both are subjects he is interested in, but he has more interest in biology than in computers, and pharmacy doesn't take as many years to learn. By the end of the first semester, he has decided on pharmacy. His goals are to have a profession, make some money, and make his family happy. If he makes enough money, he wants to open his own restaurant.
Natalia	Wants to major in biology. In first semester, is unclear about profession and says she is considering many things. In second semester, she has decided she wants to transfer to a four-year university and do medical research for her profession.
Fawzia	In first semester, can't decide between nursing and computer science. Likes computer science but also likes nursing because it is "connected to life" and because others have advised her that it is a good choice and that she can get a nursing job easily. In second semester, she decides on nursing and plans to major in medical administration, transfer to a four-year university, and then switch her major to nursing. Wants to make a lot of money and help support her family.

(Table 3 Continued)

Name	Career Transition
Benetta	Wants to be a nurse because she likes to help people, especially elderly people who cannot do many things by themselves. Wants to be a professional so that she can take care of her husband, mother, and future children. Wants to have her own house and for her children to get a good education. Wants to provide her family with a better life.
Gabriela	Wants to transfer to a four-year university. Originally wanted to be a biology teacher, but after living in the U.S., she has become more interested in being a social worker, to counsel teenagers (especially Latino teenagers), to be a model for them and someone they can talk to. She wants a job that pays well so she can be independent and support herself if necessary.
Marie	Wants to transfer to a four-year college and become a physical therapist. Wants to work for herself because she doesn't like to have bosses who tell her what to do. A good job and an education will mean that other people will respect her. Wants her future children to be proud of her.
Sonja	Has always wanted to work in radio broadcasting, but didn't have the opportunity to study this subject until she came to the U.S. Wants to prove herself to others and play the music she likes.
Serge	Trying to decide between being a physical therapist and pharmacist. Wants to be a pharmacist because he feels he can do well and likes math and science. Wants to have a nice family, house, and a car.
Fei-Wen	Has not yet decided on a career or major. In the first semester, she is interested in nursing. In the second semester, she considers psychology. She is very interested in psychology but thinks it would be hard to find a job, and she wants to graduate as soon as possible and get a better job.

In his study of “emerging adulthood,” the ages between 18 and 25, Jeffrey Jensen Arnett (2000) argues that college students typically change majors more than once as they experiment with different possible occupational futures. He views these experiments as guided both by the need to prepare for adult roles, and by the need to partake in “explorations for their own sake” (p. 474). In this period in individuals’ lives, engaging in exploration is “part of obtaining a broad range of life experiences before taking on enduring—and limiting—adult responsibilities” (p. 474). There are two students in our study who seem to have this type of attitude about their choice of a major. Abdel, a student in his mid-20s, seems content to focus on college, choosing a general major which will enable him to make career decisions later.

Well, actually, I'm major in management. I have a lot of things to do with management. But I give myself more time. I don't want to think about what I will do after college. I'm focusing now on college first. Maybe I get another opportunity for other things that I have in mind. So, I will leave that when the time comes up.

And when we first interviewed her, Fei-Wen also seemed interested in keeping her options open.

Sometimes my friends and family think I would better have a job than go to school. Don't spend so much money, and don't spend time because they want me to get a job. Then I can earn a lot of money. Because, you know, I have to spend a lot, and if I want to continue to study I will spend a lot to come and study. They want to know the result, what is your learning result? So, if you can learn something faster, that's okay. If you will spend so many times, maybe then it's useless. I don't know, but I'm interested in learning so I want to learn.

However, by the end of the semester Fei-Wen describes herself as feeling much more pressure to choose a major, complete her degree, and find a "better job."

Sometimes I think if psychology is my own language I will learn it as my major. But it's not, you know, if I learn psychology, I think maybe I looking for a job is difficult. When I've got a better job maybe I came back to school to learn more psychology to help me. But now I don't choose it. Because I want to finish. I want to get a diploma as soon as possible. If I spend a lot of time learn psychology, I will delay my other course.

Compared to the other participants in our study, Abdel seems to be the exception rather than the rule. While many participants change their minds about their majors over the course of our study, there is little indication that their exploration of possible majors involves much exploration "for its own sake." And most, unlike Abdel, often speak in great detail, with a sense of urgency, about the ways they are thinking about their decision. These students consider the ways that their choice of major will prepare them for various adult roles and responsibilities. They mention factors such as salary, their own long-term interests and abilities, the number of available jobs in a given field, the amount of preparation required for certain jobs, and the impact of particular jobs on their ability to provide for their family and home country.

At the beginning of the program, Gilles is deciding between being a journalist or a pharmacist. Both options have interest for him, although he is also aware of some disadvantages to journalism. In weighing these two possibilities, Gilles orients to the ways that these jobs will impact his ability to take care of and protect himself and his future family. He is also interested in developing skills that will enable him to help the people in his own country.

When I get my diploma, I would like to start a family and get a good job. I want to be able to take care of my family and myself. I don't know yet what kind of job I want, but I like studying chemistry, and I am thinking about being a pharmacist. I would like to study about chemical reactions and medicines, yeah. But sometime I think I would like to study journalism and be a reporter. I would like that. But in my country, some reporters don't have enough safety, and they can die. That's why I'm not sure about it. I have to think about protecting my family.

I like journalism because I would like to tell things to people in my country. They will love the journalists who can talk with them and make them feel comfortable. I want to tell people about the true things that happen, and talk to them in a way to make them feel comfortable. When I talking to them, they listen to me, and they will be happy. And you can, you can get more friends as a journalist and more intelligence with your practical talk.

By the end of the program, he has committed to majoring in biology and pursuing a career in pharmacy. In talking with his friends, Gilles realizes that becoming a pharmacist might also be a way to help people. "[It's important to me] to help people in my country. My family, my friends, too." He appears to have no interest in postponing consideration of these future plans in favor of accumulating a broader range of experience. As he makes these decisions, therefore, Gilles focuses solely on the future responsibilities he hopes to fulfill.

Tak-Jang is also trying to make a decision about his career goals and is interested in both pharmacy and computer science. Like Gilles, Tak-Jang deliberates on the implications of this decision on his future goals and shows no interest in deferring his decision until a later time.

I have a goal. I want to reach it. My goal is to have some profession and then make my family, you can say, happy.

I'm not sure which course I should take in next semester. I have interest biology and computer. Next semester I need choose one of them. I know some about computers because I have learned some basic concepts of it. But maybe I will choose to be a pharmacist because now I'm studying Psychology, about the functions of the brain and human body. So, I also have some basic concepts. Maybe I can take a major or minor, but my English may not be that good enough to do it, to deal with them. So, I must just take one of those. I can't pick it now.

If I learn computer, I must be taking a long time. The computer is so complicated, and so many things for me to learn. Maybe six years, seven years. But pharmacy is

not that long I think. So maybe pharmacist is the first choice because now I'm not too young. So, that time is also important to me.

At the end of the first semester, he says he has chosen pharmacy.

So, I'm going to study pharmacy, I think, after two more semesters. I just start to decide that. Now I make my mind to choose the pharmacist because I'm more interested in learning biology thing. That's why I want to pick that. Also, my sister and my parents say pharmacists can make more money.

Tak-Jang does not, in fact, feel that he has the luxury of time in choosing a major. He sees this decision as having important implications for the courses he takes each semester, as well as for the number of years he will need to study. In his mid-20s, Tak-Jang feels increasing pressure to attain his career goals of earning sufficient money and being a professional.

While both Tak-Jang and Gilles struggle to decide which path to follow, some participants seem to have an easier time making a choice about their majors and their future careers. Minh seems much more certain of her decision to study computer science, even though she has also made that decision very recently.

In [my native country] I study economics. But here I change my mind. Now my major is computer information systems. It's very difficult to study economics here because communications is very important in economics, and I only have a short time to study. So, I change my mind to computer, and I like computer too.

For Sonja, having the opportunity to prepare for a career in broadcasting enables her to fulfill a dream she has had since childhood.

I really like music, and I really like radio. That was like my dream since forever. And I didn't have that opportunity in my country. And when I came here, I suddenly got an opportunity, and I wouldn't miss it for anything, so now I want to be a radio broadcaster. I don't know why that career is so exciting to me. I mean, I can spend hours and hours in my room, listening to music. And can you imagine how will I feel if I do that in some place and actually earn money for that. And then, I don't know, I feel free. I feel like that's freedom.

In the past, I lived by a radio station. My friend, he worked there. And I was just there to see. Basically, I didn't do anything. I was just sitting there and watching what he was doing, and it was a local radio station, nothing big, nothing huge. But, I don't know, I talked about it months after that. I was talking still about it. But even before I went there, I knew that, that like radio was something I really like.

Neither Minh nor Sonja shows interest in exploring other possibilities. In fact, Minh's concerns, that she has only "a short time to study," indicate that delaying her decision might cause her to feel increased anxiety.

There are several contextual factors which might contribute to the seriousness and sense of urgency the participants in our study express. Arnett (2000) argues that even in highly industrialized countries, some individuals may not experience a sense of freedom about how they make educational and occupational decisions. Minority and working-class individuals are likely to experience limitations on the available opportunities for exploration, and they may therefore feel a greater sense of pressure to take on adult roles. These conditions certainly apply to the participants in our study, who often face significant social and financial pressures in their daily lives.

Additionally, students may experience the culture and circumstances of the institution itself as a source of pressure. As students of a community college, their career choice determines whether they will need a two-year degree or whether they will need to transfer to a four-year institution. For students considering transfer, their chosen field, the courses they select, and their academic performance take on increased significance. They have little time or opportunity to risk on experimentation or careless decisions. Ling-Hui seems to experience the greatest amount of pressure in preparing to transfer.

After I graduate here I have to transfer [to a four-year institution.] I don't know they will accept me on that. So if I have to worry about this.

She is unique among the participants in our study in that she plans to transfer twice. Before applying to a four-year university, she will first transfer to another two-year institution that she thinks has a better record of preparing students for transfer to four-year universities.

I think if we finish two years here already, it's only 60% to transfer [to a four-year university] so I want to—if I can transfer as soon as possible, so that's why I just study for first semester and then I transfer.

While Ling-Hui may therefore experience even greater pressure to make good decisions about her coursework and choice of major, the majority of the participants in our study also consider transferring, either before or upon completion of their Associate's degree.

Another influence that the institution may have for the participants in our study is that the selection of majors at BHCC reflects a strong emphasis on job

training and preparation. While students may choose to major in English or biology, majors which could lead to several different career choices, other majors such as travel and computer information systems are directly linked to careers. There may not be other considerations beyond future occupation that are suggested to students. According to our data, none of the participants in our study report speaking to an advisor, teacher, or career counselor to help them choose their major and future career. They are therefore reliant on their own judgment, although many also report seeking the advice of friends and/or family.

### **How Participants Choose Their Majors and Future Careers**

The life-span literature is a helpful lens in highlighting the importance of the transitions toward career and work in the participants' experiences. It helps us describe the *content* of their concerns about their choice of a major and future career. It also helps highlight some of the contextual factors that might influence students' decisions. However, it does not provide us much help in understanding *the structure* of the participants' thinking, the fundamental ways that they frame their experiences of themselves, their relationships, and their goals. It cannot account for the different capacities students demonstrate as they make these decisions. Looking at students' reasoning through a constructive-developmental lens, differences among the learners' orientations to these decisions become clear.

#### Growing from Instrumental Ways of Understanding

Many of the learners in our study place great emphasis on the practical implications of their career choice. Nine specifically mention the importance of choosing a career that will provide them with a good salary. Some think about the availability of jobs within a given field. Participants also consider the steps they must follow to complete their major and become qualified for the type of work they seek, comparing the amount of education and training involved and the relative difficulty of the coursework. A few mention worries about choosing careers which require expertise in English. These are all important considerations, and given the significant pressures and obstacles the participants in our study face as they chart their own futures, they are wise to deliberate about them.

However, some participants *only* weigh these factors and in doing so, they limit their reasoning to the concrete aspects of the decision. For students operating primarily with an Instrumental way of understanding, goals are based on concrete needs and desires and are achieved by following prescribed concrete steps and rules. Such students may also rely heavily on the concrete advice and experiences of others,

often accepting this information without question as necessary steps to achieve their goals.

Although Yousef has begun to develop Socializing ways of understanding, he still relies primarily on Instrumental ways of understanding to make his career decisions. Trying to decide between becoming an X-ray technician or a computer scientist, Yousef talks about the importance of such practical concerns as money, easier coursework, and job benefits. Depending on the experiences of his friends to help him decide, Yousef has great difficulty determining which friend's advice he should follow.

I decided to take computer information because I have my friend also he took the computer information. He's working now. He tell me take computer information. You can work and you can transfer to another university to finish four years. He tell me you can work and you can study also. Now he's going the evening to [a four-year university]. He want to finish four years. Yeah, I do same. He's doing good. He get good job, he has good office and good team there, they are all together. He has benefits, he has vacation, he has one month every year, vacation. But I have other friends who are X-ray technicians, and they are happy too. I saw them. They own house; they stay here; they eat good. They didn't work hard. Sometime they work overtime. They call them every time. You can make good money from overtime. Yeah, but now I'm thinking about computer information. Because I decide to buy computer. Next week, I will buy one computer. I don't know.

It would be easy for me to take X-ray technician. I think this one is better because easier for me to take this one. It's only two years. But computer you have to finish four years if you want to get good job, good salary, pay. But what the most thing important to me is computer information because you can get good job, good money.

Yousef mentions concrete aspects of a job that help him determine if it is "a good job" or not. He considers a job's potential in providing employee benefits, vacation time, and salary. These features will enable him to meet his concrete needs and desires, to eat well and own a house. He also considers steps he must take to prepare for a job, the amount of time and relative ease of the preparatory coursework. While he does include the advice and experience of his friends as he deliberates, he does so only in terms of what he thinks their advice will get him. He does not actually try to imagine how these friends understand their work and feel about it. Neither does he consider the potential ways that his decision to accept or reject their advice might impact these friends' opinions of him. These considerations would demonstrate greater growth toward a Socializing way of understanding his career and friendships. He looks to advice from his friends for information that might

potentially affect his purposes; from his words, there is no indication that he considers their advice as potentially forming or changing the purposes themselves.

#### Balancing Around Socializing Ways of Understanding

While students operating out of a Socializing way of understanding may also consider concrete and practical aspects of their decisions, they possess the ability to reflect on themselves in more abstract terms. In forming their goals, they may orient more toward their inner lives and subjective states, emphasizing concerns about their character and interests. They may identify and evaluate multiple paths toward any given goal. While they also seek out the opinions of others, these individuals are able to focus not only on the specific advice, but they internalize the perspective of important others in their lives. They may act in accordance with another's wishes out of a sense of loyalty or obligation, as a means of preserving an important relationship. Earlier in this section, we presented Tak-Jang's thoughts about how he might choose between pharmacy and computer science. However, as Tak-Jang continued to describe his decision, he mentioned that he has long had the goal of opening his own restaurant. This goal, however, is not one that his parents share for him. In selecting a major and career, Tak-Jang places great emphasis on the wishes and expectations of his parents.

When I was in Hong Kong I always went to a certain restaurant to talk with the boss. At that time I start to build up that imagination. I want to be a restaurant owner. This thing is since I was 16 years old. I think it's about that age. My parents want me to have a good profession, and then in the future have a good life. The good life means I will have enough money. They have some expectations. My father wants me to become a computer technician, but I also want to open a restaurant. Both thing I want. It's hard to say about the future. Sometimes it depends on the destiny, right? Sometimes it isn't you hands, your mind, how to make yourself rich. Maybe in future, after eight years of working, I can have enough money to open restaurant. But my parents just want me to study some profession, but that's all. And they give me some direction, "You can working, save some money to open your business." I just want to do something for them. They gave me the expectation. The very best is if I can do all the things I want and they want.

Tak-Jang demonstrates his ability to consider other people's opinions not just in terms of how they *inform* his own purposes but for how they can *form* the purposes themselves. While his goal of owning a restaurant could be seen as being in conflict with his father's goal for him to become a computer technician, Tak-Jang emphasizes the agreement and commonality between his father's wishes and his own. He tells us he wants *both* things, and that *he wants* to do what *they want*. In

this sense, he orients to the ways that they can have a mutual understanding of the best decision he can make. In demonstrating this Socializing way of understanding, Tak-Jang is not unlike an American college student who chooses to attend the college of his parents' dreams, or who focuses on his peers' approval in order to determine his own behavior.

#### Growing Toward Self-Authoring Ways of Understanding

As students evolve out of these Socializing ways of understanding, they develop their own standards and values, and are able to act on them, mindful of, but more independent of what others think or expect. They may still consider the advice of others, but they do not accept responsibility for the feelings of others about their decisions. Thus, should important others disagree with their decisions, these students do not necessarily perceive these conflicts as threatening to their relationships. Rather, the relationship itself supports and gives permission for more independent and autonomous thinking. They can come to their own conclusions based on their internal standards and values. In the end, decisions are their own.

Sonja, who is evolving out of a Socializing way of understanding and into a Self-Authoring way of understanding, has not received much encouragement from others in pursuing a career in radio broadcasting. Many assume that she will find no opportunities for work, or that she will have to return to her native country since she will always have an accent.

Then again, in my country, people are like, "Oh, come on. You're crazy. You don't have a chance for that. You know that." No one really takes me seriously about that. Even me. I was like, "Yeah, I like to do radio, and that would be great. But come on. Get a life. Do something else." Here, people react at school okay. The only problem I have is English. I'm aware that I don't speak English. Even after five, six years, I will always have this accent. Everybody's like, "So, do you plan to go back to your country when you finish here?" I mean, honestly, I really don't care where I'm going to work. My country or here. I just think that's the work what I want. I don't know much about radio. I know that I like that, and I don't know what kind of work I can do.

While Sonja seems to recognize that her accent might pose problems for her, she does not automatically accept others' beliefs that she must return to her native country to find work. Instead, she makes clear that she will be the one to decide where she will work, and that she does not yet have the information she needs to make that decision.

So hopefully when I start to go to school, and when I learn more about it, then I like decide what am I actually want to do. And when I decide then I'll probably know do I want to work here, or do I want to work in my country.

In this instance, she demonstrates a Self-Authoring way of understanding. She is able to tolerate the conflict between her own hopes and others' beliefs about her hopes, and she does not express the need to minimize this conflict. Her Self-Authoring capabilities enable her to hold onto and consider these conflicting views, waiting until she can integrate them with the necessary information, support, and experience to make her own career decisions.

Using the life-span literature in conjunction with a developmental perspective therefore enables us to deepen our understanding of the ways participants make decisions about their major field and future career. We can see that common features such as students' ages and context combine to exert pressures on them to make choices about the direction their educational paths will take, and we can also attend to important differences in the ways the students make these decisions. These differences in developmental capacity contribute powerfully to the ways that students will make sense of the demands they face and have implications for the types of supports they need to help them successfully meet their goals. We will return to these larger issues later in this chapter. First, we describe another type of age-related transition predicted in the life-span literature, the changing relationship of young adults to their families of origin.

### **Family Transitions**

Many of the participants in our study describe transitions they are making in their roles as family members (see Table 4). According to many life-span theorists, individuals moving from adolescence into young adulthood should be making significant progress toward achieving greater independence and separation from their families of origin (Erikson, 1964, 1968; Levinson, 1978, 1996; Scarf, 1980; Vaillant, 1977; Wortley & Amatea, 1982). Some theorists argue that adolescents need to differentiate their selves and their beliefs from their parents in order to form their own identity (Erikson, 1964, 1968; Vaillant, 1977). In Levinson's studies (1977, 1996), both men and women in their late teens and early 20s were separating psychologically from their parents. For the women, this process of separation continued into their later twenties as well.

**Table 4: Family Transitions**

Name	Family Transition
Yousef	Has close relationship to his parents, uncle, and sister. Decided not to marry the girlfriend he loves in order to marry the girl his father chose for him. Made that decision because his father was sick, he was afraid that the two families would fight, is following his religious and cultural beliefs. But, he still loves his first girlfriend and has continued to write letters to her. Considers bringing her to the U.S. Feels lonely in the U.S. without his family.
Xuan	Lives with her mother and father but is interested in moving out to be on her own. Says that she does not tell her parents much about her academic coursework.
Minh	Wanted to stay in her native country where she could have graduated and gotten a good job and where she had many friends. But, because she is the oldest child in her family, she needed to come here with her parents. She made that decision because she loves her parents, and they need her help. She says that in her native country, children cannot make decisions without their parents. She hopes that she will be able to help her parents financially, since they have always worked hard to provide for her.
Gilles	Both parents are deceased. Sometimes he feels angry about that and misses them.
Abdel	Talks only a little about his family, but he says they are proud of him and that they are a source of support, motivation, and encouragement for him.
Ling-Hui	Parents live in her native country. She was living and studying in Australia and wanted to stay there, but her family decided she should come to the U.S. and live her with aunt. Feels there is more pressure on her in the U.S. Sometimes she can make her own decisions, but her family knows better about many things, and so often she follows their advice.
Jonas	Only member of his immediate family living in the U.S. His mother is extremely important to him. She worries about him a lot and wants him to go to school in his native country. She worked very hard and paid for his schooling and tells him what to do. Father was killed by guerrillas when he was six or seven years old. Does not have a good relationship with his brothers and sisters, who have treated him badly. Decided to leave the program before the end of the first semester and return to his native country because his mother became ill.
Armand	His sister has lived in the U.S. for many years has been able to help him adjust to being in this country. Describes his parents as having always been very open to many different kinds of people. Mother is deceased. Father is supportive and encouraging of Armand's decision to work toward his diploma.
Tak-Jang	Wanted to stay in his native country because he felt he was too old to go back to school and work so hard. However, he came because his parents cut relations with his other brother, and Tak-Jang now represents their hopes and expectations. These hopes and expectations are common for parents from his native country to have, but he thinks Americans believe these ideas are foolish. He wants his family to be happy.
Natalia	Parents want to spend a lot of time with her, to take care of her and keep her close to them. Doesn't want them to be hurt or angry and worries about them if she is out. Is very close to her brother. The idea of being without her family makes her feel confused, alone, cold, and dark.

(Table 4 Continued)

Name	Family Transition
Fawzia	Parents live in her native country. Father is a physician. When Fawzia was young, he often taught her about science and medicine and let her visit and sometimes work at his hospital. Fawzia tries not to tell her parents anything that will make them worry about her.
Benetta	Is married and lives with her husband. Has a very close relationship to her mother, who she says is her best friend. Mother wants her to go back to her native country and study there, but Benetta disagrees. Has good relationship with her brother and stepfather.
Gabriela	Immediate family, including parents and two brothers, live in the U.S. One brother studies at a university in Boston and gives her advice about how to help finance her education. Also gets a lot of encouragement from friends and family in her native country.
Marie	Has five brothers and sisters, including Serge. Didn't want to go back to school, but parents told her that if she didn't, she had to live on her own. She feels that this was good pressure; it encouraged her. Without their financial support, she wouldn't be able to be in school. Parents don't want her to have a boyfriend until she finishes school. She talks to them to explain what she wants, that she can make her own decisions.
Sonja	Has no secrets from her mother and talks to her about important decisions. Her mother tells her what she thinks but allows Sonja to decide for herself. Tells her mother about her life because she wants her mother to trust her.
Serge	Talks to his family about the decisions he makes. It is part of his culture and religion to respect, honor, and listen to his parents. When parents give their children advice, it shows that they love their children and want to help them. Doesn't want to be by himself where his family aren't around him to support him and help him succeed. Now parents come to him to talk about their decisions, give him more responsibility. Helps to teach his brothers and sisters.
Fei-Wen	Parents would prefer that she work rather than study and are very focused on the impact of her studying on her future occupation. Her husband would also prefer that she be earning money. However, his main concern is that she be happy. She describes him as "a little boy" who doesn't understand "what is American life." They cannot communicate much because they are so far away from each other.

Some of the participants in our study do have or want more separation from their families of origin. Six of 17 participants live separately from their parents, a fact which may necessitate greater psychological separation. Other participants seek greater autonomy from one or more of their parents, a change which may signal successful development, but for many also presents them with serious emotional and psychological consequences. In his research on women's life transitions Levinson (1996) describes how when parent-child relationships fail to transform, the relationship itself becomes stressful and is at risk for dissolution.

The daughter's developmental task in the Early Adult Transition is to transform the relationship to the family of origin from the childhood pattern to one that is more adult, not cut it off altogether. It is important to diminish certain aspects of the existing relationship; for example, those in which she is the excessively submissive

or defiant child in relation to all-controlling parents. It is important also to sustain other aspects and to build in new qualities such as mutual respect between individuals who have separate (though still partially intertwined ) lives . . . If the relationships cannot be modified in a way appropriate to the developmental needs of both offspring and parents, they will become increasingly stressful and may in time wither away—a much more widespread phenomenon than is usually recognized. (p. 71)

However, if young adults fail to differentiate from their parents, such failure may lead to an inability to attain the tasks of adulthood—achieving intimacy and committing to a career (Vaillant, 1977).

Making these complicated transitions can be difficult under any circumstances, but the path becomes even more precarious when family life is characterized by abuse, alcoholism, fragmentation, or dysfunction. Levinson (1996) suggests that such conditions are “inimical” (p. 61) to individuals’ development, but he does not argue that these individuals should or do follow developmental paths that are significantly different from those of individuals facing fewer “environmental stresses or constraints” (p. 61). A few participants in our study describe experiences of significant stress and turmoil in their families. All three seek greater separation from members of their family, although these separations do not complete their tasks in the manner recommended by life-span theorists. We do not believe that their responses to their family situations are therefore unhealthy or developmentally inappropriate. Instead, we suggest that the path described in the existing literature may be too narrow and prescriptive to account for the range of situations that individuals experience. Further studies of young adults navigating these transitions could contribute to a broader, more complex and inclusive theory of life-span development. Here, we offer three students’ stories in order to raise questions for future research to address.

One young woman participant,<sup>7</sup> who is in her late teens, wants to achieve a greater separation from her father and describes her increasing independence as a threat to their relationship. She is eager to move out because she doesn’t agree with her father’s strict rules for her and wants to escape his physical punishments when she disobeys him.

My family is important to me. Family is once-in-a-lifetime. You only have one mom or one dad. I love my mom more than my dad ’cause my dad is too strict. He

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<sup>7</sup> We purposefully refrain from using this student’s pseudonym, to mask any risk of revealing her identity. We include the story because it illustrates an important, and common, challenge young adults face, and demonstrates how her meaning-system impacts her capacity to direct desirable changes in her life.

doesn't let me go out and doesn't let me have boyfriends. But I have them anyway. And I like my mom better, 'cause, you know, she let me do anything I want. She doesn't even get in my way, lets me have boyfriends, lets me go out if my father doesn't. As long as I don't do anything wrong such as smoking, drinking, that stuff. She tells me those things are bad. My dad has stricter rules. Last time I got caught having boyfriend, he hit me. That's why I hate him. Having a boyfriend's no big deal. Why does he have to hit me? That happened when I was in tenth grade. It's just that my parents have old fashioned way, or my dad's old fashioned.

I want to move out if I can support myself here. I'd miss my mom because I like her more than my father. You know, she's nice. She's not strict. She cares for me, asks me what do I want to eat. She never yell at me. She never lay a hand on me. I would want to stay in the house, if my dad go somewhere else. Because he has hit me more than once. I skipped school, he hit me. I didn't stop worrying that he might do it again. I want to go to school, achieve my goal and then later on move out. Go to work. You know, if you go to school and get you major, you can support yourself. Get good job. You don't need to worry about anything.

This participant's rejection of her father's beliefs about how she should live her life may indicate she is making progress toward attaining her own identity and independence. She may reject her father's commands as a means of asserting her refusal to be completely determined by him. However, her ability to form her own identity and achieve independence may also be at risk here if the physical threats her father poses to her actually push her toward a self-reliance she is not yet ready to assume. Without more information, it is difficult to determine how much her desire for increased separation from her father could be a healthy part of her development or result primarily from a need to escape unsafe conditions at home.

A second young woman participant has also struggled against her father's attempts to control her. Her decision to leave her native country and come to the U.S. involved a difficult separation from her father's wishes and expectations for her. However, this participant's decision also required her to assess her feelings of responsibility for her mother. While coming to the U.S. involves physical separation from her mother, she accepts responsibility for providing financial support to her mother. Taking on new and adult responsibilities for parents is not a task that the life-span literature describes as part of young adults' changing relationships toward their families.

I always worried about my mother. Because I am her only child. My parents are separate now. They divorce. So, my father, he marry another woman. And my mother, she live alone. Sometimes I went to my father house and sometimes I went to my mother house. And they don't have peace. They fighting, you know. And in my country, there is not jobs, you know. Because ladies, they don't work in my country. Most often they don't work. So, my mother, she is not working. Just she waiting for me, you know. I work. I study. And then I send money for her. And she doesn't have anything, you know, anybody to help her. And now also, with my country is fighting with [another country]. So everything is expensive, you know. Even the light is expensive. Even the food. Everything is expensive. So, I can help her. If I send her money every three months or six months, she can live okay.

I made the decision to leave [my native country] and come to the U.S. myself. Because I got visa lottery. And I filled out. When I filled it, I sent it to here. And my father, he told me not to come here. He was thinking like that. And he say, "You're not going to America." But, you know, I was thinking about my mother. I love my mother. And he hide my visa because he don't want me to continue the process. And then I told him, "Please father, I want to go." I told him and he say, "No. You're not going. If you go to America, you help your mother. I don't want you to help you mother." And he hid the visa. He told me, "I'm gonna tear it." I told him, "Please!" Yeah. I was crying. I was so angry! I was crying something! I told him, "Please! Please! Please!"

In two weeks the visa would expire. Finally when my father is going to work, I broke his locked drawer. And his wife wasn't home. I take out my visa. That's it. Then I went out from that house. I fill everything out. Then I send to America by express letter. He don't know. But when he came, he saw it's broken. He need to kill me! He need to kill me. But I told him, "Do you want to kill me? Now I am, like, 20 years old, so you don't need to kill me. I can do whatever I want." So, just I told him like that. And policeman told him, "Don't touch her! She can do whatever she wants. It's her decision. If she wants, she can go. You not decide about her life." They told him.

I send the visa express. In two months, it's coming back. It says, "Okay." Oh my God, I was so happy! I just got the interview everything. But I was crying! But if I don't success, oh my goodness! I'm going be dead! Just I was thinking like that!

But my decision is, when I graduate, I need to bring my mother here. Because my father doesn't do well for my mother. My mother told me the history of my father. He is so bad! Because when I live with him, he doesn't care about me, you know. And his wife, she is not my mother, and she doesn't think about me. She's not my mother.

Like the first student, this participant has been trying to negotiate new relationships to her parents, a transition which presents the possibility of healthy development as well as potentially serious risk. While her ability to psychosocially separate from her father's views about how she should live her life may indicate developmental progress, the nature of this separation also seems to constitute a loss for her. While an individual's search for greater independence and separation may typically involve loss, ideally, it does not involve isolation. George Vaillant (1977) explains this distinction quite clearly. "As we lose or separate ourselves from people that we love, we internalize them. . . . As adolescents consciously focus on all that is bad about their parents in order to extricate themselves from the backwards pull, they escape and take their parents with them" (p. 207). Demonstrating this pattern, the young adult career women in Levinson's study (1996) continued to

experience their parents as important sources of emotional nurturance and moral authority, even as they strove to gain greater emotional independence . . . while seeking greater psychological (as well as social and geographical) distance from parents . . . , they also sought to maintain emotional ties and to avoid any actions that might rupture the relationship. (p. 242)

It is doubtful whether this young woman could describe her relationship to her father in such terms. Her separation from her father does not enable to maintain a close and healthy adult relationship with her father, at least during the time that we knew her. However, given the circumstances she faced, this separation may in fact contribute toward her own developing sense of identity, and it may be the wisest choice she can make in her circumstances.

Additionally, she has taken on increased financial (and perhaps emotional) responsibility for her mother. This added responsibility is freely chosen by the student and provides a way for her to care for her mother in difficult times. However, it also comes at a cost to her in that she must sacrifice her relationship with her father in order to provide for her mother. She must also take on the additional adult responsibilities of making enough money to support her mother as well as herself.

A third participant's transitioning relationships to her family also puts her in extraordinarily difficult circumstances. Soon after this young woman was born in Central America, her parents came to the U.S., leaving her and her brother to stay with other relatives. Eventually, her brother decided to join their parents in the United States, and at the age of 20, the young woman in our study decided to come as well, to join her family in the U.S. Unfortunately, her relationship with her parents

did not live up to her hopes, and she eventually decided that she must move away from them as well.

When I was at age 21, I meet my biological mother and father. Before that, I was so depressed I never meet them, to have the opportunity to know who you are in your life. Always I ask the question, "How is my mother? How is my father?" I grew up with one of my mother's aunts. I was always living with my brother, always together. But we have to separate in 1992. I just stay in [my native country], and he came to U.S.A. So, it was hard for me. I think that's when I started to be independent, the first time that I was being on my own. So, we separate for four years. I came here in 1996 because I wanted to have the opportunity to meet my mother, to see my brother again, and to meet my little brother.

When I came here, I found things that is not the same way that I thought. First, the language. Second, the education. Third, things in my house. I have problems in my house with my father because my father [has a substance abuse problem]. So the environment, it's not healthy. My mother has to work. At first, I wasn't able to work because I couldn't understand the language, but then, I got a job, and I go to school at the same time. And I try to help her, but I think she defends too much him. He's my father, but that's another thing that I want to be understand, if you not ready to get a child, don't do it. Don't do it because it's not easy for your babies and for you. Because when people is [abusing substances], they are not strong. They fall and they start to do things again, and my little brother, he's in not a good shape. He's not doing well in school. He drinks alcohol, and I talk to him, and I explain. I try to help him, but it's hard. It's so hard. He listen to me, but he didn't do the things that I told him. I say, "How do you see your future in six months and one year?" And want that he finish high school and go to college because he's very good at math.

I would think, "What's wrong here? Why we don't get along each other?" And I was like, "Because we weren't together even for the very, very beginning. It was from the very beginning of that, we weren't together. I know the whole picture of my life now. I am trying to take that from a good, good example not for take things only in the bad picture, the black. I'm trying to see the things in the color too. Accept what is positive, what's negative.

I have to be my own. I believe in education. Is the only thing that can give you freedom. Because if you've got your career. But this is important because I will get well paid so I can live just by myself. I can do that. And I think I can be independent from my family here, my brother, or even my boyfriend, or husband, whatever, so I can be independent.

Like the other young women described above, this participant's decision to separate from her family is not driven mainly by her developmental needs for increasing autonomy. In fact, she was actually searching for greater connection to her biological parents, and it is only with great pain that she chooses to move out of their house. She interprets their relational difficulties as resulting from the fact that for so long, they weren't together as a family. There has been no strong bond among them which she might now seek to renegotiate.

These three young women only superficially fit the general pattern of young adult development as involving increasing physical and psychological separations from family members. Their painful renegotiations of these relationships may contribute to what the literature describes as healthy development toward identity formation and autonomy. Yet such developments are spurred by situations where their well-being is at risk, and with growth toward autonomy, they also experience significant loss and sacrifice. The stories these participants tell are troubling and complex, and we suggest that rather than folding them into a perhaps overly narrow developmental trajectory suggested by life-span theorists, greater attention needs to be paid the unique circumstances of these individuals' lives. Further studies might contribute to increased understanding of how familial abuse and dysfunction impacts the course of individuals' life-span development.

Contrary to the established profile presented in the life-span literature, many of the participants in our study express the clear desire to remain interdependent with their family members and to allow them to have great influence in major decisions they make. Any moves they make toward greater separation are hesitant and uneasy. Instead of concluding that some of the participants in our study are developmentally-delayed, experiencing unhealthy attachments to their families of origin, we suggest that these students illustrate another way in which the life-span literature is too restrictive to account for their perspectives. There are several plausible explanations for why we do not see greater shifts toward separation and autonomy among the participants in our study. After allowing students to explain the importance they place on close family relationships and their hopes for continued interdependency, we will suggest some possible ways of understanding and interpreting these hopes.

Natalia describes the incredibly close relationship she has with her parents and with her brother. For her, the idea of separation invokes fear and loneliness.

I just love my family. Parents, children, always together. It is important. Just family. From the very young age, I remember that. Parents and family together. For example when I came to my room and I see all family together in one table, and they hugged me, and they loved me, and they talking about this is the most

important. For me, it is like my soul. I want to have it all the way. It is the most important thing, I think. If I didn't have my family I would feel alone. I will feel confused. I want to have all my friends and all people around me and I want to have a lot of fun always. And so I am really scary to be alone. It scares me. I don't like that.

My brother understands me pretty good. He always joking. He knows everything about me. He says, "You don't look so good today. You should change this, this and this." And I will change it. I will change it. When my parents say something I will not care. If he says it looks okay, it means it looks great, and I will not change anything. When my birthday, I take my hair like this. He says, "Wow, it is wonderful." I don't touch it. No more. When he says that, I think it means I did a great job. I did something for him. Sometimes I tried to do this for him, and not for myself.

In our last interview with her, Natalia says she actually has become more like the kind of person her parents want her to be. Afraid that her father will not speak to her if she does things to make him angry, Natalia prefers not to "make any problems."

If I do something to make him really mad, he will not talk to me. He didn't talk to my brother for a year. If he will not talk to me for a year and I will live with him, I know I better don't live there because I will always crying. If I live with somebody, I have to talk. I have to connect with people. He's my father. I'm living with him. If he will not talk to me it won't be any relationship. Because I know it will always be like, he was looking at me like, really angry. He will not talk to me.

Over the course of this year, I became softer. I became more flexible. More often, I speak to my parents about things they want to hear, not because I just want to say something. I started using words that they want. I started changing to be the way they wanted me to be. I am studying hard. I am doing more things that they want to do.

Rather than apologizing for maintaining closeness to her parents and conforming to their wishes, Natalia thinks of these changes in herself as progress. She feels she can understand her parents better and seeks advice from her boyfriend's mother to help her "think more" about her family. While her course runs counter to that mapped for her by life-span theorists, Natalia feels she is moving in a positive direction.

Jonas also has an extraordinary close relationship with one of his parents. He has relied heavily on his mother's psychological and emotional support, saying she is the only close relationship that he currently has in his life. They have maintained this

closeness despite the fact that he has been living in the U.S. for four years, while she has stayed in Central America.

She advise me, all the time, which one is the best thing for me, the good and bad things that I do. She's really important. I love her. When I need to know something, I ask to my mother, and say, "Mom, what is this?" And she explain me something. Sometimes she didn't know what I was talking about, but she helped me a lot.

My mother. I love my mother. I don't know how I can say about her, but she is a wonderful woman. I always say she is the best mother in the world. She can make good moral education, and also because she helps me. She put me in school to study. She send me to school. She paid for all that. She worked so hard for her. She was alone because my father was dead. And I don't know words to tell how is my mother. I love her that is the only thing I can say. I never had friends before. Just my mother.

From a life-span perspective, Jonas' closeness to his mother may prevent him from achieving his own identity and forging new intimate relationships. In her book about the ways that incomplete phases in women's development can lead them to depression, Maggie Scarf (1980) discusses the strategies that adolescents may employ when they cannot achieve satisfactory inner independence from their parents. One strategy is "that of putting distance between oneself and one's family: going very far away from the parents in order to create the façade of an achieved independence . . . [In some cases,] the adolescent has gone far away, but she or he hasn't succeeded in making the real separation" (p. 20). According to Scarf, such adolescents have not completed the inner work necessary to form a stable sense of self and identity. Reading Jonas' words through the lens of life-span theorists sounds a warning about the success of his personal development.

It is especially upsetting to Jonas, later in the semester, to hear that his mother has become sick and to be unsure about how serious her illness is. He is so distraught that he decides to leave the U.S. and return home to be with her. We did not have a chance to talk with Jonas about his decision to leave, but one of his teachers, Carol, remembers how difficult this period of time was for him.

He was very worried about his mother. All the time. She was supposed to have some surgery. He thought she would die. And he was constantly coming in crying and telling me he was going to leave the next week to go home. And then he'd stay, and then he'd go. He was in counseling. He was going down there all the time. He was always vocal about his feelings.

So, I really got to the point where I was uneasy with him being in the States. I kept thinking, "If he doesn't get home, and get near his mother and his family . . ." He had a number of brothers, one of whom I think was a doctor and was kind of giving him the news about the mother, but he felt like they were withholding information because he was here, and his mother wouldn't tell him. His mother wouldn't speak to him on the phone because she was afraid that she would worry him too much. And here's the great irony: That the kid was out of his mind. If only his mother had gotten on the phone a couple of times, it might have been better.

Jonas' return home might alarm life-span theorists in that it might have consequences for his ability to make developmental progress toward greater independence. However, his return certainly seems understandable given the stress and concern any son might feel in similar circumstances.

Why don't these students seek the autonomy that life-span theorists see as crucial to successfully attaining adulthood? We wonder if issues of culture and gender, as well the experience of immigration, may combine to create a different type of life course for the participants in our study. Additionally, we point to the importance of developmental capacity in determining an individual's readiness to renegotiate important relationships.

The vast majority of the individuals studied by life-span theorists have grown up in the United States and may therefore have notions about independence and autonomy that differ from those held by members of other cultures. For example, although American students might be more likely to leave their parents' homes when they go to college, they are not necessarily more independent in the ways that they make decisions. Instead, their decisions may simply be shaped by the opinions of different people in their lives, their friends and larger peer group. Having achieved a measure of physical separation from their parents, they may not achieve any increased independence or autonomy of thought.

Another argument some cultural psychologists make is that conceptions of the self are influenced significantly by cultural biases. According to Markus and Kitayama (1997), Americans in general are likely to view individuals as separate entities, possessing particular attributes that are relatively unrelated to context.

Despite the growing body of psychological and anthropological evidence that people hold divergent views about the self, most of what psychologists currently know about human nature is based on one particular view—the so-called Western view of the individual as an independent, self-contained, autonomous entity who (a) comprises a unique configuration of internal attributes (e.g., traits, abilities,

motives, and values) and (b) behaves primarily as a consequence of those internal attributes. (p. 264)

In contrast, many Asian, African, southern European, and Latin-American cultures are more likely to have a more interdependent view of selfhood. For these cultures, the self is understood as it relates to other people and in specific contexts.

With respect to cognition, for example, for those with interdependent selves, in contrast to those with independent selves, some aspects of knowledge representation and some of the processes involved in social and nonsocial thinking alike are influenced by a pervasive attentiveness to the relevant *others* in the social context. Thus, one's actions are more likely to be seen as situationally bound, and characterizations of the individual will include this context. Furthermore, for those with interdependent construals of the self, both the expression and the experience of emotions and motives may be significantly shaped and governed by a consideration of the reactions of others. (p. 225)

This conception of the self as interdependent would not, therefore, be likely to appear among the individuals included in the life-span development studies. Using only the American conception of an independent self as a standard, other conceptions of the self would appear atypical, less developed. Such a perspective wrongly equates cultural differences with indications of differences in developmental progression.

Many of the learners in our study acknowledge that their decisions are ones that make sense for them, their families, and other members of their culture, but they realize that their values run counter to U.S. cultural expectations. Tak-Jang explains why, at age 27, he decided to come with his parents to the U.S. and enroll at BHCC, even though he would have personally preferred to stay in Hong Kong.

My goal is to have some profession and then make my family happy. Last year, I didn't want to come here. But my family really wanted me to study something. I thought, so many [people from my city] want to come to U.S.A., but now I get a chance. So, I want to do it. I want to do whatever. If I just only thought of my age, I didn't want to come here. I graduate in high school eight or nine years ago. I have been working a lot of jobs in [my native city]. I have no going to school for a long time. Now, I need to pick up my school back. It's so difficult.

My family have some expectations on me. I have a brother. You can say he's a bad guy. There were some problems. And then my parents was so upset what he did and then cut the relationship from him. And then now, they just got the last son is me. And then I want to do something to make up for that. I want to do something to make them feel a hope, an expectation of another son. Because one son has

already hurt them. Now they got last chance on me. So I thought about this and say, okay I try. So I want to come to U.S.A. I want to do whatever. I think for Americans, that's a fool action, right? Because the parents [in my native country] always make some expectations on their son. I think some Americans, they think that [people in my native country] have a foolish thought, a foolish mind. Maybe if I didn't make that decision, I'd stay in [my native city]. I just like working in hotel or do some clerk job, or something like that. But now, I have been here for near one year. I accept studying and working and save some money. Now I begin to accept all those things.

Tak-Jang's explanation illustrates his awareness of the different value systems operating in his native country and in the United States. From the perspective of his native country, Tak-Jang's decision to follow his parents' wishes represents the natural fulfillment of his parents' expectations. From an American perspective, Tak-Jang's decision might appear to be "a fool action," the product of "a foolish thought, a foolish mind." Aware of these differences in perspective, Tak-Jang accepts the decisions he has made.

Minh was also reluctant to leave her home country, where she was about to complete her university education. However, she decided to come with her parents because she was raised believing that children should respect the decisions of their parents.

It make me very sad to leave [my native country]. But, I have no choice because I'm the oldest in my family. So I help my parents a lot because my parents can't speak English, and I can speak a little bit. So, I think I can help them in the new country. It's very difficult for them in the new country, so I have to follow. I didn't want to go to United States because I will get a good job in [my native country]. And I have a lot of friends [there]. My environment is very good. But I have no choice because my parents want me to leave. I didn't say I would not come to the U.S. Because I love my parents I didn't say that. Also, I feel very sad, but I didn't say that because they disagree. Our country custom is children have to listen to the parents. It's not in the United States. When I lived in my country, my friend called to my house and you know what my father said? "She's not home. She sleeps. She's not home." Sometimes that made me angry, but I have no choice. I don't know, but I always feel afraid when speaking to my parents, face-to-face to my parents. Now it's a little bit easy because America and because now I'm older. I can make a decision without my parents. But they say that almost all the parents love their children, and they want their children have a good husband, have a good family, have a good education.

Like Tak-Jang, Minh clearly identifies a difference in cultural values about the ideal conception of the self. However, she has begun to make more of her own decisions, in part due to her age, and in part because that is easier to do in America.

Female students might also experience less incentive to or need for differentiation from their parents than male students do. Scarf (1980) argues that women are more likely than men to find their sense of self-esteem and worth in the context of their intimate relationships. Their dreams for the future, then, are more likely to be formed and fulfilled in relation to important others in their lives. Scarf suggests that before a young woman has formed an intimate relationship with a boyfriend or husband,<sup>8</sup> she may allow some parts of her plans and her self to remain open to the influence of this hoped-for partner, and she will therefore experience less need to differentiate from her parents. “A sense of very firm ego boundaries, of knowing who one is and what one wants and where one is going, can be a relative disadvantage when it comes right down to the difficult—yet critically important—life business of establishing a love bond” (p. 246). In women’s development, therefore, the establishment of an independent identity may not precede the formation of intimate relationships. These two tasks may happen simultaneously and symbiotically.

One final factor that may influence the closeness of some participants’ relationships with their families of origin relates to their experiences as immigrants. For many, the experience of leaving their home countries and moving to the U.S. with their families may have strengthened the bonds between family members.

Sonja talks about how the war in her home country, which prompted her family’s move, has made her realize how important her family is to her.

My family is still number one in my life, my mother and my father, especially now in this situation. I have an uncle over there. And my whole father’s relatives, everybody’s over there in [my native country]. My uncle is in a lot of bombing. I think after the bombing in [my city], I think now they are even more important to me.

Others also realize that their parents depend on them. Fawzia’s mother still lives in their native country, and Fawzia sends her money for support. Minh’s parents rely

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<sup>8</sup> We are aware of this author’s implicit expectation (described here and in other places in this chapter) that young females will form only heterosexual intimate relationships. We acknowledge the limitations of this perspective but do not specifically include a discussion of same-sex relationships since none are described among the participants in our study.

on her to help them when they have difficulty communicating in English. Benetta feels gratitude for the sacrifices her mother has made to provide a better life for her and her family.

My mom spend money for me to be here, and all the time she been here, and she will try to get down residence and stuff like that for me and my brother. You know, I want to stay here and help her.

Thus, the complexity of these participants' lives illustrates a weakness in life-span theories. Their reliance on American cultural constructs of the self and its developmental progression limits their depiction of the various paths development can take. As is the case with their explanations of career transitions, this literature can not account for important differences in how young adults understand their relationships to their families of origin. More complex and inclusive could be informed by considering issues of culture, gender, and life experience. Regarding family transitions through a developmental lens also contributes important distinctions.

### **How Participants Construct their Beliefs about Family**

#### Growing Away From Instrumental Ways of Understanding

The psychological relationship an individual is able to form with his parents also depends upon that individual's developmental capacity. Yousef, who operates predominantly with Instrumental ways of understanding, had not seen his family in a couple of years and was excited about the possibility of visiting them that coming September. He looked forward to bringing them gifts and making them happy.

I think I go [to see my parents in] September. I'm excited to take some gifts for them. From here you take many things, like you take many things from here. But problem how you take this from here to there. If you ship things by airplane bit expensive. You don't have to take too much luggage. Take only little thing, something like you find Boston on the t-shirts. I have to bring some presents for them. I'm also excited to take some watch from here. Gold also. I want to bring them presents because they become more happy then. You can give them money but money I think to finish, you give them something more than good. Everybody want his family to be happy, friendly. The best thing [about their happiness is] to give them enough money. If they have enough money they can do other things, like they can go to eat out in the restaurant. They go to visit another country. [That's important to me because] if I help them, they will help me because in the past they help me so much. They give me money to come here, they send me to school, they help me so much. Without them I can't go to school. I can't go.

Having lived apart from his parents for two years, Yousef might seem to be successfully achieving separation so that he might fully form his own identity. He does not seem to be completely defined by his parents' wishes and hopes for him, does not show indications that his parents' point of view influences the forming of his own point of view. However, Yousef has not yet developed the capacity to internalize his parents' wishes and hopes for him. Instead, he relates to their wishes and hopes by viewing them in terms of their possible consequences for him. It is important to him to help his parents, and if he helps them, they in turn, will help him.

Yousef also focuses on the concrete pleasures he will experience upon seeing his parents and on the concrete things he can give them to make them happy. He demonstrates his concrete understanding of his parents' pleasure in terms of the specific concrete things he can give them such as t-shirts, watches, and money.

#### Balancing Around Socializing Ways of Understanding

For most of the participants in our study, the Socializing way of understanding is the dominant way of making meaning, and all of the participants in our study possess it to some degree. As is the case with Minh and Tak-Jang, even when these learners can identify that their own wishes for themselves are different from those of their parents, it is extremely upsetting and viewed personally as wrong to act on behalf of these wishes. In such cases, the individual may alter her beliefs and wishes to be more in line with those of important others in her life. Ling-Hui, who also operates predominantly from a Socializing way of understanding, describes how she has chosen to follow the wishes of her family and friends.

I went to Australia before. I study English there, and I think I want stay there, but my family say, "Come to America." I told them, "I don't want to come here," but they forced me to come here because my aunts and uncles say better to come here, so my mother believes that. But also, I didn't very strong say, "I don't want to come here. I want to stay in Australia." I think it's useless, so I didn't do that. And I think, maybe, like, their decision is better than my decision because maybe I want to study there just because I make some friends there, and I used to the environment there. And, I think if I came here, I will have many pressures, and my sister come here, so they will compare us. I don't like that. So, I want to study there by myself. And, I don't know. I think if I had stayed in Australia by myself, maybe I was lazy and go to school late. And sometimes play. I want to be very good student, I think. Because sometimes people have to be pushed, and some people need a little bit of pressure, I think.

Ling-Hui can acknowledge the existence of conflict between her beliefs and those of her parents. She feels very uncomfortable, though, in accepting this conflict with her parents and seeks to decrease it in favor of a more mutual resolution which will preserve the fabric of their relationship. She accomplishes this resolution by claiming that her parents actually can make a better decision than she can, that following their wishes rather than her own initial opinions is actually in her own best interest. She relies on her parents' opinions to help her form her own and thus demonstrates her reliance on Socializing ways of understanding.

Growing Toward Self-Authoring Ways of Understanding

In contrast, those participants who have developed a greater sense of Self-Authorship have negotiated a relationship with their parents that enables them to make more decisions for themselves. It is important to note that these students are not necessarily interested in severing the relationship or even making the relationship less central in their lives. They need not embrace American conceptions of independent selves. Instead, their role in relationship to their parents allows them to take on new, more adult responsibilities while maintaining interdependent conceptions of their selves.

Benetta describes how she is able to talk with her mother and listen to her mother's advice and opinions. She does not follow this advice blindly but considers it along with her other thoughts and retains the authority for making her own decisions.

I have a big problem with my mother because she says that I have to go, I *have* to go back to my country, and get my career there, my degree. She says it's too difficult for me to get here because it will take long time, and she says, "Baby, there's school for you if you come back to our country. It will be easy for you, and it's your language." But, that is not what are my plans to do because I want to get my career here with English. And that's why I want to stay here, and she say, "No, baby, come back to your country, to my country and do it." But it's my decision. I am going to stay here. It is hard when we disagree about important things. But I think she understands. She understands. Maybe not right now, but she will.

Achieving this degree of Self-Authorship does not require Benetta to establish physical or emotional distance from her mother. In fact, she describes their relationship as "very good" and claims her mother as her "best friend." Her mother's understanding and acceptance of her and her choices, however, enables Benetta to develop Self-Authoring abilities without severing the relationship. In this instance, both mother and daughter can accept their differences in opinion and discuss these

differences in order for Benetta to reach her own decision *and* maintain a strong relationship with her mother.

Another student developing toward Self-Authoring ways of understanding, Serge has a very interdependent relationship with his parents, taking advice from them and feeling depressed when his mother doesn't support his decisions. However, there are times when Serge decides to make decisions for himself, decisions which run counter to the expectations and values of his parents. He is also taking on increasing responsibility in the family. He can give advice to his parents, and he helps to raise his younger brothers and sisters.

Some decisions I make by myself. Sometimes I have to ask my mom about something if she likes it, or my brother. If she likes it okay then I go forward. I try to find if the decision I make is going to be good for me, or if everyone around me is going to be supportive. Sometimes if my mom is not supporting me in something, then I feel very depressed. Like I am doing something that she doesn't really like. That's why I always ask her about if she likes what I am doing or she doesn't like what I am doing. 'Cause I really like my mom.

I think it is a part of the way we grew up and it is a part of my culture that you have to listen to your parents and respect your parents and honor your parents. And it is a part of my religion, too. Sometimes you don't want to take advice. Sometimes they can give you it, but you don't want to take it. You think it is bad. Sometimes if you sit down and go over what they told you, you will see that sometimes there is positive things you can take for yourself. Because they love you, and if they love you they are never gonna let you go. They would never let you fall. And then when you are 27 or 30 years old, their parents always try to help you. Even when you are married, they always think they are your parents and they can come anytime and help you and say, "This is no good. This is what you have to do." I don't find it a problem. In a way it has a lot of my religion in it and my culture built in. I don't think it is a problem for me. Sometimes taking advice from your parents is really good.

Some decision I want to take I don't go to them. Like if I wanted to take a decision about I wanted to have a house in [my native country], and I know they don't want me to. That's a decision for myself. And I say that I want to have a house because when I am retired and I can go back. They say "no." They know they not going to have a house [in my native country] because it is too dangerous now. Well that is their opinion about it. I have my own opinion about it. I have my own country. We have a little, not a fight, but a little discussion about it. But I really know if I want to do it in the future, to build a house, I am going to build it. Because it is my idea, and I am going to do it, and nobody's going to take it from me.

I am the oldest in the family. If my parents cannot make a decision they come to me and sit down with me and say, "Serge I'm going to take this and this and this. What do you think about it?" So I can make you a part of responsible. So you know I say, why do my parents make me sit down and tell me? They can do it for themselves. But they you can be their friend if you have something you have to come and talk to them. That's really good and I want to keep the same way with my kids.

Like many of our other participants, Serge is aware of the ways that taking advice is part of his culture and religion in ways that might contrast with American values. He chooses to continue to follow these practices in most situations. There are times, however, when he makes decisions that go against the wishes of his parents. Whether or not he follows their advice, however, does not tell us about his developmental capabilities. What is important is that he freely chooses when and why he will follow his parents' advice and when to follow his own wishes.

Serge's description of his new familial responsibilities also demonstrate the ways that he retains an interdependent view of self while achieving Self-Authoring ways of understanding. His parents have begun to consult him as they make decisions that impact the family. While he does not provide detailed descriptions of how he helps them make these decisions, he does not appear threatened by his parents' lack of agreement on the best possible course of action. Neither does he describe feelings of pressure in giving them his own opinion. While there is not enough data here to demonstrate conclusively that Serge experiences these new responsibilities using a Self-Authoring way of understanding, we include them here as an example of one way an individual might develop his own identity without weakening or threatening the bonds he has to his parents.

Examining the changes the participants in our study undergo in their family relationships reveals a complex interplay among issues of age, life experience, culture, gender, and developmental capacity. Attending to these issues reveals important patterns among the students in our study. They also provide interesting explanations for some of the ways the students in our study differ from each other and from the life-span literature. In the following section, we examine one more age-related transition, the forming and deepening of love relationships.

### **Intimacy Transitions**

According to life-span theorists, another major task for young adults in their twenties is to establish an intimate relationship, a love relationship generally leading to marriage and children (Arnett, 2000; Erikson, 1964, 1968; Levinson, 1978; 1996; Scarf, 1980; Vaillant, 1977; Wigfield et al, 1996; Wortley & Amatea, 1982). According to Erikson (1964, 1968), as young adults develop their own sense of identity they become ready to form close affiliations, to commit themselves to others in newly intimate ways. The forming of these bonds is an important developmental progression, for “the avoidance of such experiences because of a fear of ego loss may lead to a deep sense of isolation and consequent self-absorption” (1964, p. 264). While this transition has been undertaken by some of the participants in our study, many do not seem focused on this aspect of their lives (see Table 5).

**Table 5: Intimacy Transitions**

Name	Intimacy Transition
Yousef	Decided not to marry the girlfriend he loves in order to marry the girl his father chose for him. Made that decision because his father was sick, he was afraid that the two families would fight, is following his religious and cultural beliefs. But, he still loves his first girlfriend and has continued to write letters to her. Considers bringing her to the U.S. Feels lonely in the U.S. without his family.
Xuan	In the first semester, tries to decide between her boyfriend she has dated for two years and a new boy she is seeing.
Minh	Has a boyfriend who lives in a nearby state who visits her every two weeks, and whom she hopes to marry. She describes him as very hard working, encouraging of her, a “model” for her to follow. Says she has no friends.
Gilles	Worries about his friends and says he doesn’t have too many. Some smoke, stay out late, act crazy, drink and drive. One from his home country died after an illness. Another was drinking and died after falling into a river.
Abdel	Misses friends from home country very much. Has not made friends in the U.S. because he feels that Americans are not open or friendly. Is very busy, too, and must concentrate on school.
Ling-Hui	No mention.
Jonas	A relationship with his girlfriend ended six months before our first interviews. Says he doesn’t have friends because he isn’t social, doesn’t drink or smoke. Didn’t have friends in his native country either, just his mother.
Armand	No mention.
Tak-Jang	No mention.
Natalia	Has a boyfriend (her brother’s roommate) who is very important to her. He “pushes” her, encouraging her and helping her to study. Mentions good relations with friends.
Fawzia	Refers to new friends she is making, doesn’t discuss them in detail.
Benetta	Is married and lives with husband.
Gabriela	Has made some friends in the U.S. who have given her a lot of support.
Marie	Says she has no friends and feels lonely.
Sonja	Had many friends in her native country; has had some trouble making friends in the U.S. It is important to her to be completely honest with her friends if they are to be close. In second semester, meets boyfriend with whom she becomes very close.
Serge	Refers briefly to a girlfriend as someone who helps him memorize vocabulary words.
Fei-Wen	Is married; husband lives in her native country. Had many friends there but feels that others don’t need her in U.S. Meets some new people over the course of the year.

Three of the participants in our study (Yousef, Benetta, and Fei-Wen) are married; however, neither Fei-Wen nor Benetta speak much about their husbands in their interviews. Fei-Wen's husband still lives in China, a situation that makes communication between them difficult. Benetta's husband, Jorge, lives with her in the U.S. She says only that he helps and supports her. Yousef, on the other hand, speaks in depth about his decision to follow his father's wishes and marry a girl that he doesn't love instead of the one he does love.

I used to love one girl named Selam. But my father, he don't like her. I didn't marry her. But I married as he liked because he tell me, "marry to my family." I married from his family. Most of people in [my native country], they married family. You can't marry from other place. The girl I love is different family. If I don't marry from family, father will become angry. He tell me, "I don't like this one." Also, he's sick, you know. I think he die of this something.

I leave my heart. I know this is not right decision, but I do this because of my father only. He's sick. I like other decision, but no way to do that. Something bad might happen if I marry the girl I want. You have to do the rule of religion, you know. I am Muslim. You have to marry from your family first. Second, you can keep Sabbath. Also, I have to go by my father. My religion says you have to go behind your father and your mother. I was choosing my father over myself. But if I had to choose again, I would choose my first girlfriend because my heart likes this one. Yeah, I feel good and very happy. All my heart going to her. But I don't feel anything about my wife now. In America, you have to marry to one you want. Yeah, different rules. Sometime I think I brought her here. I go back there, and I married her. Sometime, my mind tell me that. (laughter). Maybe my father would be upset; yeah, of course. But, sometimes, I think I marry by secret. We still have relationship. I send letters to her. She send letters to me. Many times, my father tells me, "don't send letters." I do it anyway. Sometimes I call.

Yousef struggles to find a way out of this dilemma. Conflicting beliefs send different messages to him about what is most important about the formation of intimate relationships. Choosing a partner out of feelings of love and feelings of intimacy may coincide more closely with Erikson's description of a healthy developmental progression. Yousef recognizes this choice as one that aligns with American beliefs about marriage. However, the cultural and religious practices of his native country suggest that Yousef should act according to different priorities. He wonders about what the consequences might have been had he not married within his father's family.

I look for my father because he's sick is his problem. And if I didn't do it, how come might he do? Bad things might happen. Maybe my family and her family fight together. Yeah, maybe they'd fight together, do something wrong.

I have to cover my family first. Because maybe nobody come to marry this girl. She's married [in the family]. Better than other men.

Given the importance of his marriage partner to the continued good familial relations, Yousef did not feel that he could act simply according to his own wishes. His dilemma indicates that there may be important differences among cultural priorities for individual development. While our data here is limited, we believe that it points to the need for further investigations of the heterogeneity of cultural beliefs about the development of intimate relationships. Such investigations would add greater complexity to the life-span theories.

Six of the participants in our study (Minh, Xuan, Tak-Jang, Natalia, Serge, and Sonja) are in dating relationships for at least some portion of our study. Minh speaks briefly about the possibility that she will marry her boyfriend.

My boyfriend, he's very computer science. And maybe I'm marriage to him, and we are study computer. We intend to have our own small business about computers in New York. We just intend to sell computer software, something like this.

The other five do not mention specific plans for the future of their relationships, and only Xuan and Natalia talk about these relationships in any detail. Later in this section, we will explore their comments using a developmental lens.

Eight students are single and give no indication that they are in any romantic relationships. While some talk about their feelings of loneliness and longing for friendship, none mention that they specifically want a romantic relationship. However, several include references to future spouses and children when they talk about their dreams for the future, so it seems that love relationships are important for the participants in our study.

Why do so many of the participants in our study choose not to focus on developing intimate love relationships when life-span theorists suggest that it should be a dominant theme at this stage in their lives? For the female students, gender may play a role. Another possible explanation is that moving from their own countries to the U.S. has created significant upheaval in their social lives, interrupting and delaying the formation of intimate relationships for many.

Maggie Scarf (1980) argues that women's lives are much less likely to follow the linear course predicted for men's lives.

Women's lives, if you look at them over time, rarely follow a straight line from "identity" to "intimacy" and so forth. On the contrary, their unfolding selfhood seems to occur in cycles, or phases, rather than in a movement forward, or in a single direction. If you look at where a woman has been, and what her major goals have been in different 10-year segments of her life, you'll often find sudden discontinuities, surprises—and frequently astonishing ingenuity and invention! There's far more shifting of direction, of moving off in a new way to make up for time lost, and of returning, later in life, to goals and preoccupations that have been abandoned earlier, in a way that might have seemed final then. There is by no means that undeviating male progression from "identity" to "intimacy" to "generativity" . . . that Erik Erikson has so tellingly described. (p. 248)

These discontinuities may be especially evident among women who hope to combine career and family in their lives. Such goals may lead to a dilemma within women because each role prescribes different types of demands upon her, different expectations for her behavior. Sociologist Mirra Komarovsky sees these differences as diametrically opposed, necessitating the development of two different selves.

Young adult females who are . . . trying to develop themselves in both work and love simultaneously, are also having to develop two differing kinds of selves simultaneously. In her intimate life, as she relates to her opposite sex partner, this young woman is expected to be someone warm and emotional, nurturant, expressive, noncompetitive, supportive, more compliant, and so forth . . . The built-in conflict, however, and the ambivalent set of signals with which she must deal, stems from the fact that in her occupational world she'll have to show much more of the typically masculine forms of behavior-self-assertion, competitiveness, control, dominance, a push toward mastery . . . The ambitious woman seems to be required, both by inward and outward pressures, to evolve not a single "self" or personality, but two at once! (Komarovsky as quoted in Scarf, 1980 p. 247)

While some women do commit themselves to these dual goals, many women in their twenties choose to prioritize one goal, delaying or diminishing the importance of the other. Given the fact that so many of the participants in our study are preoccupied with academic achievement and the attainment of their career objectives, they may feel that the pursuit of intimate love relationships can wait until later.

Finally, there may be few intimate relationships among the participants in our study due to the fact that they have come to this country so recently. Many speak about the difficulties they have faced even meeting people and making friends in a new language and new culture. Abdel, for example, seems unhappily lonely.

Like I live here two years, and I don't have no friends! That's terrible. Strange, very strange. I guess I feel hurt. Like, I have something wrong with me.

And Fei-Wen attributes her difficulty in meeting people to the fact that Americans don't seem to need her friendship the way that she needs theirs.

In [my native country] I have many friends, I can easily communicate with others. But the American, sometimes I feel I need to communicate with others, but others don't need me. So sometimes I feel a little different.

Given these difficulties, many of the participants in our study may have at least interrupted their development of intimate relationships. These difficulties might also explain why so many have remained close to their families, relying on them for emotional and psychological support.

#### **How Participants Construct their Beliefs about Intimate Relationships**

##### Growing Away From Instrumental Ways of Understanding

Xuan ended one relationship and began a new one during the course of our study. She explains the ways that she makes decisions about relationships, describing the kinds of things that are important to her in a dating partner. While Xuan has developed some Socializing ways of understanding, here she demonstrates some Instrumental ways of understanding that she has not completely relinquished.

I'm 19. I'm too young to think about staying with anyone long term. I'm not ready to make a commitment. I fought with my boyfriend. And that's what shows me I'm not committed. But if a guy really treat me right and everything that I wanted, you know—then I might choose him. Like, this boyfriend, now, treat me good. He's good to me. He helps me with a lot of work. Well, everything's good, so far. I don't disagree with him. I trust him. How can I tell? Depends—depends how they're treating me. Do they call me constantly? That's good. It shows that they're thinking of you.

For Xuan, a boyfriend is good and worthy of trust according to the concrete ways that he behaves toward her. A good boyfriend helps her with work, calls her constantly, and thinks of her. She also measures the relationship by her own behavior. If she fights with her boyfriend, she knows she is not committed to him. Rather than looking to her inner states such as feelings and sense of herself, which would demonstrate a more Socializing way of understanding, Xuan focuses instead on fighting, a specific and concrete action, to inform her decision.

Xuan does indicate that agreement with her boyfriend is important to her. However, in this brief excerpt we see no indication that she focuses on her boyfriend's views and feelings. Xuan does not try to evaluate herself or the relationship from the perspective of either her past or current partner. Therefore, her emphasis seems less on mutuality and agreement as an emotional quality between them and more on agreement as it is manifested in specific behaviors: the presence or lack of phone calls and fights.

#### Balancing Around Socializing Ways of Understanding

Natalia's description of her relationship provides a contrasting example. Her struggle concerns how she can preserve a good relationship with her brother, who does not always appreciate her interest in her new boyfriend. This source of tension is particularly difficult for Natalia to avoid since her boyfriend and brother are roommates.

He is roommates with my brother. They take apartment together. For me it is really hard, if something goes wrong between us, I hope that he will not have a problem with my brother. So for me, [if I have problems in my family] I can't say to him. I try to say it and, then, no I can't. I care about my brother, and it really scares me that if they have a problem. Just I know that my brother jealous me, and sometimes I don't want to go there because I know that my brother will be like, "Okay, okay, you go to him. It's okay." He don't like it. He broken a little bit. He is jealous a little bit. I always was with him. It was just my brother. And right now, there is another one for me. So he is like, "Okay. You go with him." He will say to me, but I don't like it. "I jealous you. Why are you going there?" And I say, "Okay, I love you, too." And he say, "Love me too? No. You love him, too." He will say to me like that.

Natalia feels uncomfortable with this conflict because she is particularly concerned not to hurt either man's feelings. She fears that a disagreement between her brother and boyfriend would place her in the position of having to sacrifice one for the other, of having to choose one loyalty over the other. The conflict between these two loyalties threatens her sense of self-integrity. She frames her behavior, then, in terms of how she can keep both as happy as possible, accepting responsibility for their feelings about her and about each other. In fact, Natalia reports difficulty in addressing any problems with her boyfriend. She feels more comfortable talking to someone else about problems she has with him.

Probably I would go to him to speak with him about some stuff but not about him. Sometimes I want to say something about him, not good, and I go to [my parents]

sometimes. But if I want to speak about something else like children or parents then I go to him. For me it is easier.

Natalia's fear of disagreeing with or disappointing either man suggests that she experiences conflict as a threat to her relationships. Attentive to the needs and feelings of others, Natalia is not able to separate them from her own needs and feelings about the situation.

Growing Toward Self-Authoring Ways of Understanding

Sonja thinks about conflict and disagreement in her relationships quite differently. Growing away from more Socializing ways of understanding, Sonja is able to approach her relationships with greater Self-Authorship. In this excerpt, she begins to talk about her boyfriend, and then her comments move to a more general level as she describes the qualities that are important to her in all close relationships.

Recently, I really find a person that's very, very important to me. And instead of like bunch of friends I put him because he's the only one who is here, so he's my boyfriend and my best friend at the same time. What does it mean to me to have a best friend? My best friend has to feel with me. I am very complicated person. I know that. I am very complicated because I am very honest. Sometimes I am like cruelly honest. And my best friend and person who is with me has to know how to deal with it.

I don't like to pretend. Like, I'm not the kind of person who my best friend will come and say, what do you think, is this good? And you know that you're supposed to say it's good because she liked it. I would say, "No, it's ugly." I would say "It's ugly, it's awful." Not to hurt her. I can [lie to] people, but I don't want to do it. Because people that I care about. And that's what I want them to understand. I would do that with the people that I know, with the people that I'm close but not like. I never had a huge bunch of people as my best friend. I always had 3, 4 person, and I want that person to understand that. I don't want to change myself with that people. And I don't want them [to change for me]. Because I'm going to accept them the way they are. Nobody's perfect.

I'm trying to learn not to be very honest with the people that are not close to me. If they asked me I would say yeah, maybe I would, I don't feel very nice about it, but it's okay. But if I had to do it with a person who I think is close to me, then that person is either won't be close to me anymore. I won't be close because if I start to lie, just to make that person happy, that's not the person that could be my real friend. Or that person have to accept that. I explain to them, that's me, that's how I am. I am very honest, especially with my friend. I don't ask for them, you have to.

It's up to you if you want, that's good, we could be great friends. If you can't, we could still be friends, but not like best, best, best friends.

I always say what I think. And I have very strange way of making jokes, but I always say them. And that's why. I just feel that I don't have anything to hide from people. I don't have anything to be ashamed of in my life. That's why I feel comfortable to say everything. Even something that most people would not say, I say. It's very important for the relationship for people to understand that, and I don't want to lie to them even about that.

Sonja is able to understand others' perspectives on her honesty, and she is aware of how a friend might be hurt by her strong opinions. However, rather than taking responsibility for the ways that others might be hurt, Sonja explains that it is more important to her to say what she really believes and *not* what she thinks others want to hear. In this way, she shows that she has a sense of herself that is separate and very different from the sense that other people may have of her. She doesn't want to change just to please other people, and although her close friends' acceptance of her is important, she would like them to be able to accept her as she is. Sonja also shows some ability to regulate her behavior on behalf on the principles that are important to her. She decides how and when she will choose to lie or to be honest with another person, illustrating that her reactions are not completely dependent on external circumstances.

The students in our study describe important transitions they are making in preparing for careers, in their relationships to their families, and to a lesser extent, in their intimate relationships. While the life-span literature also draws attention to the importance of these transitions and provides interesting ways of understanding them, it does not adequately account for the complexities and variations across culture, gender, or life experience. We also believe that bringing a developmental perspective to these issues enables us to illuminate the different ways that individuals understand the nature of these transitions.

As a group, these students experience multiple areas of stress and support in their lives. We hear heartening stories of familial support, intimate connections, and hopeful dreams for the future. We also hear stories of painful relational tension, loneliness, and strain. It is in relation to these larger contexts that the participants in our study locate one new aspect of their identity, their role as students in an American community college. Their ability to take on this new role and to develop and maintain belief in themselves as students will also influence their ability to pursue and attain their life dreams. We present our interpretation of how students negotiate this transition in the next section. The many sources of stress that

participants describe also provide convincing evidence of the importance of teacher and peer supports within the program. We will take up these topics in a later section, where we describe and interpret the functions of the holding environments for these students.

#### SECTION IV: ACCULTURATION

In addition to the transitions related to age that participants in our study are making, they are also making another transition, growing acculturated to different roles and environments. As new residents of the United States, they are learning how to function successfully in this culture. In particular, they are learning how to understand and manage the role of student in an American institution of higher education. Such transitions can be difficult for individuals to make due to inequities of power and ideology within our society and its educational systems. In many ways then, the participants in our study began their programs with marginalized status and are seeking ways to gain access to greater social, economic, and political standing.

In the past few decades, community colleges have provided immigrant and minority students access to higher education (Valadez, 1993). Despite their successes, critics have suggested that they, like other educational institutions, also prevent many of these students from succeeding because they reproduce the existing inequalities and social hierarchies in our society (Herideen, 1998; Pincus, 1994; Rhoads & Valadez, 1996; Shaw, Valadez & Rhoads, 1999). When the structure of community colleges mirrors that of the larger society, students who enter having had greater social and economic advantages are more likely to be highly rewarded. They may be channeled into academic tracks and marked as good candidates for transfer to more prestigious colleges and universities. Those entering with fewer advantages are over-represented in vocational tracks and their ambitions for graduation and transfer are often stunted (Pincus, 1994; Trujillo & Diaz, 1999; Rhoads & Valadez, 1996; Shaw, Rhoads & Valadez, 1999; Valadez, 1993).

The participants in our study run the risk of falling into this second group. New to this country and its educational institutions, they do not yet possess the linguistic and social competencies required for them to reach their academic and occupational goals. In the literature on acculturation, these competencies are referred to as “cultural capital” because they constitute the knowledge, skills, behaviors, attitudes, and meanings that are possessed by the dominant classes and traditionally rewarded in society (Rendon, 1999; Rhoads, 1999; Rhoads & Valadez, 1996; Trujillo & Diaz, 1999; Valadez, 1999). Much of the knowledge and experience of immigrant students such as ours stems from their cultural background and is not relevant to or

rewarded in traditional academic settings. Institutional messages about what types of knowledge are valued are therefore embedded in larger messages, devaluing students' cultural identities (Herideen, 1998; Lin, 1999; Rhoads, 1999; Rhoads & Valadez, 1996; Valadez, 1993).

In this section, we will describe the nature of the transition the participants in our study have to make and the ways that larger messages about their cultural identities influence this transition. However, individuals do not simply absorb messages passively but are actively engaged in making sense of their experiences. We will therefore show how the students undertake these transitions and respond to the ways that individuals and institutions act to keep them in the margins. The ability that individuals possess to respond actively and creatively in the face of these kinds of constraints is known as agency (Lin, 1999; Rhoads, 1999; Rhoads & Valadez, 1996; Shaw, 1999). For the students in our study, making a successful transition of acculturation may require them to possess certain abilities, certain kinds of agency. First, they must be able to identify and learn the skills and behaviors that are rewarded in the institution and necessary for academic success. They must also possess the ability to identify, interpret, and evaluate the implicit messages that accompany their socialization process. In exploring the manners in which the participants in our study responded to their marginalized status, we find that developmental capacity helps determine the way that individuals construct a sense of their own agency.

#### **Acquiring Cultural Capital**

While the students in our study do not use the term "cultural capital," they do describe the particular skills and types of knowledge they need in order to succeed in the world of higher education. In fact, many of their explanations about the qualities of a good student and the ways that they learn emphasize these features. These skills are difficult for students to learn because they may require high levels of linguistic and cultural fluency. Sonja describes her feelings when she realized how many particular skills and sets of knowledge she had to acquire.

When I first came here I was completely lost. I didn't know what to do, where to start. First of all it's completely different. I came to a completely different country. I didn't know the way of learning, what they learn, or the language. Everything was like no. I didn't know anything when I came.

Many of these crucial skills depend upon students' ability to acquire new forms of language quickly. Several of the students in our study point out that the English they encounter in school is quite different from that they hear and use in

other settings. They refer to it as “academic” English, a language that seems to require additional rules and skills than those necessary for “basic” or “street” English. Sonja describes academic English as “more difficult” for her to learn because she rarely hears it used in other settings.

Academic English is the most difficult part for me because I did not have an opportunity to hear academic English to talk with that. I thought that I actually understand everything, that I can have communications, that I can speak, that I can understand. I really thought until I came here to Bunker Hill and until I actually heard the other side of English, that academic English. I don’t know why but I now divide English. I feel like I don’t speak English at all even though I have a huge bond of words but not these words. I knew street English.

Not knowing how to use and understand academic English therefore creates problems for learners, since it is the type of language used in college. As Armand explains,

So when I came to the United States, I got this problem, because I know basic English, but to learn you know, I need [academic] English.

One feature that characterizes academic English is its vocabulary. In order to understand and demonstrate understanding of psychology, students had to grow familiar with and comfortable using the terminology specific to that field. For many, terms like “homeostasis,” “neuroscience,” “stimulus,” “approach,” “random selection,” and “variable” were completely unfamiliar and confusing to them. Being able to use such specialized words correctly is an important indication of academic mastery and therefore is a key to moving from their marginalized status to insider status. Students often referred to the difficulties they faced in learning these new words, telling us that in psychology and other classes, there were “a lot of words that you cannot understand” (Armand), “very complicated words” (Marie) and “words I didn’t see in my whole life” (Jonas).

And there is many new words for us to learn. Because maybe there’s too much definition. And sometimes you forget the difference between them . . . I can mix them up also. Have to make definition for everything. (Yousef)

Referring to a dictionary didn’t always help because “sometimes you don’t find what you really wanted to for you to really understand what this means” (Marie). Some students were able to ask their teachers for help in defining vocabulary, especially when difficult terminology interfered with their ability to understand the content of the material they were studying.

This semester, there were a couple . . . of things that were difficult, but it was probably because of English, just because I don't know so many words. Sometimes, paragraphs that written in academic English, and you have to understand it to understand the rest of it. So I just raise my hand and say, "I'm sorry, I don't understand it." The teacher can say to you another word, and you understand it easily. Probably there were a couple of times I was stuck on one problem. For me it's hard. It's hard because of English, because the words that I don't know. (Natalia)

Students must also learn to communicate their ideas in accepted academic formats. In terms of written communication, the standard format is the five-paragraph essay, including a thesis and supporting evidence. Constructing these types of essays requires students to learn and follow certain rules of thought, writing style, grammar, tone, and vocabulary. Participants describe the importance of learning to "put the words in order" (Minh), to "stick with the idea" (Marie), to "develop the idea" (Abdel), and to use "good grammar . . . correct grammar" (Fei-Wen).

The essay, I don't know. The essay is difficult. I always got the trouble with that. When they give me a subject, I'm talking about another different subject. I don't know. Sometimes my sentences are not always . . . Sometimes I've got too many faults, vocabulary. I like it, but my problem, I can't get a good grade. That's my problem. (Gilles)

For some classes, students must be able to write the entire essay during class time, to prove that they have not relied too much on help from others.

I know how to organize the five paragraph essay. It have a topic sentence and something like that. And I try my best to organize. For example, if she give us "What is the more concern about the America in the year 2000?" And I try to find three problems. But it's, the technology in the computer. And the violence. And then I start to write the introduction paragraph and then I create three problems. Wow, it's difficult [to write an essay in class]. I can't think about it. I can't think about a topic in a short time, just 45 minutes. (Minh)

In terms of oral communication, students must also learn that it is acceptable and expected for them to ask questions in order to clarify their understanding. Students may be expected to participate in classroom discussions, to offer their opinions, and engage in debate. Some students relish this new form of learning, but for many, oral participation is very difficult to get used to. They may feel self-conscious about their language skills. Armand realizes that in order to participate in

class, he has to be willing to feel a little “frustrated” when he can’t always communicate clearly. Sometimes, he thinks

I don’t know if I am able to say this, to say that, to talk to my teacher. I don’t know if she will understand me, or if he will understand. You are kind of just shy because you have kind of a pressure. You don’t speak in the same way as everybody and they think you are strange.

Ling-Hui reports that she is “just very quiet” in her classes, but that she feels she should change and become more talkative.

I hope I can talk to the teacher and ask question or answer his question... I never talk in class. I think I should improve this. I don’t know because I think my speaking is not good enough so that’s why I don’t ask.

Like other participants in our study, Ling-Hui grew up in a culture where students are discouraged from asking questions or offering opinions.

The American system is in the class . . . They give us these class and ask question. But in my country we didn’t discuss in the class, just listen, and then we don’t have any question. The teacher won’t say, “Do you have question?” But here the teacher ask a lot, “Do you have question?” Then people ask question, and we discuss in the class.

Fawzia relates similar reasons for her difficulty in getting used to the class participation behaviors expected of American college students.

If you have some problem, you know, students can ask teachers, free. It is hard for me to do this. I don’t know because in my country, it is hard to talk to the teacher. In my country, you can’t ask them, “Teacher, I need help with this. You know, I don’t understand.” If you need to ask them, you will feel shy. They don’t have relation with the student.

Despite their discomfort, students report that they continue to challenge themselves to participate more often. Armand, in particular, tells us that how important these challenges are to him in helping “push himself” to be a “good student” who is open to “new things.” At the end of the year, he proudly describes his recent successes in oral participation.

I was just free to feel myself comfortable in this class. Talk with different accent than other people, but my concern is this class and the content the course. I didn’t care about people, what they think. I was just focused on my class.

Familiarity with traditional methods of evaluation, such as quizzes and tests is also necessary for academic success. Students must learn how to prepare for these tests and how to demonstrate their learning effectively. There are also various study methods that they are expected to be able to use, such as note taking, using a textbook effectively, completing homework assignments properly and on time. Minh, Armand, and Ling-Hui each describe specific strategies they have adopted to help them increase their understanding and improve their grades.

The best way for me to learn is read the chapter before I go to class and then when I come to class I can understand. Because when I read the chapter and there is some point I don't understand, and I come to class the teacher will explain and I understand more the chapter. And then after that, go home and do the homework. We have to do the homework because if you don't do the homework you can (sic) remember and understand the lesson. And when you take the exam, I can do well on the exam. (Minh)

It is important to do your homework, your assignments every time. I mean, do your best to do that, because it seems like you don't do your homework, you are losing a part of the lesson. Maybe one day we start, you'll be like one step back. Because sometimes the next lesson is based on what you did on the homework. So, I think do your homework. Most of the time, it's going to help you to do well on the quiz. (Armand)

I think if I can understand the teacher talking, I have to read the book before the class, and after she, he, the teacher teach I have to do the homework or read the book. (Ling-Hui)

Understanding the function and value of each of these skills, as well as their relationship to each other, can help students learn effectively and demonstrate their understanding to their teachers.

There are also particular behaviors that are emphasized in educational institutions and associated with academic success. One behavior that students mention repeatedly, and that carries great significance in the cultures of their classrooms, is the value of daily attendance and timeliness. According to Yousef, good students "have to get to school on time; no absent." Serge advises other students to "make all your effort to be in class because you have to be in class for the first ten minutes," and Ling-Hui mentions timeliness as an important change in her behavior.

I think I learned to be on time. I think it's important for me because I used to get later every day, but now I on time every day. I think less, so I not just rush to the class.

According to Xuan, Natalia, and Gabriela, good attendance and promptness can strongly influence their teachers' opinions of them and have a significant effect on their grades.

Don't be late. Because it is not good to be late because you miss out. You miss out in the beginning of the class. Teachers don't like students coming in late. That shows that that is not a good student. They are not responsible. (Xuan)

A really good student. Of course this is attendance first. Yes because if I miss one class I got 50 on the test. If I didn't miss a class I got 90. So first of all it is attendance. (Natalia)

My ESL teacher say, "you have to come to class on time at 8:30 o'clock." If you were in class five minutes late, she'll advise you. She'll say, "You're late. You're late." But also I couldn't understand the message. But at the end of the semester, I understand she's right. She's right because you have to more responsible for your actions. And you have to think what you're going to do. And at the end of the semester, I got an A+. (Gabriela).

Related to the idea of being on time is the idea of managing time. Students must make sure that they can plan a schedule that enables them to meet all of their responsibilities. For many who have demanding work schedules and other obligations, learning how to structure their time is crucial to their success. Gabriela warns other students that "if you're working full time, and you want to be in school full time, think twice. Think twice. Be realistic with your time." After she notices that her demanding schedule is causing her schoolwork and friendships to suffer, she decides she needs to cut back on her work hours.

Minh also pays a great deal of attention to her schedule, carefully planning ahead so that she makes sure to be able to complete all of her homework.

Sometime I have a lot of work, but I try to arrange the schedule because sometimes I have a lot of homework for my math class, and I have to write the essay, and I have to study for psychology quiz. I have a lot of work. But I try. Like, if I know I have a quiz on Thursday, and I have to do the homework on Wednesday, and I have to do the essay on Thursday too, I start to study on Monday. I planned every day. First of all, I have all the ideas for the essay in mind. Yes. Before I go to the bed, I think about the essay. I have the idea I want to do, which one is the topic sentence, and

the thesis sentence. And when I try, I already have the idea in mind. Yes. And I begin to do my homework. And then on Tuesday and Wednesday, I'm already free for studying for my psychology quiz. (Minh)

Many students must also adapt to the work ethic that is expected of them in higher education. Marie reports after the first semester that she now realizes, "I can't be playing around. I have to work really hard." Xuan agrees, crediting the combined ESOL/psychology program with teaching her how to become a better college student.

I feel that this program teach me to get used to study because I never studied before. And once you come to college you have to study, not fool around or anything. It was surprising to me that I actually study. If you don't want to study, you just might as well drop out. In high school, you have to go to school, and some people there, they don't study. They don't care because they take the time fooling around and they don't pay attention.

By the end of the year, Serge feels that he has become a "better student" because he has had to work so hard to overcome "a lot of difficult with the language."

Finally, students must learn how to utilize the institutional resources that exist to help them outside of their classes. Many of the participants in our study rely on the independent learning center, a facility which provides services such as computers and tutoring. Armand briefly summarizes the various types of support the center can provide.

They give you a program and see if you have some difficulties to do something, they can send you to the self-directed learning center so you can learn. The tutors down there help you to write an essay. They help you to do good in writing. Or if its math, they give you some classes and tests on the computers and things like that. So there is a support from this college. If students don't feel like they're able to do something in the ESL classes, so they help them so they can continue to work.

These writing, studying, organizational, and behavioral skills are the "cultural capital" that at least partially constitute institutional understandings of "good students." In order to succeed academically, to demonstrate fluency in their new roles as students in an American community college, the participants in our study must identify and acquire these skills, adapting their behavior to fit the institutional expectations of them. All learners in our study demonstrate the ability to identify these components of cultural capital, and they commonly organize their descriptions of themselves as learners around them. In fact, some participants in our study define learning almost exclusively as acquiring these types of skills. Others include these

skills along with other types of considerations. Examining these constructions of learning through a developmental lens provides a helpful way of understanding some of these differences.

### **How Participants Construct the Role of Student**

For individuals to be able to gain these skills, they must be able to take clear steps toward a goal, follow prescribed rules, and attend to concrete evidence of success and failure. These are all abilities that a person operating with an Instrumental way of understanding can demonstrate. Since all the learners in our study are already evolving out of this benchmark in their development, it is reasonable to expect them to acquire these skills. However, students who operate with Socializing or Self-Authoring ways of understanding demonstrate that they have additional ways of defining and determining concepts of learning and of being a good student. They may orient more toward their inner states, including their feelings and attitudes about learning. Or, they may focus on improving their abilities to express their ideas and live up to their own internal standards.

Many of the learners in our study emphasize the importance of being able to see connections between what they learn in school and their own lives. In fact, students commonly describe their most powerful learning experiences as those that enable them to understand aspects of their own lives in new ways. Their descriptions of the usefulness of their knowledge, however, reflect the structural differences among the learners in our study.

#### Growing from Instrumental Ways of Understanding

Some students focus almost exclusively on specific behaviors and skills in their descriptions. They tend to define the process of learning in terms of the concrete and literal steps they take to complete an assignment or study for a test, so their descriptions of learning sound like clear directions or rules.

I have to get to school on time. No absent. I have to spend many time to study, to take care of class. And if I don't know something, I have to ask my teacher. I have to study and to spend time on my class. To go to learning center. Yes. (Yousef)

Psychology is not easy to study. You have to carry a heavy book. And you have to read a lot of new words, so you have to read first before you come to class. And ESL class can help you a lot for psychology class, so you have to do good in ESL class first. You have to do all the assignments that the teacher give to you. That you can understand the whole lesson first, and then you easy to enter the psychology class. (Minh).

I can see a student when they are good by taking notes, paying attention, come to school every day, and by their tests and quiz grades. (Xuan)

Similarly, these students are more apt to define their standards and goals for learning in very concrete terms. They explain that these behaviors are the key to success, suggesting that there is a direct cause and effect relationship. For example, Yousef claims, "If we spend some time and we study much, there will be no difficulty," and Gilles suggests that "If you're steady, you're going to pass."

They are more likely to evaluate their learning based on the grades and course credit they receive and according to their ability to identify and produce the "right" answer. Because they do not question what can be termed "right" or "wrong," these students often do not explain how right answers are determined or who determines them.

I could put more time on reading it, and answer the question right because whenever I get stuck on something, I write anything down, and I don't have a good grade for that. (Xuan)

[I know when I've learned something new because] it's like if you learn about something and then, first thing like you learn a lot. And when you be asked some questions and some of them you didn't know, and you went back to get more information basically like after that, you get more information. After that, you will be more familiar with what did you study, and that's helped a lot, and the way you get the information and then you have more information about the subject that you study. (Abdel)

[You know when you've learned] if you test yourself by asking yourself some questions about the subject. And if you answer correctly most of them, then it suggests to you that you learned a lot. (Abdel)

Movement toward these goals involves learning better skills or more carefully following the concrete steps they have identified as important to success. These students evaluate their own and others' behaviors mainly in terms of whether or not they lead to immediate and desirable consequences.

In describing how they apply their learning to their lives, those with some remaining Instrumental ways of understanding were more likely to describe useful factual knowledge as that which does not need to be interpreted or adapted when

applying it to a particular situation. In class, Minh has learned how to tell if a person is right-brained or left-brained by comparing a person's hands.

When I study psychology and I know people have a right brain. I mean they're not very strong about the logical, something like that. And people have a left brain. And they can strong in mathematics. And I study from my professor that if you put the hand like that, you can know which brain is stronger for people.

Minh, like other Instrumental learners, also determines whether or not knowledge is useful based on whether it helps her to make better decisions involving concrete concerns.

And then from my accounting class my professor said you better use a MasterCard and Visa card than American Express or the Discover Card. And I don't know, yes . . . It's very useful in my life.

As these students emphasize the concrete consequences or results of their new knowledge, they can judge the value of their knowledge by the quality of the results. For Gilles, for example, what seems most important to him is not that he achieve a powerful sense of connection with his friends, but that the end product of his behavior and their conversation is a good one.

When I go out with my friends, I know how to talk with them. I know how to get results and do something good. I don't want them to be mad at me.

He does express concern that his friends will not be "mad" at him, which could illustrate some of his more Socializing abilities. However, it is also possible that he understands and orients to someone else's anger more because of the effect it will have on him than because there is a break in the mutuality of the relationship or because he can understand his friend's perspective.

While individuals operating with an Instrumental way of understanding possess the abilities necessary to acquire the cultural capital of successful students, they could encounter some difficulties. As long as the means of attaining the desired skills and behaviors is clearly identified and described for them, they can focus on these tasks. Yet if these specific skills and behaviors are not made explicit, and the learners must infer them from the cultural surround, an Instrumental way of understanding is not sufficient. In order to deduce these rules, individuals must first be able to see that there are multiple perspectives on any given issue, to take the perspective of the institution or authorities within the institution. They must try and see the world the way these others see and value it. This ability to reason abstractly,

and to infer concrete messages from a general perspective requires a Socializing way of understanding.

The learners in our study who have not yet fully developed this way of understanding may encounter difficulties attaining specific skills which have not been identified for them and which they are unable to identify on their own. In the classroom, a student who does not understand the culturally sanctioned and expected behaviors might try and “cover” their lack of understanding by remaining quiet, withdrawn, and passive, unable to complete the required tasks correctly. This student could also appear to be resisting learning by unknowingly acting in ways which transgress the rules of the dominant culture.

Instrumental learners also have difficulty in thinking about and expressing abstract ideas or the logical relations among ideas. They may therefore have difficulty with assignments that require them to orient to their own or others’ inner states. Yousef, who is transitioning between Instrumental and Socializing learning tells us that the writing assignments which he finds difficult are the ones that require him to write about his feelings and attitudes. The more concrete topics like sports are easier for him.

We write many essay. Sometimes she give us writing out of psychology. We write what is a famous person or what is the important thing in your life like this. Some very hard to write sometimes if you write how like “openness” or like “language,” like how you feel about doing, how this importance our life. But when you can write about the sport, you can write. Yeah, this is easy I think, easy enough. Yeah, write in class about this was nice.

Instrumental learners’ limitations could become risks if the behaviors and skills they rely on to achieve their desired goals are insufficient to the tasks they are assigned. As long as they can demonstrate learning through following clear and concrete instructions and rules, they can succeed. But if higher-level tasks are required, these learners may not possess the cognitive complexity to perform these tasks without significant levels of external support.

#### Balancing Around Socializing Ways of Understanding

For other students in our study, attention to specific skills and behaviors of cultural capital was combined with increased attention to a more abstract sense of the importance of attitude. Their descriptions of good students and effective learning include references to maintaining a “positive” attitude, feeling “strong,” remaining “curious,” “open,” “flexible,” and “humble” in the face of new experiences and challenges. These qualities suggest that the students have a growing awareness of

their own inner states and emotions and also indicate an increased ability to reflect on themselves in a more abstract way. Other important attitudes and traits these students value include having a “hope,” a “will to learn,” determination and belief in one’s own abilities. Minh demonstrates her increasing capacity to think about and talk about abstract qualities in her own inner life.

I think to be a very good student, I would say had to be, have intelligence. But I don’t think so. I think to be a good student you have to be curious, and study hard, and come to class. I think that. I always think so. Because intelligent is the trait but somebody don’t have. I mean that they don’t be intelligent, but they try. They try their best. And they want to study. And they try to find something new. Or they try their best. I think it’s a good student.

I think that hope help the students improve the study. And hope help you learn feel stronger, feel recover from illness. And hope to people work hard. Hope is a motivation that help people work hard, like that. Yes. I think if we have a high hope, we can more success. And if we don’t get what we want, then we change our hope, and we wait.

Considerations of one’s character and personality are therefore seen as driving behavior. These students are also able to acknowledge different ways of learning, which may explain why being “open” and “flexible” are considered important. Thus, these students may have identified their preferred learning styles and strategies which allow them to generalize across specific tasks. They can make distinctions between the skills called for in specific situations and their own preferred ways of learning. Natalia learns best when she is able to make explicit connections between new knowledge and what she already knows. She describes how this style of learning, which she originally identified while still a student in her native country, is one that she can generalize and apply to her psychology class.

Actually I learn anything with analogy. So when I learn something I try to think of something that is remind me. A word that’s similar to [a word in my native language], that I translate and put it together in one folder. So for example, there is an neuron that we just talk about. It remind me something. For example, it remind me of caterpillar. Yeah, both long and thin. But when I said caterpillar I tried to already remember neuron. I said, “Caterpillar, neuron, neuron. What is it? Neuron. Caterpillar. Yes, of course, it’s long.” And already I’m trying to remember. I said it’s neuron, and already I saw the picture of neuron. Just analogically, I try to remember everything. For me it’s easy to learn.

Accordingly, these students tend to refer to their attitudes and their personality when they describe how they evaluate their learning. While these attitudes are seen as driving learning, the students do not seem able to separate their attitudes from their learning. The openness and receptivity they describe suggests a kind of assumed and

necessary agreement with or acceptance of new material. They can evaluate their learning in terms of their ability to achieve this sense of acceptance and inclusion. Here, Armand emphasizes the importance of remaining “open,” “flexible” in order to “work according to the regular system.”

The teacher is going to make an effort to let you understand that you have to explain everything in English and try to work according to the regular system, but as long as you are stuck in your culture, you don't perform this way. You are not going to go forward, so you stay somewhere. I think that's the thing most of the students have when they start as international students in a college. If they are open, the more they are open, they learn new things. Because we saw that in psychology. The openness is when people understand that they have to learn new things, trying to get something new, novel experiences. If you are not open to learn, to make yourself learning something, even if you think you know something, if you are not able to be flexible with yourself, to admit that, “uh huh, I have to do this,” no matter how old you are, or what your background, whatever, if you don't understand this, that you have to be open, it seems like you are going to waste your time. It is going to be tough for you to get done your first semester in college.

Natalia describes a “voice from inside” that tell her when she's “got it.”

[I know when I've learned something because] it's in myself that said to me, “Yes, you have got it, you understand what does he mean.” I got it. I have the picture that connects with the words, and it connects with the sounds and everything. So this give to me, “Yeah, you got it.” The words and sound. We call this the voice from inside, something like that say to you, “You got it honey, that's it.”

In describing important changes they have undertaken, these students refer to changes in their attitudes, to new awareness of their inner states, and to abstract understandings of subject matter. These changes may be signaled by the appearance of a new learning context that allows students to function in new ways, discovering a new sense of themselves that cannot exist apart from that context. Such is the case for Armand.

Sometimes I discover myself when I am talking. I am not the kind of person staying quiet and try to figure out what I am. No. I may get information about myself, and it is not easy to understand what I am, but if somebody ask me question, or if in any circumstance I had to talk to anybody, and I start explaining something, I start now explaining that, and I discover myself while I am talking, who I am. So it's kind of explaining to myself my personality, but if somebody does not ask me, it is true that I will not discover many things that I have.

Speaking about how they apply their learning to their lives, students who fully possess a Socializing way of understanding describe how their new knowledge helps them to take the perspective of someone else, to understand people's internal states in new ways. They also show more ability to determine when their new knowledge is appropriate to a situation, to recognize its applicability even though the specific circumstances may be quite different from those that they studied in their classes. Armand remembers how some of the concepts he learned in Psychology helped him understand the behavior of people at his workplace.

Yes, like the psychoanalytical approach. This definition helped me to know how people sometimes get stressed in this country, like in work, they are just always like, do well, well, well. So sometimes they do as much as they can. So, it's kind of an emotional fears. They've got unconscious fears. Sometimes they realize they don't do well. You know, if somebody is working somewhere, and his supervisor behind him, or manager is watching him and sometimes, you've just got to get the managers. That is a mistake. So, I'd be like, "Oh, no, I don't want to do a mistake." And when he got about five, ten years after same job, you know, he's starting to get tired of the job. So, he needs now to understand the part of unconscious, his mental process, so he can understand how to help himself to overcome that. Because when you let yourself be fascinated with that, you are going to be like crazy or sick because you like to do well every time.

These learners also speak more often about the ways that they can apply their learning to their own feelings and sense of self. They speak about learning in order to "grow my feelings" (Jonas); "to know who I am" (Armand).

#### Growing into Self-Authoring Learners

A third group of students in our study use slightly different criteria for thinking about themselves as students and the processes of their learning. While they, like the other students, refer to the importance of adopting specific behaviors and attitudes toward their work, they also are beginning to articulate a new sense of priorities in expressing the complexity of their ideas. These students seem to focus also on communicating ideas and opinions that exist independently of the context in which they are engaged. As Serge and Fei-Wen illustrate, the language they use to describe their ideas suggests that they think of their ideas as containing multiple layers of meaning, and these students are more likely to feel challenged to find ways to express this multifaceted nature of their thoughts.

And when writing the essay, I mean you really understand the subject, but you cannot really express yourself because you don't have enough vocabulary, the way

that you want to say that, you know. Sometimes that's my problem. Sometimes I'm trying to make something clear. (Serge)

I can use the English writing to express my thought, my feeling. For example, now I don't feel very difficult to express what I want to say in paper. I think maybe my sentence is not beautiful, but I can express my meaning clearly. Because I live here, I must know how to write English sentence, how to write English essay. I think that is life cure for me. At least I think if I used the dictionary, I can write something. I can express my thought. Recently our speaking class give me a topic. At 11:00, I have a final examination in speaking. I will talk my topic. Because I learn a lot of writing skills so I can write myself essay. Because I write it, I have a deeply impression that I can talk it. So writing help me talk, you know. (Fei-Wen)

These students therefore show more interest in holding themselves to a standard of how well they are able to express their thoughts than to being validated by others. They place a greater emphasis on whether or not they have met their internal standards than they do to looking to an external source of authority for approval. For example, in Sonja's eyes, a good student is one who:

. . . knows what he wants and if he really wants it. Realizing that you really want that. I don't do anything in my life that I don't like. Sometimes you have to do something. I know that but if I have to study something that I don't find interesting, I don't have success in that because that gives it like for three or four hours. Let's say the computers. I know computers are very important here, and that's a very good career, easy money and everything. You have a big salary but I just don't like it and so then I have to choose between these too. My friends and my family are like, "you should take computers." But I did not want to take it because I know if I took that then I would not have success as much as I have in psychology because I really like it. And I think that if you really want something, and if you really like something, you have determination I think. You have to know what you want, how much that is really important to you. Because if you know that that's really important to you, you are ready to give up a lot of other things. If you are there just because you should be, you think "I should be." So it all depends on what you think about it.

As with Socializing learners, students who are developing Self-Authorship show increased ability to interpret and anticipate their teachers' standards about what constitutes good learning. They can infer from a teacher's behavior what that teacher values in students. However, these learners, unlike the Socializing learner, can see that these different opinions are not necessarily conflicting notions of truth. They represent multiple perspectives and possibilities which all can be seen as viable ways of teaching. For example, when she begins studying with a professor Sonja reasons

that it is useful to figure out what types of behaviors and demonstrations of knowledge are important to this professor.

I had both of the classes same professor. So also, for me the way to learn is to know what teacher wants. What kind of professor I have. What is his way of working? Because each professor has different style. Like I'm first assignment that I give to him and I look at my grades. And then I look why does he emphasize my mistakes. Next time I focus on that more than something else. And if that works, if next assignment is better grade than the previous one, I stick with that. If it's not that I'm looking what he is, like some professor, like my math professor, she pays too much attention how often I am in the class. Are you late and stuff like that. So when I realized that I was trying to be there all the time because at the end she pays a close attention to your assignment. But she also grades you on that and if you were there most of the time. And even if you are not doing so well, she's ready to like push you a little bit. But she's very upset if you don't come to her class. Or if you are like there just physically, not mentally. If you're not being 100 percent of attention. So when I realized that, I was trying to do it like that. And with English I didn't have to pay attention because I realized I can do it what she want me to do. Just write essay and that's it.

Relying more on their sense of their internally authored goals, these students show signs of evaluating their teachers and classes in terms of how well they meet these goals. This increasing capacity for self-dependence and self-ownership allows them to step away from their immediate context and determine if it meets their own standards for learning.

The learners who speak most freely and in depth about the ways they apply classroom learning to their own lives are those students who are developing Self-Authoring abilities. Perhaps one reason that they emphasize these kinds of learning is that they have achieved the ability to take more distance on their own emotional states. They are therefore better able to articulate differences within themselves, since a more integrated self exists that can describe changes to its various parts. Since these learners describe many examples of useful and exciting learning experiences, we include two particularly compelling examples here. In the first example, Benetta describes herself as growing less shy and more open, friendly, and comfortable with other people. She attributes these changes to the ways that she has learned from her psychology class, in that as she studied various aspects of personality and reasons why people have certain personality traits, she was able to identify aspects of herself that she wanted to change.

I was confused about how I act sometimes. And now I know, okay, that's because the psychology teacher says this, I read the book and it's more clear for me. Now I

know why I am shy. I'm so shy. And now I know the reason. I think that is because my parents—hereditary. My father is like that. And now I say, okay, I'm shy because my father is like that. It's more clear. [And now] I feel more comfortable talking to people. Before, I couldn't speak with you, like look in your eyes directly. I only like with my head down. And now I can do it. I can see you directly, and I feel comfortable talking to you.

I don't know at what point I changed, but it was in psychology class. Something happened this semester. I can't explain to you exactly how it just happened because it just changed. I didn't know how. I didn't know how. Every time that I read a chapter, I say okay, maybe that is one of my problems. I'm going to change this. I went to the next chapter and I would say, "Okay, I have to change this myself." This was a big change for me. My personality, everything. Now my work, I'm talking with everybody. I'm saying, "Oh hi, how are you doing?" And I'm making a conversation with everybody, all my co-workers. And here, I have more friends in college. Before I was only alone and just, I came to class, different classes. I went to the learning center, do my homework, and go home. I went to work. I did my work. Never talked to nobody. Now I spend more time with people. I'm talking. Now I have more friends. I think it's a big improvement for myself.

I say how I change like that? That personality that I had before, and now I'm more open. I think that is the word. I'm open now. More friendly. I have more communication with others. That's good because they say, "Okay, she's a nice person."

In telling this story, Benetta seems to take some responsibility for making these changes in her life. She seems able, therefore to review and critique her own actions and aspects of her personality based on a Self-Authored theory about how she would prefer to be. Rather than accepting that she must be shy because she inherited that trait, she is able to make that decision for herself.

There is also evidence that Benetta continues to use a Socializing way of understanding herself and her experiences. Even though she mentions that she purposefully wanted to change, she still cannot really describe how this change came about, how the various factors in her life were involved. This difficulty may reflect the authority that her external environment has for her. She does not completely possess the ability to separate her ideas and feelings from those around her, to see them as something she can regulate and control from within. An increased ability to do these things might enable her to step away from the parts of herself that have changed and describe the process of change more clearly.

Serge, another student in the program, describes a similar change experience that he had. In his story, his increased ability to understand people enables him to change his emotional reactions. He grows less angry, better able to understand himself and to tolerate other people.

You know something, when people say something to me I usually get, even I don't show you that I'm angry, but I'm angry inside. Now it's like there's not anything that make me angry. You can say anything you want, and I'm just looking at you, and that's all. If I see something that's going to make a big fight, I'm going to go. You know, it's a lot of thing that's changed. So now I am less angry and mean. No, less emotional about the things that's not going to help me. If you say something to me like, instead of fighting or instead of saying bad words to you, I just let you go, and go my way.

I think the learning is, like they say the language, is really good thing for human to experience. And when you're learning those things, you behave in a new way. You understand yourself in another way. And then you see the world, and then you understand the world another way, in your own way. And now I know how to tolerate people. I know how to understand and know everybody. Because everybody behave in that way, in their own way, in their own world. And I have to be in my own world and have my own world. And I have to tolerate and understand the value of everybody.

We learned the social learning. We learned a lot of things about people, about, you know, a lot of things that we have inside and we don't know. And then maybe by studying psychology, we understand the things that we have that needs to be changed but that needs to be shaped again.

In this story, Serge explains that his change is not just one of learning to control his anger, but in fact, he has changed the way he understands people so that he doesn't even become angry at all. This kind of change suggests, perhaps, that Serge has experienced a transformation in his way of interpreting other people's behavior. His emphasis on having his "own world" and everyone else having "their own world" may indicate that Serge is less identified with the thoughts and feelings of others than previously. Growing less dependent on maintaining a sense of inclusion and mutuality with others, Serge is also less controlled by them and their behavior. His increased Self-Authorship enables him to understand others better because he is not threatened by their difference. They can behave "in their own way, in their own world" without threatening his world.

Thus, as long as their developmental capacity to construct conceptions of a "good student" loosely matches the demands placed on them by their institution, all

participants in our study demonstrate some capacity for identifying and acquiring the cultural capital necessary to succeed as American community college students. In situations where the institution requires students to operate with Socializing or Self-Authoring ways of understanding, requiring abstract or independent reasoning, some students may need additional types of support to help them develop these capacities. Many of our students do face these demands as they encounter ways that American culture and its institutions expose them to messages that devalue their own backgrounds, values, experiences, and cultural characteristics.

### **Marginalization: Messages of Inequality**

As the students in our study attempt to acquire the skills necessary to succeed as college students, they are faced with the racial, class-based, cultural, and linguistic inequalities of American culture. In addition to possessing the ability to acquire the skills and behavior that constitute cultural capital, students may therefore need to possess additional abilities. In order to construct a conscious and creative response to potentially toxic messages about their own cultural identity, students may need to identify, interpret, and evaluate the implicit messages that accompany their Socialization process.

Sociologist Awad Ibrahim (1999) argues that in a racially conscious society such as the U.S., new immigrants are categorized according to the existing racial divisions. For example, a Vietnamese student living in Vietnam might not think of herself as “Asian” in the sense of being “other” or “minority.” However, when she moves to the United States, she would be exposed to new messages about her racial identity, messages which could cause her to think differently about her race. Having moved from Africa to North America, Ibrahim remembers his own changing awareness of his racial identity.

As a continental African, I was not considered Black in Africa; other terms served to patch together my identity, such as *tall*, *Sudanese*, and *basketball player*. However, as a refugee in North America, my perception of self was altered in direct response to the social processes of racism and the historical representation of Blackness whereby the antecedent signifiers became secondary to my Blackness, and I retranslated myself: I became Black. (p. 354, emphasis in original)

According to American racial categories, 15 of 17 participants in our study are members of minority groups, and they will therefore be culturally recognized and marginalized as Black or Asian or Latino. These predetermined categories tend to erase differences and complexities of cultures, personalities, and languages and send

powerful messages to students about the identities they should construct for themselves.

Noticing the ways that racial categories and associations are imposed on students, one of the teachers in the program, Carol, describes how some accept the identities offered to them by U.S. culture, even when those identities are unrelated to their own experiences. In her view, some students are Socialized into an identity of resistance and opposition and take on these identities and the behaviors associated with them.

You know that there's a kind of a funny thing. Some of these kids are very well educated. They come from [a country in the Caribbean], and they come here and they identify with sort of the American Black thing and the kind of tough guy in the school and the bad attitude, and I'm not trying to say all, but suddenly they relate to kind of this minority status, hostile, you know, minority, entrenched minority kind of thing that has been the African American experience here but not really theirs. I mean, it's just they come here and they say, "Okay, the rules are different." And they relate mostly to their peers and not their parents who are going through their own difficulties with coming here, if they even came, and so you tend to see that, you know, with some of the students [from a Caribbean country]. And when you really dig a little bit, you see that actually a lot of them are quite educated and came from middle or upper class backgrounds when they were there, and that the affectations that they've taken on here are just that.

Carol's comments seem to suggest that the students take on these identities somewhat unconsciously, since the students' new identities are unrelated to their past experiences. Ibrahim (1999) makes a similar argument, noting that

the Western hegemonic representations of Blackness . . . are negative and tend to work alongside historical and subconscious memories that facilitate their interpretations by members of the dominant groups. Once African youths encounter these negative representations, they look for Black cultural and representation forms as sites for positive identity formation and identification (Kelly, 1998). An important aspect of identification is that it works over a period of time and at the subconscious level. (Ibrahim, p. 360)

In further explanation, Carol mentions that when exposed to different cultural messages and expectations which invite students to shed their new "African American" identities, some "really come around," implying that they adopt identities more relevant to their own experiences.

Some students in our study recognize that others may judge them according to racial prejudices. For example, Ling-Hui describes her plans to transfer at the end of the first semester to another community college in the area. She worries about how the American students there perceive Asian students. Her comments indicate that she reads certain messages in the culture around her that value some racial identities more highly than others.

I hoped the classmates there are like here, but they are more American. Here are more international student so I think that's the difference. I have to get used to be with more Americans. Now, I don't have American classmates so I just worry if I start there, maybe I can't adapt in the class because we will divide in groups. Maybe Americans they don't want to be in group with Asian. They think maybe our image is not good. So I was very worried.

In my math class, they don't talk to me and I don't talk to them, to Americans. We don't talk a lot each other. Sometimes we have take-home tests. I go to library with classmates to study, so it's like an American group and Asian group separate. Sometimes maybe we have a project in class to have two or three people to do one project. How can I find a partner? I think it is difficult to do it. I have heard that some Asian students don't want to choose a course where there are no other Asian, only him or her. I feel maybe uncomfortable, worried too.

While Ling-Hui notices that these messages exist around her, it is not clear from her comments whether she accepts or rejects these messages. It is possible that she can construct a positive response to this situation; however, her feelings of being “uncomfortable” and “worried” may indicate that she allows these messages to define her in negative ways.

The learners in our study are also learning English as a second language, another aspect of their identity which traditionally connotes “outsider” status in the U.S. (Lin, 1999; Norton, 1997; Pennycook, 1999). As ESOL students at BHCC, they are placed within the lower tracks of the institutional hierarchy. They are classified as needing remediation and are not yet eligible for college credit. This placement can also carry a certain social stigma. It classifies them as “foreign,” different from the American students who “own” the language and the institution. Such a viewpoint illustrates the “abstracted notion of an idealized speaker of English from which ethnic and linguistic minorities are automatically excluded” (Leung, Harris & Rampton in Norton, 1997). As non-native English speakers, these students must improve their English as a necessary first step toward achieving academic recognition as well as higher social standing within the institution.

Some participants are aware of the low social and academic value placed on being in ESOL classes. They distinguish these classes from the “real” or “normal” classes, for which students can earn credits. Ling-Hui’s comments illustrate the difference in status between these two programs. Her fear is that once she has left the program, she may not be able to handle this coursework without the ESOL support.

I enrolled in this program just because I have to study ESL 3. But I also want to take another course, like normal course. I don’t want just that English. So I choose psychology. But I also worry that after the ESL, if I study another major maybe I can’t understand, without all the ESL help. I don’t know. I just worry.

Actually my family and friends don’t want me to take the ESL class. They want me take normal class like I can choose a major. So maybe they think it’s easy or because it’s just English class, so I just take one psychology. But I think it’s good begin for me.

What is not clear from these comments is whether Ling-Hui has internalized these beliefs, accepted the fact that the ESOL classes are “easy” and deservedly lower in status than other courses.

When someone criticizes Natalia’s ability to speak English, she experiences these criticisms as making her feel like she has a disability, like there is something literally harming her, “cutting” her.

But to learn something in different language, like science or even grammar, just simple grammar, it’s hard, it’s really hard. So sometimes when I am talking to somebody and people say, “Oh you don’t speak well, blah, blah, blah” and say something like not really good. I was like, “I’m sorry.” And I feel like I have a disability, I have like, I have something that like, cutting myself, don’t say anymore. If somebody said it about me, I believe it. I don’t know why, I do. I just do this.

Other students describe differences between ESOL students and American students as differences of culture. Having come from other countries, these students feel separate from the American students. Many do not like feeling separate and different, describing it as feeling “strange” or “scary.”

Well, American students are different than international students. The international students came from different cultures and understood each other. The American culture is different. So we share the same thinking about American culture, that it’s different than we came from. So that makes us to connect and to relate to each other. We have the same feelings. So when you go to other classes, we don’t have

that. You feel like you are there the minority, and here is you are now a majority, all of us internationals who don't speak the same language, but we connect. When you go there, you feel like minority, and something doesn't connect there. I guess we feel strange in this country. (Abdel)

This semester is much harder because I don't know anybody in the class. It was much harder, most of them were Americans. So it was real hard. It was really scary. (Natalia)

Despite the fact that these students come from a variety of cultures, their comments suggest that in this community college, the differences among foreign cultures are less important than the differences between Americans and foreigners. Abdel's description emphasizes that the most important similarity among them is that they are all different from Americans. This fact alone enables the students to "connect" and have "the same feelings." It also exposes them to feeling inadequate, strange, scared, and alone.

Financial barriers also threaten their success. Out of economic necessity, most of the participants in our study must work long hours which limits the amount of coursework they can take and the hours they can study. Jobs and affordable housing are difficult to find, and some face the additional pressures of supporting other family members. Finally, few can afford to purchase resources such as computers and extra books to help them study. Many of the students in our study recognize and discuss the importance of money and education in U.S. society. However, no student presents a critique of these values. Instead, some, such as Marie, seem to accept them as indications of an individual's inherent worth as a person.

Because, especially in this society we are living in now, if a person is rich, they have money. I mean, you might have little respect because you have money. You know, money is everything. But if you don't, especially if you are not an American native and you from another country, you have nothing. I mean, they not going to look at you as nothing. That's the way I see it. And it is true.

But I mean, when my cousin is talking, like, she always tell me, you know, if you still want to be my friend, you got to go to school because there is no one going to take you the way you are. It is true. If you don't have any education, they don't want you. I mean, a lot of people, if you don't have anything, they don't want you. It's true. Especially if the person already has something. They not going to waste their time on someone like you. I mean, she always tell me good things, and she didn't have her mother. She was alone, and she made a new life.

The students in our study therefore experience significant obstacles to their continued success as students. However, since all individuals possess agency, the ability to act in numerous and creative ways, they can conceive of and engage in this task in several ways. In this chapter, we show two different dominant types of responses that the students in our study demonstrate. However, we do not wish to suggest that these are the *only* two ways that they respond, nor that any individual student responds in *only one* way. In fact, a student's response to any given situation may depend on many different factors such as the situation itself, the larger context in which it occurs, sources of support in the student's life, as well as the student's own beliefs and internal resources. We also see developmental capacity as one important factor, and in the following section, we illustrate the ways that it might differentiate among the ways that students respond to cultural messages of inequality.

#### **How Students Construct Messages of Inequality**

One way students can respond is by internalizing the values of the dominant culture. Following this course of action might lead students to denigrate aspects of their identity and culture which conflict with or are not rewarded by the dominant culture. In compliance with myths of social mobility, they may accept the idea that cultural capital is equally available to all who are determined and hardworking. As they encounter personal and institutional discrimination, they run the risk of bitter discouragement and frustration (Valadez, 1999). We see indications that some of our students may be at risk for this type of reaction.

Another way that students exercise agency is by resisting the dominant culture and developing an oppositional culture which challenges it (Shaw, 1999; Goto, 1999; Valadez, 1999). Students who resist the ideology of academic achievement might refuse to accept the authority of their teachers, or refuse to follow institutional norms and rules that they experience as harmful to them. To follow this path might place them at odds with institutional values in ways that jeopardize their chances of acquiring the cultural capital they need to succeed. However, students who are able to resist the dominant culture might also develop important abilities to shield themselves from toxic messages about their own cultural identities. Some students in our study demonstrate an ability to resist these messages and evaluate themselves according to their own internally constructed standards and values. We contend that the reason these students demonstrate these abilities is that they have begun moving away from Socializing ways of understanding and towards Self-Authoring ways of understanding.

#### Growing From Instrumental Ways of Understanding

The students in our study who operate primarily with Instrumental understandings orient toward explicit relationships of power and inequality in their lives or in the environment around them. Because they focus on the concrete rules and procedures of institutions and relationships, Instrumental students do not call these rules into question on behalf of larger, more abstract purposes. For example, Yousef recognizes that money affords some students increased access to education, to better jobs, to a greater number and quality of material possessions.

They give financial aid, but some rule is very hard, if you take one class, no financial aid, you have to take two classes. If you take one class, you lost financial aid. I'm driving taxi. Twelve hours a day. Then I study. But now I have to drop some hours. Less hours. I work six hours. But need to spend many time studying. Now, I have to take time from school. I have to spend time here in school. You know, I have to spend time learning.

I have computer course, but it very hard. I should have computer in my home. Because, I drop this class because I don't have computer in my home. But now I bought one. Because every day homework, I have to send it by e-mail. To the teacher or I have to spend three hours here learning something to do the homework . . . But now I bought one computer, I take in the fall.

I have to finish this school, it's two years. Because you can get degree from here, and you work after. The degree is important because you'll get more raise. You'll get good job somewhere, in two years maybe. But when you get four years, maybe you'll get diploma or something. You'll get good money.

Having identified the college's rules for providing financial aid and enumerating the concrete privileges that money can buy, Yousef does not call these rules into question on behalf of larger principles such as justice or fairness. Instead, he focuses mainly on following the steps and rules necessary to acquire the money and possessions he needs and desires.

Instrumental learners may also identify their teachers as holders of power. When they evaluate their teachers' use of power in relation to them, these learners tend to focus on whether or not the teachers help them meet their own concrete needs and goals. Xuan and Gilles both illustrate these ways of assessing teachers. They also explain their understanding of teachers' abuse or misuse of power—presenting subject matter in ways that make it difficult for students to understand.

The way my psychology teacher teaches, I understand the words; but, back in high school, the way my teacher teach, I don't really get. Like there is no key words. The book that we have right now, there is a blue word for the definition. That's how I understand. That's easier. Yes. (Xuan).

I don't know about a good teacher. You can tell who is a good teacher by the way they explain, the way they go through the homework, or maybe how they can do the class to be more easy for us. Some teachers, they don't do that. They just bent on their way. On their own way. Yes, some teachers, try to say what would make the class easy. Some teachers try to say that. Some, they don't. Yes, that is an important thing. The student, maybe they find it, this is the easy way, they can know about it, so. (Gilles)

Focused mainly on the ways that teachers do or do not help them meet their own concrete goals, Instrumental learners do not recognize messages of power and inequality that are not stated to them in explicit terms. Thus, these learners do not describe the more abstract or implicit power dynamics of the institution.

#### Balancing Around Socializing Ways of Understanding

In contrast, Socializing learners can identify more abstract messages of cultural expectations and standards. The danger for these learners is that evaluations of their learning, and their sense of their own acceptability cannot exist independent of the contexts and authorities in which they are embedded. These students have not constructed an independent sense of their own standards that they can consult to determine whether or not these evaluations are justified. They may often work hard in order to receive the approval that is necessary to their sense of well-being, but negative evaluations from authorities are likely to be unquestioningly internalized. In such situations, the negative feedback may be interpreted to be a negative evaluation of the student's self, rather than simply a negative evaluation of the student's behavior or work.

For example, when someone tells Natalia that she doesn't speak English well, she experiences these comments as violent attacks, like there is something "cutting herself." She explains that she always believes the criticisms others have of her, that she "cannot stop" listening to them.

I'm always listen what the teacher said, when people said about me. Always listen. I can't stop. Even my mom said to me that I'm really bad, I do bad things, I will try to not do the thing, just don't do this because I'm really bad in it. I'm like, you know, if somebody said it about me, I believe it. I don't know why, I do. I just do this. I'm really, sometimes it's really bad, sometimes it's really good.

People said to me sometimes, "You're a really bad girl. You didn't do that. You didn't do that." I'm like feel, "Oh yes, I didn't do that. I didn't do. I'm a really bad girl." And I'm just close myself, and I don't want to talk. I don't want to see. I

don't want to. I'm just closing, and I go somewhere to be alone to discuss it with myself. "Yes, you didn't do. You have to do that. You have to do that." And later when I do next time, I'll try to do everything right, and when people say to me that I'm still do this bad thing, I'm escaping it and I'm closing. It's like bad for me because I'm closed myself and I can't open my, like really just escape it. It was really often times.

If faced with negative appraisals from important others, Socializing learners such as Natalia run the risk of internalizing negative images of their own abilities.

However, these students may have some protection from negative messages if they have sufficient sources of positive support in other parts of their lives. For example, in the second semester of her coursework, Minh struggled in her English class. The teacher required that students write their essays during class time only. Minh was unable to prepare for these essays at home and often had a great deal of difficulty writing well in such limited periods of time. Dissatisfied with her grades, she grew very upset.

I talk to my boyfriend a lot. Every time I got a bad grade, I am so sad. I can't live. I can't live. I don't know why but my friend said, "It's not the last day. You can continue, continue, continue. Don't be sad." But every time I got the bad grade I think "oh yes." I feel so sad every time I got the bad grade. [And then] I talk to my friend. I talk to my boyfriend. They encourage me. "You did try your best. You have to satisfy what you did. You try your best. Don't be sad."

[I worry] less now because I think they right. They said that. "You try your best and you have to satisfy what you did. Don't be sad." And I have to think of future. I have to study for the future. Don't think about this. Because I cannot change what happened. Yes. So I have to try on the next step.

While Minh's experience causes her a great deal of strain and anxiety, the support she receives from important friends in her life enable her to "worry less" and to avoid thinking about the bad experience.

Natalia also receives support from other teachers she has. She describes her best teachers as those who "love the students" and "respect" them. She can recognize these teachers because, as she says, "I will feel it. It is inside me." For example, the extra time and attention that Natalia's biology teacher shows her enables her to feel much more positive about her own abilities as a learner.

When I ask him that I want to do extra work because I really like it he said, "Okay, come on Fridays. It is yours." He give a fetal pig to work on. He gives me the

brain of sheep, heart of sheep. He give to me to do anything I wanted to do with cells and microscopes, the plant cells and for the smallest organisms. So it is amazing. He is giving the chance. He is giving chances as he can do it. And up to that he knows that I work hard. I show to him all the stuff I did. For example my last work was work with corn, you know, like Indian corn, the different colors. I was trying to get the gene type of it. And it was interesting. He gave me the chance to do it. He said, "You know what? You did a really good job." He explained to me what I did wrong and what I did right. It is not his work, but he did it. This was really good. This was one of the most exciting things I ever did during this semester of school.

It seems particularly important for Socializing learners such as Natalia to work with teachers who can affirm and encourage students' sense of hope and confidence in their own abilities. For these students, who make up the majority of the learners in our study, it is crucial that they find enough of these sources of support, either in the college itself or in other parts of their lives.

#### Growing Toward Self-Authoring Ways of Understanding

Self-Authoring students seem better able to evaluate and critique the messages they receive about race, class, linguistic, and cultural differences. As they move away from Socializing ways of understanding, they develop the ability to reflect on the standards and values of their cultural surround, reviewing them according to their own internal standards and values. Thus, even if the culture messages imply their inferiority, they are able to reject these messages and disregard negative feedback that contradicts their own values and standards.

In the first semester of the program, one of Marie's teachers suggests that she may not be sufficiently prepared to pass her class. Rather than accepting and internalizing this opinion of her abilities, Marie relies on developing her internal sense of authority to guide her. She is able to disagree respectfully with her teacher's assessment and maintain confidence in her own theories about her abilities. She convinces the teacher that she will be able to learn the material successfully.

[My teacher] is the one that told me, "I don't think you are going to be able to make it and you can just drop this class." And I told her, "No. If I fail, I fail, but I am not going to drop it." She said, "Well, it is going to be very hard. You are going to struggle." I'm like, it's okay, and I know if I want to do something, you know, if I really want to do it, then I will do it, and I told her, "Yes, and I am not going to give up. I am going to do it." And she is very proud of me now. She is like, "You have been doing a good job."

Similarly, when Marie does not learn much in her second semester English class, she does not assume that the fault is with her. Instead, despite his official position of authority in the institution, she places the fault with her teacher.

There are bad teachers. And I am telling you, this one was the worst one. Because when he come in class, he didn't really care about, I mean, some nonsense joke he just giving to us. And sometimes he just opens the book, doing something else, I mean, it's not English at all. I think I wasn't learning anything, so I had to just drop the class. If I stayed and he would just give me a grade and pass me, I would just go to the next level. I would just have to drop it and do it over again. I wouldn't learn anything. Not all teachers are like that. That was the first one I had like that, I mean.

Marie does not look to the teacher as an expert who can validate her own ways of learning. She does not even seem particularly concerned with his evaluation of her since she assumes that she will pass. Instead, she focuses on whether or not she will be able to learn from this teacher, whether he will be able to help her acquire the skills, knowledge and strategies she needs to improve her English. When she decides that her teachers will not be able to meet her standards, she decides to drop the course.

Gabriela shows that she is able to evaluate messages she receives about her racial identity, and she rejects these messages when they are incompatible with her own images of herself.

I got a job. At the beginning, it was okay. But after, I see a lot of discrimination involving American people, and also I saw discrimination from Latino people to Latino people who work there. Discrimination in your face. When you start to work in there everything is okay. But then things are going on and you see things I didn't like.

For example, one of the things was one day on my free day I went there to write stuff for myself. And one of the lady, she told me when I was paying, she don't want to make the discount for the benefits. I'm working there full-time. They told me, "Every time that you came here, you have to come in from the back door." And I say, "No, I don't think so. I don't think so." And I went from the front door. And after that I was thinking, that's not fair. These people do not appreciate the work that you're doing. They think, and they treat you badly, treat me bad, and they think that I'm Latino. I don't know, or the slave, something like that. I believe in the people right and the human rights. That's not my personality that people treat me bad. So I say I don't think so. I say forget it. And yesterday, I call and I say I was

sick, "I'm sorry, I don't feel well, I'm not going to work tonight. I'm sorry." And I feel great. I feel good.

Like Marie, Gabriela does not allow the opinions of others to determine how she should feel about herself. Resisting her co-workers' attempts to treat her "badly," as "the slave," Gabriela evaluates her work according to her own standards. She has her own definition of what is "fair" and how she should be treated. When others do not live up to these standards, she is able to critique their behavior.

After beginning classes with some American students, Gabriela also reevaluates her fears that these students are somehow superior to her.

For the first day of my English class I got American classmate, two Americans. I felt bad because I got an American classmate for first time, and they didn't seem to me friendly as another international student. But also I thought if they are American, they are on this level, it is so low, it's a pre-college course. They should be in English 111, not here. But on the first day of class also, the teacher give us an assignment, a topic and he start asking about grammar. I did good on that part. But for the writing, one of the boy, he finish his assignment in 20 minutes of class. The first 20 minutes and I was struggling for my ESL dictionary. I looking for words and thinking and organizing ideas. He was done. He just went through and also the American girls. I was like "oh my God." I felt so bad. The next class, I have to work with this guy who finished in the 20 minutes. That guy, he was really good. We finished. We was the first group to finish. But then I saw that what is his problem is that he cannot stay in class more than 20 minutes for the whole time class. He doesn't have any more idea to write. He just finish. I was like thinking, reviewing, doing this, doing that.

Gabriela realizes that this American student has limitations that she does not have. He cannot stay in class for long and quickly runs out of ideas for his writing. In contrast, she sees that she is able to continue working, thinking, and reviewing to improve her work. Gabriela no longer seems to feel that American students should necessarily be on a level above her simply because they are Americans.

Sonja also re-evaluates her feelings toward American students and ESOL classes. When she first began the program, Sonja saw ESOL classes as having low status. While she describes the program as "very good," she also felt that she was "wasting time" preparing for "real" classes.

I want to get away from this program so badly because I want to like go to regular class and real college, to real like class with people that speak English. But I would

probably fail or something so I think this is a very good way for people that don't speak English as a first language to start.

However, by the end of the first semester, Sonja realizes that the program was very valuable to her. She learned a great deal and feels "lucky," "fortunate" to have been in the program.

And I told you, at the beginning I wanted to get away from it. I don't want to go to real English now, I think I'm going to miss this. I know that I have to go to some kind of English. And I know that I wasn't ready for the real. So I knew that I need some program. At the same time, so I was ready to go for it, but I wasn't happy about it. I didn't feel happy about it. Not until I started, no. Because all the time, oh, I want to get away from this, I want to get away from here. So I feel ESL is labeled. So, my God, I'm going to school, taking these classes, and wasting more time. But when I started now, I realize, actually, I'm not afraid to go. I'm just, I guess I just realize how happy I was to go to this program, how lucky I was, how fortunate I was, how much it helped me.

After finishing the ESOL/Psychology program and taking "real" classes for one semester, Sonja no longer accepts the idea that ESOL classes are lower in status. She is able to reevaluate her former beliefs and the messages of the institutional culture about the value of her coursework and her value as an ESOL student.

To be honest, to be really, really honest, I think that I learned much more in my previous, which I didn't get credit and I feel so unhappy for it. Because this semester from English I didn't learn anything new. It was like repetition. Maybe math a little bit.

And Sonja realizes that she can also perform successfully in classes with American students.

I'm more confident. Now when I have to deal with American students, I'm not afraid of them anymore. I was very afraid at the end of the my ESL program, of American students. I was very afraid of American. Now I'm not afraid of them anymore.

In some important ways, then, learners moving toward Self-Authorship have greater protection from the negative evaluations of others. However, as they learn to rely on their own standards for successful learning, they also run the risk of letting themselves down if they fail to meet those standards. Sonja explains,

I have one goal to finish [the semester]. Because maybe after that semester, if I finish that semester good enough, I could think to transfer to some other college. But I'm still not ready because, if I do poorly, I would be like I'm nothing. So I think maybe the next semester and real English, I can maybe help to take the chance to try.

Since more Self-Authoring students rely on their internally constructed standards to evaluate their learning and performance, indications that they are not meeting these standards or living up to their own potential are likely to feel like a loss of competence and control.

These risks are somewhat mitigated by these students' capacities to review and reflect on their own standards and values, to revise their own theories when they perceive them to be inadequate. We see indications that some students moving toward Self-Authorship do engage in this process of revision. Reflecting on her own experiences of feeling offended by the ignorance of Americans, Sonja sees that she has also acted in ways which could offend people who come from different cultural backgrounds.

I see that I can connect with Asian students. I can talk with them. I see that I can learn a lot of them, from them. It's so interesting, and it's important that it's like open me. I am feeling that I'm not limited anymore that I like now. At first, I thought that we are very different from each other. And I thought that people from, I don't know, China, they listen only that kind of music. And then I asked that girl, "Have you ever heard about Madonna and Michael Jackson?" And when she told me that they actually heard about Madonna, about, I was like, "Oh, really?" When I came here, when I meet my friend, he's American, and he asked me, "Have you ever heard about Tupac?" And my sister, she had a room full of his pictures and his book, and I was like, I was like, "Are you crazy?" I even get mad. "How can you ask me something like that?" And then I was thinking, "Hey and you asked that Chinese girl if she ever heard, and. . . ." And I tried to compare how was I thinking about that people, about some other people that's not from my country, and, and then I start to compare how I behave, according to them. That's opened me. That's why I am feeling it's opened me. I don't feel like I'm limited anymore. I feel like I'm just born again. And I'm really grateful for that opportunity to see that, to see so many different people. And I'm just here one year. Can you imagine that? So, I practically didn't see anything yet because, you know, the first one, the first year, you don't even know where you are. And, I'm always more open. That's what I like about school.

When presented with information that contradicts her theories, Sonja can use this information to construct more complex theories.

The ability to reflect on and perhaps revise one's theories is often accompanied by increased appreciation for adversity and conflict. Self-Authoring students such as Serge, Marie, and Sonja can interpret conflict as an opportunity for growth that does not fundamentally threaten their sense of self. They are therefore more open to receiving and learning from differences of opinion, which lead them to form more complex and inclusive solutions.

Initially, I didn't want to make any mistakes, but I learn that you have to learn by your mistakes. You can't be shy, you have to talk to some of the people and they say, no this is not the way you say that. When you learn it, you don't say it that way anymore. (Serge)

You are always criticizing the thing. And the thing is, once you really have an idea about what you are going to do, once you get an idea, it's like, "Oh, my God." This is what I have learned; before I criticize something, I have to take a chance first. Give the thing a chance, you know, to see what is it about, what's going to happen to it. And before I do, say something else. (Marie)

I remember my math teacher from my country, I hated that woman. I just couldn't stand her. She failed me once on the math. But she told me, "You cannot study math. You cannot, like, not study anything and then expect to study everything in one or two days and then just kind of say ask me now. That's not how I'm doing. You're failing. I don't care that you know now everything." And I hated her. Now if I see her, now I'll say thank you to her. That's a good teacher. Teacher who's not afraid to flunk you. (Sonja)

In these instances, students describe the ways that conflict, disagreement, or adversity contributed helpfully to their own development. Because they can retain their own perspectives while comparing them to other, contrasting perspectives, they are able to consider ways that integrating new ideas with their own can be beneficial.

A developmental perspective illuminates differences in the ways that students experience and respond to harmful messages about the value of their cultural identities. Some but not all students in our study seem to be effectively able to resist these messages, to respond to them in ways that enable them to continue to experience themselves as effective and able learners. Those students operating predominantly with Socializing ways of understanding, however, are at risk for internalizing messages that devalue them and jeopardize their ability to maintain an overall sense of confidence and optimism about their learning. Yet, when we look at students' overall descriptions of themselves, we continue to see evidence that they are able to feel positive about their abilities and potentials as students.

### **Overall Evaluations of Themselves as Students**

The most hopeful way for students to exercise agency is to acquire the necessary skills to succeed in the academic world while maintaining a positive sense of their cultural identity. When students develop a sense of hopefulness about and belief in their own capacity to achieve, they are more likely to persist toward their own academic, social, and occupational goals (Lin, 1999). Despite the many obstacles and negative messages they face, we find that, on the whole, the students in our study possess a positive sense of their own agency. They view themselves as students in ways which seem closest to this third, most hopeful type of response. Developing the possibility for this type of response is often contingent on mediating forces such as teachers, program structures, and peers. We will consider such factors later in this chapter. First we will illustrate the ways our students retain a positive sense of their own agency in making successful transitions into their role as students at an American community college.

At the end of the first semester, when they had completed the ESOL/Psychology program, the students describe feelings of success, confidence, pride, and optimism.

I success in this program. I feel confident. I success in drawing class and Psychology class. I got all A's in psychology class. Yes, and from the ESL class, I skip English 095. Yeah, I go to English 111. Now I can write the essay in order. And it make me success. Now I feel confident by myself because now I feel good, a little bit intelligent. The success help me improve my study. I satisfied what I did." (Minh)

The best thing is that I finally completed the ESL program. I didn't know that I will pass it. In the beginning, I was thinking, I don't think I will make it because of all the writing skills, the work that she gave us in psychology. I thought that I would have to continue on studying, but I did pretty good in it. (Xuan)

First, you get improvement in your thinking, first, and your writing. And you eventually gain a good feeling about yourself. And you get more confidence about yourself. Well, the confidence came because you're studying something different or like a particular psychology class is very hard. And it makes you feel different. And then you got like an A for psychology. It's a hard field, and new concepts. And they have hard language and different words. And it makes you feel good about yourself, like you did all that things, and you eventually get an A. Like, wow, what a good thing you did. (Abdel)

Oh, it's good. We had a difficult time. Yes, it was very long, and too many assignments to do, but it was good. Sometimes it was tough, but now I feel like I did something, that it helps me to see how it was great to start something and to get

this thing done. Kind of I am grading myself, and I know now that I did well.  
(Armand)

It was good, because I studied very hard. I got good results. I'm very happy.  
(Fawzia)

The students' descriptions do not focus on the ways that the difficulty of the work has frustrated them or caused them to question their own abilities. The fact that the work was difficult yet they have still found ways to succeed seems to have bolstered these students' feelings of accomplishment.

With the end of the first semester, these students graduated from their pilot program. They were not required to take ESOL classes, no longer enrolled in classes as a cohort, and could now receive college credit for their subject-matter courses. We spoke with them again at the end of their second semester, to see how they had experienced this transition. For the most part, the students report having had good experiences, retaining their sense of achievement and optimism. Their experiences, however, were not as uniformly positive as they were during the first semester. Some students had teachers they felt were too difficult or unfair. Three students—Fawzia, Marie, and Natalia—chose to withdraw from classes because they were unhappy with their teachers. Many students describe classes and subject matter that were particularly difficult for them. As a result, Minh and Gilles feel that they did not achieve the success they had wanted.

Last semester, I got on the good grade. And this semester, my grade is not good as last semester. Last semester, I feel confident by myself about writing class. But this semester, I feel nervous and worried about writing. Different was from last semester and this semester. Just only for writing. And the other class is okay. I feel difficult. I feel more worried than last semester. (Minh)

I learned a lot. But it was hard. So I tried. I did my best. Like English class, I didn't pass it, I got the incomplete. I'm going to finish it next semester. Yes, that was hard for me. I am not pretty sure about how to write an essay or paragraph. I always get confused. I learned a lot, but not really well, so. I don't take biology right now. I am going to take it soon. I cannot take it because my English is too low. So, maybe next semester. (Gilles)

Other students, such as Abdel, Natalia, and Sonja, struggled with difficult teachers and complicated subject matter but felt they were able to find ways to succeed.

It was a very good experience. The difficult one is that just the final exams. They all came on the same week. Very difficult part about it. I made a plan in the last

couple weeks. Because I have to finish accounting in the last day. I have three finals in the same week. So I thought that if I took two earlier I would give myself a chance to study for accounting. That's what I did. It was great. It worked. I get an A on those, and I'm not sure with accounting yet. I did it on my own. I study hard. Very hard. From ESL to college courses, that's a big change. (Abdel)

The semester was difficult, yes. It was. Biology was exciting, which was wonderful. It was beautiful, but it was real hard. The test that he give us was word problems. I was doing this dictionary. My first two grades was 45 and 50. My last was 100. I feel success because I finish my courses without any C. I finish the hardest class. I was jumping around, jumping on everybody. I was like, "Yeah, I finished! I finished! I'm done! I'm done! I'm done!" I really wanted all my credits. So for me, it was, like, I really want to do it, so please, and I did it. (Natalia)

I didn't have trouble in English class even though I was afraid, because I didn't know what to expect there. But I didn't have trouble at all. And I finished that class, like, very easily. I got the best grade. But I am very, very bad at math. I'm very bad, very bad. I cannot even describe. I was on basic one, which is 090. That's, like, really basic stuff. My little sister, she's, like, 14 years, she is laughing all the time when I'm showing her my homework. But that really exhausted me because I'm very bad, and I had to put extra work for the math. And my professor, she's a good, she's a good professor. But she's very strict. She never smiled. And I'm just not used to work with people like that. But after a couple of days of studying really hard, I started to make progress. And then I ask her, am I going to fail? She is, like, "No, no. You make progress." (Sonja)

Finding a way to overcome their obstacles, these students report feeling good about their success and hopeful about their abilities to continue to succeed.

A final group of students report uniformly good experiences during their second semester. They make explicit statements about the high levels of confidence they feel, as well as their sense that they will be able to reach their goals.

In September, I didn't have any idea, I was not sure about my English. I have to work on that, try to learn more, speak well, especially write because to write is not easy in English. So I was not confident in myself, but I just realize learned good, and I can do school in English. I can start practicing in the field and continue in a four-year college, so before I was not able to see that. I was doubting of what I can do and my skills, but now I just learned that it is possible to do it. (Armand)

I feel so happy. Because my plan is to know more English, to speak well, correct way. So I guess that's I want. I got what I want, so I am happy. If I do it well, it's not hard. Nothing is hard. (Fawzia)

I feel I'm more positive now, and I know that I can do whatever I want to. I will do it. I always think this way, but not here because it's more difficult. I saw other people that they went through to [a local four-year university], they study here, and then they went to another university, and other immigrants that they just are going to graduate. If he can do this, I can do this, too. I can do it. (Gabriela)

It was really, really great for me. I mean, I have learned a lot, things that I didn't even expect. Every time you take a new class, I think it's progress. I think it is. A new progress for you. Because I remember when I first came here, I couldn't, I was afraid of open my mouth and talk to people. I always thought that I would never be able to speak this language. I mean, even I don't speak it really well, but I have made a lot of progress. I think I can do anything if I want to. (Marie)

I have more confidence in myself now. Because when I came here in September I told myself that because I don't speak English, I would not be able listen my teacher, and he will not be able to understand me, too. And now I feel more comfortable now. I understand more. I noticed that I'm more self-confidence in myself. More self-esteem and willing to help anyone that just came to this college, trying to explain them how to be able to understand their assignments and what they have to do pass the course. (Serge)

Overall, the students' self-evaluations are less glowing than before, but they generally retain a belief in their own abilities as learners, enthusiasm for their work, and optimism about their futures. Despite the many obstacles and risks they face, they have demonstrated an ability to navigate the transition of acculturation, successfully taking on new roles as college students in American institutions. We wondered about the contextual factors that enable students to retain these largely positive images of themselves. In this next section, we turn our attention to the nature and characteristics of the supports students rely on within the program and institution as a whole.

## **SECTION V: HOLDING ENVIRONMENTS**

### **How Teachers and Peers Create Communities that Support Consciousness Development**

A developmental lens not only provides a structure for the interpretation of intellectual and cultural demands on adult learners, it also suggests particular forms of support institutions might offer to buffer those demands in wholesome ways. The claim that one function of an educational institution is to support its learners through a series of complex but typical transitions arises from a conception of educational institutions as directly responsible for students' emotional well-being as well as their cognitive growth. Recent work in the study of community colleges as supportive environments

describes this function as contributing to students' "emotional capital," a concept derivative of the notion of "cultural capital" put forward by critical theorists (McGrath & Van Buskirk, 1999; Valadez, 1999). As we noted, cultural capital refers to the forms of social understanding and the web of connections adult learners can build in such social systems as community colleges that lead to greater capacities to negotiate and benefit from the economic gains that social access can provide.

Critical social theorists advocate that community colleges ought to become self-aware of the seductive pull of vocational and technical training for institutions and students alike, seeing these programs as straightforward avenues to economic advancement. However, these programs also may undermine the development of higher-order reasoning skills that prepare students to critique the social structures that act as barriers to their social advancement. "Critical pedagogists consider critical thinking as a key, but not singular element of 'critical political consciousness' and express strong concern that both students and teachers 'transcend the rote-based fragmented thinking that has degraded modernist schools'" (Bailey-Ben Ishay, 1994, p. 18, citing Kincheloe, 1993, p. 25).

Immigrant students in community colleges are especially prone to select vocational programs as the focus of their educational efforts when they have not yet developed a broader understanding of how technical education functions in American society. In some ways, technical education helps fulfill a social need for a base resource pool of fairly low-skilled employees who can fill service and production sector jobs. "If all the community college emphasizes is the opportunity to learn vocational skills at the expense of diminishing other possibilities and dimming student futures, it reproduces a class structure" (Rendon, 1999, p. 198) rather than giving students a choice about an array of professional and personal development opportunities. Adult learners who build "social capital" are better able to read these opportunities because they are more fluent in decoding socioeconomic markers, such as class distinctions and social tiering.

Studies of social capital in education find that student success is deeply affected by the social relationships within schools. Successful secondary schools, for example, function as "communal organizations." Such schools are characterized by a sense of shared purpose, and have practices that give life to these common beliefs, especially social relations centered around moral norms stressing responsibility and self-development. When these features join together, they promote engagement in students and commitment in teachers. (Bryk, Lee, and Holland, 1993, p. 275)

Emotional capital, by extension, is a source of positive self-appraisal and empowerment that aids individual students in conceiving of themselves as deserving of the full resources of the educational institution and thus of the broader society it represents.

Viewing emotional capital as the capacity of an organizational culture to hold in place positive appraisals of well-being directs attention to how programmatic and cultural factors intertwine and mutually strengthen one another. The analysis of emotional capital clarifies how educational settings can respond to the needs of culturally diverse, at-risk students whose practical difficulties are aggravated by cultures in which negative and dispiriting interpretations of reality predominate. (McGrath & Van Buskirk, 1999, p. 20)

As a social analysis of the 'production' of self-esteem, the idea of emotional capital directly connects institutional values and norms for supporting students with their ability to make desired gains in a new society.

In educational settings characterized by high levels of emotional capital, the environment as it is socially constructed will be experienced as benign or at least manageable within the stock of available coping resources. Under these conditions, students are able to concentrate on their studies and are not distracted by potential threats, worries or other preoccupations that might lurk on the periphery of awareness. (McGrath & Van Buskirk, 1999, p. 18)

Necessarily, the contours of this "environment" need to reflect both the students' emerging goals for themselves (as full participants in and also intelligent critics of the educational setting) as well as the organization's goals for its students. And the elements of a positive environment will necessarily attend to the psychological as well as the social aspects of student support. A useful framework for considering how to best design such an environment draws on what developmentalists call a "holding environment," the "psychosocial environment" which "is the particular form of the world in which the person is, at this moment in his or her evolution, embedded (and) the very context in which, and out of which, the person grows" (Kegan, 1982, p. 116). The study of holding environments brings the question of "goodness of fit" of support directly to the issue of where students are currently positioned developmentally and where they need to next move (Kegan, 1994). In other words, a good holding environment meets the students where they are, confirms their current way of knowing, and then stimulates them to grow beyond their existing perceptions to new and greater ways of knowing. The holding environment must be "good both at holding on *and* letting go" (Kegan, 1982, p. 127).

"Best practice" research in community college settings confirms the importance of this dual function of the holding environment. In their analysis of community college environments "which are particularly successful in educating at-risk populations," Dennis McGrath and William Van Buskirk (1999) specify that "they provide a balance between support and letting go so that students do not become either alienated from or overly dependent on the programs . . ."

These programs function as "holding environments" (Kegan, 1982), providing safe places for students to try out new identities and new ways of behaving while structuring out anxiety-producing considerations. By helping students reinterpret their experiences in ways that build a sense of competence, they allow them to concentrate on the task at hand . . . At the same time that these programs 'hold' students in a safe and supportive environment they also encourage independence so that they can move on. As students develop new competencies they must shift their attention to the future and move on to new educational or professional settings. The programs must shift their orientation from immediate support to promoting a sense that the organization will still 'be around for them.' . . . This balance of 'holding on' and 'letting go' that Kegan describes as essential to adult development (Kegan, 1982) produces graduates who are neither alienated from the organization nor overly dependent on it. (pp. 32-33)

Community colleges that manage to simultaneously affirm students' existing perspectives while encouraging their growth "contain a plethora of organizational and cultural practices which engender

and maintain in students positive appraisals and hopeful images of themselves in the world” (McGrath & Van Buskirk, 1999, p. 18). In our own research, we were especially interested in teaching practices that both confirmed and challenged students’ ways of knowing. Teachers contribute in multiple ways to the construction of an appropriate environment. We explored how the typical styles of classroom management as well as teacher interactions with students reflect their assumptions about what students are capable of in terms of both understanding and performance.

As our research progressed, we also became interested in the role of the student cohort in the holding environment culture. For the adult learners we followed in this setting, the first semester brought membership in a larger, cohesive group of international students who were co-enrolled in the ESOL program. The group as a whole shared two classes together in the fall (ESOL and psychology, as mentioned above) and kept company in other ways, including study groups, friendships, and a romance. The second semester brought a rather abrupt dissolution of the formal cohort as students moved on to regular classrooms across the college. Their experiences of the cohort and their transition into the broader school environment suggest important aspects of group experience that matter greatly to learners’ overall schooling experience. These two aspects of the holding environment as viewed by the learners in our study—teacher support and the cohort—will be reviewed in more detail here.

### Teacher Supports

The participants in our study consistently remark on the importance of teachers’ efforts in helping them progress as students. The forms of their descriptions of teacher support vary of course, depending on individual preferences. However, a pattern emerges from the student descriptions of teacher help that suggests again a conformity among student perspectives that transcends their evident cultural and personal differences. These patterns relate to their conceptions of the teachers’ responsibilities, intentions, and methods for enhancing learning in the classroom. As prior developmental research would predict, these patterns are consistent with the discrete expectations of teachers held by learners in other higher educational settings who share a developmental position with our ABE learners. They mirror these expectations in the following ways:

- Those participants who are primarily Instrumental knowers, like Perry’s dualists, focus their expectations on the clarity and specificity with which imparted knowledge is communicated by teachers. They prefer teachers whose strategies include direct guidance and modeling of desired behavior. They dislike teachers who ask them to compare or contrast multiple points of view or sources of knowledge.
- Those participants who are solidly positioned at a Socializing way of knowing appreciate teaching methods aimed at building their understanding in addition to

supporting skill development. They appreciate teachers who enthusiastically and compassionately employ methods that help them apply their learning to broader goals. They dislike teachers who discourage their tentative expressions of their own opinions.

- Those participants who are beginning to demonstrate a Self-Authoring way of knowing want their ideas to be valued and taken seriously by teachers. They look forward to vigorous exchanges with teachers and peers where perspectives are actively compared and contrasted. They generate their own standards for educational practice and critique themselves and their teachers against them. They dislike teachers who will not share responsibility with students for shaping work standards and processes.

These findings are stimulating for us because they suggest that developmental frameworks are also informative for adult learners of diverse cultural backgrounds who hold variable educational aspirations and that graduated forms of support practiced in traditional educational settings might be equally beneficial for learners in ABE settings. In these pages, we will look at how ABE learners' differently construct the teachers' role, the conclusions they draw about their own agency as students, and their ability to navigate key transitions in relationship to the forms of support they receive.

More stimulating, however, are the implications of these findings for the larger debate currently underway in communities of researchers, teachers, and policymakers concerning the appropriateness of different pedagogic frameworks for teaching and learning in community colleges that serve large ESOL populations. These debates tend to be value-laden and prescriptive, with contributors arguing over the political and social impact of various classroom cultures on students' capacities to direct their own lives. If institutional value systems are replicated in classroom environments, institutional core assumptions about learners' abilities are reflected in teacher practice. Our data suggest that the debate over classroom culture would benefit from an understanding provided by students themselves that they bring preferences for school cultures that reflect their current forms of consciousness development, and which, at the very least, need to be taken into account when establishing norms for teacher practice (See Quigley, 1997).

Our data suggest, for example, that **elements of the “democratic” classroom experience emphatically endorsed by the critical, emancipatory educational literature are inconsistently successful for the students in our study.** An undergirding premise of these approaches is that students should be invited to co-

construct knowledge and build a sense of their efficacy through collaborative forms of learning. The participants in our study made differing interpretations of this invitation by teachers to actively participate in the shaping of classroom culture. While some (Self-Authoring) learners openly embraced it, other (Instrumental) learners rejected it. Conversely, elements of classroom experience or teaching style sometimes portrayed in the literature as inappropriately authoritarian and disempowering actually appeal to Instrumental students.

We will look at these varying preferences in light of the discussion of “mono” and “multi” cultural classroom environments, suggesting that learners at different stages of development will resonate with those cultures that most closely approximate their preconceptions about how education ought to proceed. An implication of this discussion is that classroom cultures might be more successfully viewed as representing a continuum of needs and preferences rather than as closed categories that reflect only political motivations to dominate or liberate. Adult learners may need various forms of support consistent with their developmental level as well as with a declaredly transformative institution’s aims to liberate them from authoritarian claims on their minds. And for students who are currently consolidating the developmental level most consistently represented across our sample—Level 3, the Socializing way of knowing—supports that scaffold emerging capacities to reflect critically on one’s education will need to be drawn out. These students will need to be supported in “growing into” multicultural classroom environments. These implications will be taken up after we more thoroughly review how students’ preferences for teacher support reflect their current developmental positions.

#### **Student Perceptions of Teacher Support**

Just as the participants in our study differently see their roles and tasks as students so, too, do they differently construct the supports that they want and receive from teachers at the community college. In many ways, the supports that learners desire fit well with their conceptions of their role as students. They define their aims and tasks as students in a particular way and see the institution as more or less effectively supporting them in accomplishing personal goals. At the same time, learners never wholly give up simpler, more Instrumental concerns and desires for support around them even as they develop more complex understandings and desires. **Increasing mental complexity seems to be evidenced not so much by a wholesale shifting of concerns but by a layering of additional concerns and perspectives on the foundation of those which preceded them.** We noted earlier that the range of developmental positions represented by these students is not expansive; some of the

overlap in concerns may be driven by the common, Socializing perspective that underlies the participants in our study's thinking.

#### Growing From Instrumental Ways of Understanding

Not surprisingly, and in keeping with the developmental literature on student preferences in higher educational settings, Instrumental learners in our study tend to look for Instrumental supports from teachers. They prefer explicit assignments and descriptions of learning priorities ("He writes for us on the board everything important, yeah."—Yousef) as well as clear direction about how to do the tasks they see as the work of school. As Xuan explains in describing a favorite teacher's style,

The way he teach and the way the book is, like there is a definition. I study the blue words, that's how I study. I never studied before in high school. . . . I really didn't. . . . The way he teaches, I understand the words; but, back in high school . . . the way my teacher teach, I don't really get, like there is no key words. The book that we have right now, there is a blue word for the definition. That's how I understand.

Students with an Instrumental perspective rely on help from teachers that is directed toward explanation and review. They report finding it useful to work with teachers who will be prescriptive in standards for work: They go after class to get corrections on their papers and to have teachers "check your homework" (Yousef). They expect teachers to tell them not only how to approach and think about a topic, but also to provide writing mechanics. Yousef, for example, prefers direct instruction in the elements of writing:

She give us an option about five paragraphs—you have to choose one. I change it, she tell me, no, you just you stay here in this one. . . . Sometimes . . . she say everybody take one paper, write your name, give me topic sentence about anything.

Since knowledge for these learners is demonstrated primarily through skill gain, help often comes in the form of repeated opportunities for practice.

Teacher . . . helped my success because she gave us a lot of assignments, and we got to practice at home . . . which is my responsibility. I have to do the whole homework . . . I complete all the homework that she gave us, and it make me a success. (Minh).

Ya, she helped me, this is very good help. I feel that I learn many something new, but I think this is the best way, for practice, because we do practice . . . I did one paragraph seven times. (Yousef)

Clear, factual explanations are strongly preferred by these learners and constitute a large part of what counts as good teaching. They especially want teachers to speak slowly and to be organized in their explanations. Like Perry's dualistic knowers, they assert that there is one best explanation that just needs to be communicated well enough for the student to absorb it, perhaps through repetition. Xuan advises teachers that "the way to make it easier is if the teacher takes it slowly, like don't go too fast on teaching, and take notes." Yousef concurs, "Good teachers explaining to student very well . . . help us with homework, and explain for us the subject very well, and the rule of language also."

Ongoing relationships with teachers and advisors matter because they can facilitate the process of becoming and being a successful community college student. If a teacher knows a student, the student can trust that the teacher will take better care of the student's needs.

My advisor is the same as my ESL teacher. This is good for me. Sometime your advisor, he don't know you, how you study that, how you understand it, which one you want to take. If you stay with the same advisor, this is good. It help you many things. You don't have to ask. He know which semester you have taken this.  
(Yousef)

Participants report that some relationships with teachers from the program did continue into the second semester. While these relationships are perceived as supportive and the continued availability of these teachers encouraging, the support itself was typically described by the Instrumental learners as more incidentally social than academic. The relationships, stripped of the context of daily directive instruction, were no longer perceived as mentoring. Because Instrumental learners tend to rely rather heavily and explicitly on direct academic scaffolding by teachers, they may be at risk when such support becomes less available. A community college environment like BHCC, which supports self-direction as a critical component for academic success, may be particularly challenging for these students. The concrete, skills-oriented perspective of these learners may be shaken by teachers who ask them to take on alternative viewpoints in their writing and work. In their developmental analysis of classroom practices in another, similar Massachusetts community college, Howard Tinberg and Ronald Weisberger (1998) underscore the implicit demands of curricula which carry "a whole complex of expectations and demand a full range of thinking skills" students have not yet developed.

Kegan's work reminded (us) of this unfortunate fact: Teachers, in assigning tasks to their students, may assume a range of knowledge and abilities that those students have not yet attained; these expectations are rarely made explicit to the students. Instead they become part of a hidden curriculum or the "what exactly does the teacher want" game. (p. 50)

For Instrumental learners, the demand for self-direction may be experienced as an abandonment of supports. As the students in our study moved into the second semester, and explicit instruction gave way to more student-driven forms of learning, several of the Instrumental learners expressed confusion about teacher expectations and a degree of dismay over their inability to manage the work.

#### Balancing Around Socializing Ways of Understanding

Learners who are primarily embedded in a Socializing perspective still exhibit a preoccupation with skill development, as well as preferences for teachers who are clear and explicit in their directions and explanations. Fawzia and Ling-Hui describe teachers they found especially helpful:

He was my English teacher for last semester. He was so good teacher. He told us to write an essay or a paragraph in the class. And for next class he put some marks . . . to make a correction and when he gives us back the paper we make correction—that

means we rewriting. And we can do—we can understand our mistake easily. So it's a nice teacher. (Fawzia)

Actually, I think with ESL teacher is very good. I learn a lot in the English class. She give us homework, but every day she check the homework, correct it very carefully. And I think the material she give us is very good, help us learn a lot. If she didn't give me these, maybe I won't understand psychology so much. (Ling-Hui)

Like Instrumental learners, Socializing learners prefer teachers who will explain things clearly and speak slowly so that they, as new speakers of English, can understand. As Tak-Jang notes, "The teacher always explains the psychology things with easy way and then I can understand what they said . . . They speak so slowly. It's not—it's not like I'm seeing a movie." Armand elaborates, "[A good teacher is] simple and clear [and] explains things easily in a nice way so people can understand what is business."

However, while an emphasis on learning skills and absorbing the particulars of knowledge remains, they are expanding and broadening their concerns in notable ways. Unlike Instrumental learners, Socializing learners are beginning to exhibit a focus on and interest in understanding concepts. And they express interest in considering different perspectives and sources of information on a topic.

I always borrow some book from library to find out something extra information about human brain. Because English has so many way(s) to write about it. If this book have a different way to write about the human brain, and then another book have another way to tell about the human brain, and then I can learn more way to say the same thing about the brain. (Tak-Jang)

Socializing knowers also reflect approvingly on how teachers approach topics differently to meet the needs of a variety of students—as one participant puts it, he appreciates teachers who "focus on how the student is going to learn" (Jonas) rather than just on teaching through a prescribed set of methods.

I like the teacher that explains more—well, different—a teacher that (makes) easy the subject for this students or her students by making it more easily to understand and developing different ideas to study the subject. (Abdel)

So when we go to field trip she teach us something, and then we really learned. It's better than to teach just the textbook. (Ling-Hui)

ESOL students at this developmental position begin to talk about teachers as models for good behavior. Through listening and actively observing their teachers' conduct, they assimilate generalized norms for the new culture. Some learners focus more on learning specific moral or cultural behaviors.

The teacher is telling you true things. I trust him to tell me true things. Yes. I don't do that. I don't smoke. I don't drink. I take his advice. (Gilles)

Others talk about learning more abstract sets of culturally prescribed behaviors from teachers, like "how to be independent" (Abdel) or about U.S. cultural norms.

She didn't just teach us about the program, but also about American culture, about American way to live. So, that was interesting. So it was a kind of American culture class because you learn English. (Armand)

Some of these Socializing knowers report learning about novel, more independent ways to present themselves in American college classrooms. They recall with pride learning how to give voice to and defend their ideas. Support for demonstrations of emerging confidence in their reasoning processes often comes from a mix of peers and teachers. Natalia, for example, describes a pivotal event in her assertion of herself as a knower:

So I'm start like a little bit stronger. And teachers, they said this, it's like a little bit better. I see how she [Sonja, a peer] fights in class, how she prove herself, and she was right, you know, she was right! I was, like, wow! That's something. I have to do this. I have to just listen this. I have to, probably I have to be a little bit stronger to show improvement in my thought. And I did a couple of times and I was, like, wow.

I think it was something I was thinking. I said "It's not true." And teacher said "What?" This is the first time I said it's not true. But here I was saying strong, "It's not true, it couldn't be." I was trying! I said something that proved my thought. I was, like, wow, my God, I did it.

The development of independent thinking and voice comes, in part, when teachers value students' ideas. These Socializing knowers appreciate teachers who listen to and encourage the expression of ideas rather than focusing exclusively on skill development. Ling-Hui reports changes she notices in her willingness to ask questions that further idea development in the presence of a teacher who demonstrates her interest.

It is easier to speak up in the class here because if our sentence has mistake, the English teacher can still understand. She know what we want to ask. She know what we are thinking. If I ask the question, but it's not a good question or my sentence is not good, but the teacher still very kindly to answer me, it will encourage me to ask.

Having their ideas valued helps these students build a reciprocal relationship with faculty. Many use images of care-taking and "mothering" to describe these relationships, appreciating when connections are built that are not strictly formal and academic.

She act like we're her children, you know. We're like her babies. She all the time say to us, "You're the best class." Probably each class is the best because she's the

best teacher. For me she was, like, she was the best. A lot depends on the teacher, actually. I found it, too. (Natalia).

The English class, the teacher is like American mother. At first when I come to college I think maybe it's not very good, but I study this semester. I think the teacher take care of us. (Ling-Hui)

These students note and remark on the human qualities of these teachers. They comment not only on what teachers know and have to teach, but how they treat and value students. Tak-Jang, for example, describes a favorite teacher as having a "kind heart." These deeper, more expressly emotional connections lead learners to express their gratitude to their teachers by maintaining contact after classes end. Learners at this developmental position appreciate teachers who advise them and advocate for them beyond teaching study strategies. These learners report with gratitude actions their teachers have taken on their behalf, such as spending extra time advocating across the system to support a student's progress. Learners in this group consider advocacy fundamental to a supportive relationship.

My friend, Irina, she didn't pass to [the next level writing class]. Everybody fight for her. Carol said, "Okay, you have to write, do this, and this and this. You know what—I don't have the time, but you should come this time to me, and we will talk about it. Please come." And she did all the paperwork. Everything. She did it for her. (Natalia)

One student summarized the mix of supports that Socializing learners most appreciate receiving from teachers—clear explanations, human relationships, and advocacy.

I will really miss Carol. Yesterday we had like, like last class. I was almost crying, I was just, like, oh no. I don't want to go. It's real hard. I don't know if I'll have teachers like that again or not. But I know that they were the best for me. They did so much. They were, first of all, they were really good teachers. They were easy to explain. And second time, they were really good humans. Like they were people, not like somebody who came there, they blah, blah, blah, blah, they give us what they have to and just go away. Carol was always ready for fight for us. So she just, she's just human. (Natalia)

Socializing learners may be well poised to take advantage of the different forms of support teachers are willing to provide in the community college setting. They learn not only concrete skills from their classes, but also express growing interest in exploring ideas that connect them to larger conversations about how and what they know. For the participants in our study, the opportunity to observe cultural norms for American students is also central to their successful transition to the second semester and to later higher education. Supportive relationships with teachers who care about them as people are more likely to matter to these students than to more Instrumental learners. At the same time, they are unlikely to challenge the authority of teachers, or will at least (like Natalia) perceive such challenges as constituting a personal developmental advance. When teachers encourage the development and expression of their own ideas or confusions, these learners are supported in the move towards a more self-directed and Self-Authoring perspective.

Growing Toward Self-Authoring Ways of Understanding

Again, many of the concerns raised by learners at prior developmental positions are repeated by these learners, though these are often presented in somewhat more nuanced and complex ways. For example, these learners sometimes discussed very concrete and Instrumental concerns about getting to class on time and staying on top of lectures and assignments.

You got to study and try to keep up with professor. If you do that, at the end of the semester you might be . . . get a good grade. Because she will ask you to do a lot of things. She will give you essays. She will give you things to do. You've got to do all these things . . . I was talking with a student that entered the program. I told him to study and try to understand. And make all your effort to be in class on time. That's what I can suggest, I can tell someone to do, is to study. (Serge)

Though these concerns sound like those of the Instrumental learners, these learners often embed these concerns in an understanding of their larger purpose or in a sense of how corrections lead to deeper learning.

Because if you're responsible, you feel good when you're doing your job well, and it help you in the future. In my regular class, I be there on time. And the first five minutes the teacher explain, we will do this. I want this for the next day. And also when you get a job, when you get there in the first five minutes, I think is the most important time . . . Because the teacher gives the homework for the next day and you have to listen. And also when you work, it's tomorrow we will do this and do that. (Gabriela)

When you have a lot of homework it is really hard. One time I spent two/three hours for one introduction, and I can't even get it. Three hours, I can't get it, really. Three hours—it discourage me. I'm, like, "My God. Why can't I do this? Why can't I just get this? I'm, like, torn apart. I'm going to drop out. I'm going to forget about stuff like." And then I'm like, "No. I'm gonna try. Even if it is not good." And I did. And I give it to Carol, and she correct it. I didn't do too good on it. She gave it to me back. I did it, and I got a B on it and I'm like, "Okay. Hey we don't know things. We just have to work hard." So I really feel like I wanted to drop everything in life. Sometimes I come in and the way you wanted to forget about things. And then you just have to realize that this is life. Nothing is easy. Everything is hard in life. (Marie)

Like the Socializing learners, they appreciate teachers who find different ways of "pass[ing] on information so everybody know" (Serge). These learners also pay attention to developing what they report as deeper understandings. They are excited when teachers help them learn to think and can reflect on that process.

She has required us to do a lot of homework, writing . . . She taught us how to write and how to read and how to read an article, to catch the main idea . . . I think that's very helpful for me, yes. One of my teachers . . . gave us a lot of American

literature. For example poems, novels. I like them so I can learn a lot of American thought, American life from this . . . [Chinese teachers] only teach you the skill for reading so you can read fast, fast, fast. They don't give you the tools to think. (Fei-Wen)

And the professor is a really good professor. Really take his time and wants you to understand the concept, understand the subject. And if you don't understand something, he go and try to make it easy for you . . . like try to take something, the real life, and make you understand the concept. (Serge)

Like other learners, Self-Authoring learners appreciate the time that teachers spend to help them learn, especially when they're struggling. Benetta recalls her first semester teachers with admiration: "They were very special. They spend all the time—that's excellent because they help me a lot and together, they work together with me. This is the best semester that I ever had in my life." Like Socializing knowers, learners at this level appreciate simple encouragement they receive from teachers and advisors, even as they sometimes put this into the context of larger understanding goals.

Sometimes we want to give up, and she is, like, behind us. "You can do it, guys. One more mile to go. You guys can do it. Oh, you have been great." No matter what we do she says, "Oh, you guys are being great." You know, if you did this, next time do better, but it is very good. You know, she is always encouraging us . . . She is proud of what you are doing but she expected more. So that makes you feel good that, you know, if I did more than that, she is going to be more proud of you. (Marie)

Encouragement can form the basis for developing relationships, but for Self-Authoring knowers, connections are valued more greatly when students see teachers working hard to understand their perspectives. Being understood and taken seriously as thinkers matters to these students. At the same time, unlike more Instrumental learners, these learners are able to take on their teachers' perspectives, imagining how they themselves are viewed or could be viewed by teachers.

I got very enthusiastic teachers. Some teacher allow me to do whatever I wanted as long as there were guidelines. "Have to do it this way." I don't like those kind of teachers. The teacher doesn't have to be opposite, to be creative. Also, you have to have compassion with the student. You have to understand the problem the student. They're immigrants. (Gabriela)

We know the professors are very flexible with us. I don't think that they make everything easy for us, but they are conscious that we don't know the language very well. (Benetta)

These learners also appreciate when teachers advocate for them within the broader community college context. However, unlike with Socializing knowers, advocacy can be effective when it supports the students' own actions to successfully negotiate the system.

My teacher told me about a scholarship. And I applied for it in summer, and last week I received the letter that I get it, the scholarship. So that's something I can tell you. (Gabriela)

Because of their awareness of how teachers think and act on their behalf, learners at this position can experience sometimes uncomfortable or ambivalent forms of obligation to teachers who support their development. Sonja, for example, reports feeling responsible to Carol for doing well in the advanced English class to which the teacher had encouraged her to apply. Sonja felt she had to live up to the faith that Carol had placed in her, and to some extent, to protect Carol's integrity.

Learners who are growing into Self-Authoring knowers demonstrate more complex understandings of the relationships they have with teachers than do Instrumental or Socializing knowers. To a large extent, this growth involves being able to commit to independent evaluations of their educational experience or of their teachers' competence. Marie and Fei-Wen, for example, find teachers whose classes are "easy" problematic because, in their view, these teachers fail to take students seriously or to prepare them appropriately for their futures.

I think some teachers they more care about their job. So sometimes they are very easy for the student . . . But the teacher is easy, I feel comfortable but I think that is not a good thing. So I like teachers who are hard. (Fei-Wen)

When Marie feels she isn't learning English and is just listening to her teacher tell "nonsense jokes," she decides to drop that class because she believes that if she stayed, she "wouldn't learn anything."

These learners are able to judge for themselves when they are being challenged to learn. They negatively evaluate teaching when it fails to facilitate that process, even if the class is easy and fun. Some students discover themselves changing their minds about teachers during the semester because they learn to value forms of challenge and pushing that initially seemed "mean."

And at the beginning of the semester, I say, oh, my teacher is okay, but I think she's mean. But at the end of the semester, I love my teacher. I think I'm going to miss her . . . Because . . . she push you, she push you. And she want that you look inside of you. And she teach you that you can do it, and you can do it better. (Gabriela)

These students see the kinds of challenges that some teachers provide as going beyond skills or even understanding to incorporate student "growth." They think through the teachers' perspective to gain awareness of how teachers' visions for their development impact the quality of their learning.

If you want to be a good teacher you must be proud of your job. You must be responsible for it. I think that's very important. If you are responsible the student will (keep) trying. So I like my teachers. They always want to help you, help the student give them something, make their growth. That's very important. (Fei-Wen)

Finally, when considering the advice of teachers, some Self-Authoring students are able to hold teachers' opinions in coordination with their own sense of what matters. In doing so, they can choose to go against a teacher's opinion and make a choice that they think is right for them.

Every semester I get a tutor. Even my teacher say “You don’t need a tutor.” But I don’t have the mentality that only bad student that are going to fail in that class that have very poor skills have to come to the tutor. I think that I need a tutor because I want to build my skills. I always think that. I don’t think that I’m the baddest student in the world. I don’t think also that I’m the brightest student in the world. But I need help. (Gabriela)

Students moving towards Self-Authorship recognize that part of what teachers can do for them is to push them towards more independent ways of knowing.

The way that Carol helped us is we need to be able to understand things, and we have to be able to do by ourselves. She helped every student . . . to become independent and then to feel comfortable when you are in a class by ourselves because she was not going to be able to help us every day. So we need to try to do as much as we can by ourselves. (Serge)

In some ways, this is a kind of paradoxical support—telling students what they should do so that they can better make decisions on their own at a later date. Yet it is just this sort of support for self-direction in learning that is appropriate for learners moving from a Socializing towards a Self-Authoring perspective.

The progression of concerns and support that we see among these students is not sequential and linear. Concerns that seem Instrumental recur in the talk of all of these learners. Yet some themes are only seen among learners with more complex views of themselves and the world. It is by identifying and understanding these layers of complexity that we can develop a fuller and richer picture of the various ways that community college students at different levels of development perceive their experiences.

### **Implications of Learners’ Conceptions of Support for the Design of Classroom Cultures**

Becoming familiar with the underlying perspectives that guide Instrumental, Socializing, and Self-Authoring knowers’ views of teacher support brings us into conversation with debates on ideal classroom cultures. Robert Rhoads (1999) summarizes this debate in his report on a qualitative study of the “politics of culture and identity” in classroom cultures at Western Community College (a pseudonym). There, he distinguishes among two forms of classroom culture and links each to a broader social view of the appropriate role of education in immigrant acculturation. Arguing that “the assumptions we have of the other (and necessarily ourselves) are revealed through the educational interactions and endeavors we adopt in relation to our students,” (p. 107) Rhoads infers from discrete classroom cultures at Western two basic stances toward immigrant identity. In “monocultural” classrooms, preference is given to authoritarian teaching strategies and passive student behaviors that reinforce the existing values of the dominant receiving culture.

Monoculturalism is the idea that a singular culture prevails or ought to prevail within a given society or organization. Schooling based on monoculturalism reinforces an authoritarian view of education. As diverse students enter the institution, they are forced through educational tactics such as grading and other

reward or punishment structures to leave behind their cultural ways and replace them with mainstream values exhibited by the school. Such a process is authoritarian because teachers make the key decisions and provide little to no opportunity for students to alter the cultural norms of the school. Consequently, they offer little hope for students to see themselves as agents in the transformation of the broader society. Socialization and education is a one-directional process: Teachers convey the proper norms, values, beliefs and attitudes to students, who must respond appropriately. Thus, from a monocultural perspective, educational institutions serve the purpose of socializing diverse students to the dominant culture of a society. Such a process necessarily involves devaluing the cultural understandings diverse students bring to the educational context. (Rhoads, 1999, p. 111)

Classrooms that operate under monocultural assumptions have been previously characterized by Freirian educators as committed to a “banking” model of instruction, where information deemed valuable by the culture is deposited by teachers and texts into student minds. “Teachers are seen to be the experts and keepers of knowledge and students are seen to be newcomers lacking relevant knowledge or experience and whose success is contingent upon their ability to grasp as many facts and as much information as possible” (Rhoads, 1999, p. 113). Students do not actively participate in the construction of knowledge nor are they expected to critique its sources or claims to legitimacy.

Multicultural classrooms, by contrast, are characterized by the embrace of a multiplicity of perspectives. Student perspectives are valorized not undermined. Teachers are agents of transformation, whose responsibilities are first to the development of student capacities to independently identify cultural value systems and critique them. Rhoads notes,

Multiculturalism highlights the notion that multiple cultural identities exist within a society and therefore colleges ought to reflect the different ways of knowing and cultural forms diverse peoples bring to educational institutions. Such a perspective suggests a democratic form of education in which diverse voices are to be represented not only within the curriculum but within the organizing structures of the institutions...Faculty committed to multiculturalism tend to see education in a broad sense. For them, a community college education is more than preparation for a job. These faculty feel that one of their roles is to get students to think of themselves in terms of multiple roles: as family members, as residents of a community, as citizens of a country. (p. 115-116)

For teachers committed to developing multicultural classroom cultures, instructional strategies are dedicated to inviting broad participation and active debate. Teachers

communicate to students their legitimacy as knowers whose contributions expand the scope of discussion rather than respond to it. Knowledge is viewed as coconstructed by communities of knowers who have a social obligation to share their views and demonstrate their differences.

Faculty committed to multicultural education tend to see the pedagogical process in a different manner than faculty who reflect a monocultural perspective. For example, while monoculturalists speak of passing knowledge and skills on to students so that they could get jobs, multiculturalists tend to see the process as more interactive . . . (There is) an emphasis on democratic classrooms in which all students have opportunities to discuss their own experiences, and, in a very real sense, write their own educational histories. . . . Consistent throughout the discourse of multicultural teachers is a view of students as “equals” or as “partners” in the learning process. Although this group of faculty recognize that they have expertise and knowledge that students might not have, they also believe that students bring a great deal to the college in terms of their own understandings. (p. 117)

Because, in Rhoads’ view, teachers who inculcate monocultural classrooms have different views of student identity than do those who actively structure multicultural environments, a strategy for effectively decoding how teachers come to act in particular ways in the classroom would be to uncover their underlying assumptions about students and chart them against a “spectrum reflecting a singular view of culture (monoculturalism) or a more multifarious view (multiculturalism)” (Rhoads, 1999, p. 110). While useful for uncovering teachers’ predominant meaning systems, such a strategy apparently leaves out student influences on classroom culture.

When we consider what our data tell us about student preferences for teacher support, we conclude that there are important forms of reciprocal influence that teachers and students bring to bear on each others’ understanding and behavior in classrooms that are linked to their predominant valuations of goodness in learning environments. The range of models that developmentalists who study adult educational settings have put forward all consistently suggest that students’ preferences for certain forms of teaching vary with developmental position. These models, as reviewed at the beginning of this chapter, show students moving from positions of dualism (or instrumentalism) that preference teachers as authorities who unequivocally impart reified knowledge upon students-as-novices, to the eventual development of contextual (or Self-Authoring) knowers who incorporate “the exchange and comparison of views in their learning process, which was aimed at thinking through knowledge claims and integrating information in order to apply it within a context” (Baxter Magolda, 1992, p. 177). In their models of student preferences, these developmentalists anticipate Rhoads’ distinctions among

classroom cultures without confirming his political analysis of the sources of these differences. Indeed, the similarities between Rhoads’ depiction of these cultures and those reported by developmentalists as preferences for learning environments expressed by students at Instrumental and Self-Authoring positions are uncanny. Consider, for example, this summary chart (see Table 6) prepared by Laura Rendon of the key differences between monoculturalism and multiculturalism in her essay on Rhoads’ (and colleagues’) ideas applied to “a new vision of the multicultural classroom for the next century.”

**Table 6: Classroom Elements of a Monocultural and Multicultural Community College<sup>9</sup>**

Monocultural Community College Classroom Elements	Multicultural Community College Classroom Elements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students are engaged in menial tasks.</li> <li>• Faculty employ authoritarian forms of pedagogy.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>--Culturally different views are devalued.</li> <li>--System of rewards and punishments prevails.</li> <li>--Linear teaching is employed.</li> <li>--Faculty are authority figures and keepers of knowledge.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Students are not viewed as knowers.</li> <li>• Student docility and passivity are viewed as positive qualities that help faculty work with students.</li> <li>• Students expected to conform to predetermined standards of academic proficiency.</li> <li>• The curriculum is Euro-centered.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students are engaged in critical thinking and problem solving.</li> <li>• A democratic classroom is created.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>--Diverse voices are represented.</li> <li>--Faculty and students are open to diverse points of view.</li> <li>--Students are equal partners in teaching and learning.</li> <li>--Faculty share knowledge and learn from students.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Students have the opportunity to discuss their own experiences and write their own histories.</li> <li>• Students are active learners and assisted to negotiate the college environment.</li> <li>• Standards are set with students.</li> <li>• Diverse forms of knowledge are recognized and legitimated.</li> </ul>

While it is undoubtedly true that teachers and institutions exhibit, through pedagogical design, their ideas about the proper aims of students’ education, it is also likely true that students in turn press their own demands on teachers, if not directly then through the ways in which they respond to classroom cultures that are differentially suited to their current developmental position. The Instrumental knowers in our study demonstrate motivation and enthusiasm for learning when

<sup>9</sup> Taken from Rendon, L. I. Toward a new vision of the multicultural community college for the next century. In K. M. Shaw, R. A. Rhoads & J. R. Valadez, (1999) (Eds.), *Community Colleges as Cultural Texts: Qualitative Explorations of Organizational and Student Culture* (pp. 200-201). Albany: State University of New York Press. Note: In her chapter, Rendon notes that this table “represents a summary of organizational elements as presented in Shaw, Valadez, & Rhoads (1999). *Community College as Cultural Texts: Qualitative Explorations of Organizational and Student Culture.*”

teachers are “authority figures and keepers of knowledge” and feel resistant and mystified when expected to be “equal partners in teaching and learning.” At the other end of the developmental spectrum, the more Self-Authoring knowers in our study express disappointment in themselves as students if they fail to be recognized as active “knowers” and gain agency when they “have the opportunity to discuss their own experiences and write their own histories.”

A holding environment that takes into account student preferences in partnership along with political frames on emerging immigrant identity will not, as might be inferred here, equally preference all forms of instruction or styles of teaching. Instead, it will consider how students do make sense of the learning experience and both “confirm” students’ present understandings while actively working to “contradict” them so as to support the emergence of greater capacities. In his reflections on how to make his own teaching in a community college with a large immigrant population better able to encompass different learner perspectives, Howard Tinberg and Ronald Weisberger (1998) cite Kegan’s (1994) metaphor of “bridges” that can be successfully constructed between waning and waxing forms of consciousness. Tinberg, noting that “the journey is not the same thing as the destination” (p. 54), argues for flexibility on the part of teachers who may personally preference interactive, student-centered forms of teaching but who recognize also that some subgroup of their students may be intimidated by and poorly prepared for their expectations for self-direction and brazen participation.

Developmentalists can, like critical pedagogues, continue to value forms of education that liberate students’ emergent capacities to think and act on their own behalf. And they can assert that an Instrumentalists’ frame of reference and a contextualist’s are not equally adequate. What they are not free to declare, however, is that classroom cultures that preference one position are adequate as holding environments for all learners at any stage of growth. Instead, their observations of adult learners suggest that adequate classroom cultures will somehow bridge the continuum between the monoculturalists and multiculturalists among the student body, whose common agenda is to be successful as students.

#### **Learner Perceptions of Peer Supports**

Adequate holding environments do not solely rely on the intentional construction of appropriate contexts. They also take advantage of “naturalistic” forms of support— “those relations and human contexts which spontaneously support people through the sometimes difficult process of growth and change.” (Kegan, 1982, p. 256) These emerge from or are native to the social system, and include close relationships with

others who are travelling the same journey at the same time. At BHCC, the peer group that was formed out of the coincidence of co-enrollment in an ESOL program became an important source of nurturance and affirmation for many of the learners in our study. While not surprising in itself, the importance of support provided by peers at BHCC to immigrant students suggests that there are, by contrast, risks afforded to learners who either cannot access such group support or who lose contact with it prematurely (in relationship to their needs).

At BHCC, the peer group peaked as a robust context for support at the end of the first semester; its importance trailed off as students move away from shared courses and to independent forms of study. Our data tracks this peaking and ebbing of peer support in the following way: At the beginning of the first semester, students do not anticipate the importance of peers or predict that they will become a direct influence on their experience of success. Many of them anticipate, for example, that their study strategies will be organized primarily around solo study and teacher support. Also, several participants feel strongly that they will remain socially isolated at BHCC. At the transition between semesters, the participants in our study are nostalgic for the group and highly anxious about how they will fare without the group's ongoing presence in the second semester. They describe the influence of the group on their learning processes and remark that the group became a primary context for collaborative study. They recall with fondness friendships they made and are articulate about the types of affiliations that formed.

At the end of the second semester, the participants in our study once again characterize themselves as somewhat isolated and dedicated to independent study habits. They seem resigned to bearing the burden of academic expectations and stress independently, or they are relying again primarily on family members for support. The absence of the cohort in the second semester made it difficult for some students to feel as connected to BHCC emotionally and to demonstrate transfer of some learning skills the cohort helped scaffold. Gabriela summarizes the rising and falling curve of alienation, connection, disconnection at BHCC in her first year:

I come here, and I was lost because everything was new. I had to do English. I have to get a new job. Make a new life, have new friends. I get to school in September. I decide to come—to take classes at Bunker Hill Community College. But it wasn't easy. It wasn't easy because my English was so poor. I couldn't understand anything. I didn't have a lot of friends, but I make new friends. They help me a lot, friends from different backgrounds. I have American friends too. . . . Yeah, so I speak, and I understand, and I write English better than before, so I did better. Then I start a new life. I have friends. And I have make friends, to make really good friends, boys and girls. Not a lot, but I have.

It's too much going on right now. It's too much. This school, I finish, but also, I know that I need a break. I'm so tired. Friends, because my friends, I don't have time to see my friends, so it—when I see them, if I spend time with them, like 20 minutes one day. It's important, the time we spend together.

In their study of best practices for support in community colleges, McGrath & Van Buskirk (1999) highlight the importance of achieving synchrony between the rhythm of student needs and the timing of provision of appropriate supports. Programs that successfully support students

identify predictable points in the students' career, where they are likely to experience disappointment, discouragement, uncertainty and anxiety. They offer both cognitive and affective support by providing setting and activities designed to help students interpret their experience in positive ways. By doing so they encourage students' continued engagement with their studies. (p. 18)

At BHCC, the natural emergence of peer support was implicitly encouraged by the design of a program that brought ESOL students together in two related classes in the first semester. The potential for capitalizing on that support was lost, however, when the group formally disbanded in the spring. While in many ways the group's positive influence emerged through the natural unfolding of collegiality and friendship, these connections were nurtured by collaborative goals and simple proximity through shared coursework. Abdel, who expressed his concern at the beginning of the first semester that he would be unable to find useful help at BHCC, recalls with satisfaction the easy give and take of support with classmates who share needs and responsibilities.

If you have any questions, you could ask them. And they really become friends, and plus. I know now, from this semester, that I could help them, too . . . In doing homework. That's the help I get from them and they can get from me.

In some ways, BHCC represents a holding environment that recognized the need for supporting peer connection at one critical transition—the move into school—but did not put conscious attention on the positive potential of group support through the second key transition the participants in our study made from the structured ESOL program into the broader, integrated school environment. In the language of Robert Kegan (1982), the peer group performed only two of three possible functions of a holding environment: It “confirmed” its members' emerging identities as adult students in an American college, and it “contradicted” their tendencies to overcommit to forms of role performance that did not suit the

expression of their own agency. (In other words, the peer group helped learners develop a shared understanding of the expectations of adult students in U.S. culture, but it also introduced a healthy diversity of opinion on the goodness of any one strategy for academic success or for future goal-setting in that context.) But the disbanding of the group at the end of the first semester made it difficult for students to benefit from the third function of the holding environment: “continuity.” This lack of continuity created forms of risk for the study participants that exploited their particular developmental vulnerabilities. (A developmental analysis of risk would suggest that it would take different forms for students at different developmental levels.)

Our data suggests that there are three categories of risk that the participants in our study experienced that are evidently connected to developmental level. Instrumental learners were particularly at risk for abandoning collaborative forms of learning with which they had begun to experiment and returning to rote learning characterized by repetition and a focus on skill practice. Socializing learners were particularly at risk for feelings of emotional abandonment (from peers and teachers) and sometimes retracted into isolation or returned to older relationships that were not life enhancing. Also, these learners either muted or retreated from earlier efforts to express their opinions in class. Sometimes these retreats took the form of using new skills in self-assertion to actively avoid classes or teachers who were not compliant with their own views. Self-Authoring learners were at risk for feeling devalued as knowers and for compromising their professional dreams.

It would be an exaggeration to say that the splintering of the peer group led to consistent losses in self-esteem, agency, or academic progress; most of the participants in our study characterize their second semesters and the academic year overall as successful. Instead, it would be accurate to say we observed a series of notable setbacks that might have been avoided if the peer group had had an opportunity to maintain continuity. Apart from this overall observation, what interests us especially are the forms of support learners at different levels of development took from the peer group, as well the forms of risk they encountered when the group disbanded.

Functions of the Peer Group as Holding Environment and Forms for Instrumental Learners

Learners at each developmental position are in motion psychologically from their current form of meaning making to an emergent form; developmentalists speak of adults being “embedded” in these current forms of knowing. Holding environments necessarily encourage and consolidate emerging forms of knowing even as they contradict old forms learners are outgrowing. In his description of the functions of holding environments, Kegan (1982) demonstrates that while the functions are continuous, they vary in how they confirm, contradict, and/or lend continuity to learners at different developmental positions. Here, we’ve adapted his original schema to reflect the particular challenges encountered and changes undergone by participants in our study. Table 7 outlines the various functions the peer group served for Instrumental learners at BHCC. It also highlights the risks students at this level encountered when holding failed.

**Table 7: Instrumental Learners**

Culture of Embeddedness	Function 1: Confirmation (holding on)	Function 2: Contradiction (letting go)	Function 3: Continuity (staying put for reintegration)	Forms of Risk
Role establishing and clarifying culture. Peers support role differentiation and share strategies for successful role performance.	Supports practice of tactics that enhance self-sufficiency. Confirms strategies to build competence. Provides context to experiment with role differentiation.	Recognizes and promotes emergence from embeddedness in self-sufficiency. Denies the validity of only taking one’s own interests into account, requests reciprocal exchange in academic help, expects that they participate actively in role of member of group.	Peer group acts as container for student experimentation with diversity of opinion, direction, goals.	High risk: Peer group disbands during transition period.

At BHCC, Instrumental learners’ descriptions of the peer group are replete with examples of helpful exchanges in which students become resources to one another academically. These students typically note that they had not expected that peers’ ideas and advice would be helpful to them, yet they come to appreciate both the spirit of willingness and the tactical advice provided.

Yousef, who described himself as somewhat of a loner when the program began, talks about the importance of the group for camaraderie and practical support.

We study with the group. Normal, you work with the group. Every time, especially in ESL, psychology. Yeah, many friends now. There is teamwork. You can ask them if you have something difficult or you have something you don’t know.

Sometimes you call each other. Yeah, we ask—if sometime you don't know something, you ask your classmate.

Like Yousef, Xuan finds positive group work a refreshing new experience. She contrasts the behavior of peers at BHCC with the “stuck up” attitude of the American students at her U.S. high school. She appreciates the cohort members for both their helpfulness and for the useful advice they provide.

It's the people. They are very friendly here because they have been in the same situation, like they want to learn because they are new here, and they are very friendly. . . . The program, the class I am in, they are not stuck up. In the beginning, they don't talk to you because you are new, because that is the first day. So later on you get used to each other, and we talk to each other. It's fun because you feel comfortable. You feel comfortable working with them, and we can help each other with the stuff that we don't understand. My friend, his name is Tak-Jang, like when I have problems, I ask him for help, and I feel comfortable with him because I am always with him, and he can help me on to write an essay, and explain to me the questions. It's just that you feel comfortable around them. Surprising to me is that the people that I have class with, they are very friendly, and I actually study.

For both students, the novel experience of studying with friendly peers resulted in satisfying experiences in the first semester. By the end of the second semester, Yousef has refocused his efforts on independent study. Xuan has narrowed her alliances from the group as a whole to one romantic partner. Neither express as much satisfaction with the second semester as the first, and it is unclear whether Xuan plans to continue her schooling.

Functions of the Peer Group as Holding Environment and Forms of Risks in Socializing Learners**Table 8: Socializing Learners**

Peer Group as Holding Environment	Function 1: Confirmation (holding on)	Function 2: Contradiction (letting go)	Function 3: Continuity (staying put for reintegration)	Forms of Risk
Mutually reciprocal one-to-one relationships. Culture of mutuality.	Acknowledges and collaborates in mutually attuned interpersonal and group relationships. Orients to feelings, shared experiences, common purposes.	Recognizes and promotes emergence from embeddedness in Socializing way of knowing. Person or context that will not be fused with but still seeks, and is interested in, association. Demands the person assume responsibility for own initiatives and preferences. Asserts the others' independence.	Group members permit relationship to be relativized or placed in bigger context of ideology and psychological self-definition.	Peers leave at very time one is emerging from embeddedness.

As with the Instrumental learners, Socializing knowers often did not anticipate the role the peer group would come to play in their school experience. Socializing knowers come to emphasize more greatly the relational aspects of peer support, and take on more fully the values associated with collaborative learning. Consider, for example, the contrast of Gilles's conception in the first interview of how he learns best with his description in the final interview. In the first, Gilles emphasizes learning the meaning of new words and remembering (memorizing) information.

I remember in my brain, and I write it down. I study like this too. And when the teacher's talking, I'm taking notes. You have to take notes for every course so I can look at it. . . . Later, or maybe tomorrow, maybe every time I want. It's harder for me to learn when I can't understand what the teacher says. That's harder for me. Sometimes ask the teacher for information. I write it down. And I put it in my mind, too. I put it in my notebook, and I put it in my mind to remember it because I don't want to lose the thing that the teacher said.

However, in the second interview, when asked what is the best way for him to learn, Gilles talks about the importance of working with others. He recognizes that this way of learning is new to him, something he has learned about and grown to value over the course of the year.

[The best way for me to learn is to] work with a group of like students, and get some help from the learning center, from friends, from anywhere. [Before I came to Bunker Hill] I didn't know this.

Finally, in the third interview, he again stresses relationships, this time as an important source of support in his learning. However, now that the cohort has disbanded, he emphasizes the importance again of self-sufficiency. Yet his recognition that he has come to rely on himself is tinged with a kind of desultory realism; it no longer seems to be his preference to work alone.

I guess my family and my friends [have helped me learn the most this year]. Like, even my cousin, he moved to Haiti so I just keep going to that school, if you don't go to school, then you'll never do anything. So, nothing can help you. Even your mother or your father. They cannot help you. You have to think about yourself. [When the cohort disbanded, I felt] a little sad. Yes, a little. Because I miss some of them.

Although he doesn't mention the value of working with other students in the first interview, Gilles refers to the importance of this way of working over and over in the second and third interviews. For him, the presence of peer support confirmed his emerging interpersonalism, and contradicted his older Instrumental way of knowing. Lacking a similar context for safe growth, he might struggle to consolidate this form of knowing.

Like Gilles, Tak-Jang is similar to many other participants in that he does not talk about the cohort in his first interview, but it features prominently in his second. Tak-Jang, with a fully operating Socializing way of knowing, is further along the developmental trajectory than is Gilles. Tak-Jang demonstrates this difference in his early (first interview) statements of appreciation for difference among the members of the cohort, suggesting that different ideas combine to make better ideas. He values the group's integration of differences into larger perspectives and is uncomfortable when people cling too tightly to their own ideas, not opening themselves to the ideas of others. In part, he sees group discussion as serving the accomplishment of more "correct" answers.

Because if you have a question, just you think by yourself, you just got one mind, one thought, if you work on a lot of people in the group, you have so many minds and thoughts. They can give you more, more, more idea. Then we will do a good job, huh?

Tak-Jang values diversity of thought and relies on the group as a means to realize his preference for integrated thinking. Yet he conceives of diversity as a mutual enterprise. He has not yet imagined how persistent disagreement might be managed in service of the group’s overall satisfaction with thinking together.

But one more thing is if you have a—if everybody in this group has many idea, that’s become an argument. [Then] I don’t know [what to do]. I just maybe—do you know the argument is from the different idea, some people too subjective.

We do not know how Tak-Jang resolved this dilemma, as he left the country prior to our final interview. We might speculate that the loss of the cohort contributed to his decision to move on to other venues for his development, but we have no direct evidence that this is the case.

Functions of the Peer Group as Holding Environment and Forms of Risks in Self-Authoring Learners

**Table 9: Self-Authoring Learners**

Peer Group as Holding Environment	Function 1: Confirmation (holding on)	Function 2: Contradiction (letting go)	Function 3: Continuity (staying put for reintegration)	Forms of Risk
Typically group involvement in career, admission to public arena.	Acknowledges and cultures capacity for independence; self-definition; assumption of authority; exercise of personal enhancement, ambition or achievement; ‘career’ rather than job, life partner rather than helpmate.	Recognizes and promotes adults’ emergence from embeddedness in independent self-definition. Will not accept mediated, non-intimate, form-subordinated relationship.	Ideological forms permit themselves to be relativized on behalf of the play between forms.	Ideological forms of support vanish (e.g., peer group loss) at very time one is separating from embeddedness.

Self-Authored learners make use of the cohort as an enhancement to the development of self-expression and a furthering of their agency. Sonja's thoughts about the cohort trace a theme similar to that of our other participants at all developmental positions. Initially, she was struck by the differences among the students and thought they would have little basis for friendship. But by the end of the first semester, she notices a bond between them based on their international backgrounds. They seem to connect readily with one another.

When I first came here, I thought that I don't fit very well with other people. I thought that they're very different from me. That you didn't have anything in common. Now, like two months after, I am actually going to miss all of the people because we became, I don't know, like family, kind of. And now we all going to different separate ways. It was easy because I told that to the group talking because we all somehow the same, but now it's like real. First I went and saw that we don't have anything, anything in common. And I know, what am I doing here. After, you know, two weeks I went and started to communicate with people. At the end of the semester I cried. You can ask people. We had the interview and they were talking like how do you feel. And I started to cry. I just felt huge connection. I befriended all of them.

Sonja's early fears were based in her perception that differences among students could not be readily overcome. "I thought we don't have anything in common. I thought we completely don't have anything to talk about. I was very, I was disappointed. I was shocked when I saw. I was like, oh my God." At the close of the year, she reflects back on the similarities that emerge from shared group membership, but also of affiliation with a shared identity—ESOL students.

Yeah, I felt that ESL like labeled, and I didn't like it. Now, I finally get everything that I wanted [in the spring semester, to not be identified solely as an ESL student.] And now I'm not sure that I really want it. I mean, I know I want it, but it's, but I really like those three months that I spent. It was the group. It was, yeah, it was the group. And it was the feeling that you belong somewhere, that you belong somewhere and I was handling very well all of that. I was handling very well my grades, my relationship with teacher, my relationship with my classmates, my assignments. I had, like, motivation to do all of that because I like to come here. I felt like I belonged there. And we were all on the same, and everybody understands that on the same level. We all were ESL students.

Sonja appreciated the group, in part, because she was a member of a majority in a larger context where she struggles against minority status. She contrasts her experience in the ESOL program to those of the American students who were placed there to enhance their English skills.

Because in psychology, we had three American students. All of them dropped, dropped out of the course. Because they were minority. They didn't fit really well. And I never thought about it before I start. I mean, I think it will be more and more easier if I can finish my college with [a cohort group] like this. It's kind of selfish, I know. Yeah, because it inspires you, you know. It feels good.

While Sonja comments on the positive feelings that come from friendships in the group, her commentary centers more on the connections the group created to a shared social status. With the loss of the cohort, Sonja, like other learners at prior developmental levels, characterizes herself as alone again. However, this understanding does not make her disconsolate; instead, she sees it as a lesson in the power of group membership. She says, "Now, I feel like I'm on my own. I'm not that afraid. I'm just became aware of that. I just became how fortunate I was to be here." In part, she recognizes that her integration into the larger BHCC community returns her to minority status. It is this social identity she regrets, although she has apparently learned strategies in the first semester to be comfortable among different peoples and to participate actively in the larger community.

Also this program helped me to understand like the people from different cultures that I thought I could never understand. Just being with them. It came kind of naturally, I don't know. The other day I was sitting and I was thinking, oh my God, I'm having lunch with people, with a man from Haiti, with a man from South Africa, with the girl from Russia, a girl from China, talking so comfortable and so natural with them as they're my friends from my country. And, like, if somebody told me that, I would probably start to laugh. This program completely, completely—it turned out to be everything that I didn't expect it to be, in a good way.

Unlike Instrumental and Socializing knowers, Sonja does not view the lack of proximity and access to her peers from the first semester as a prohibitive threat to their friendships.

It's different [in the second semester] because we don't talk as much. We all have, like, different responsibilities. Different, we all met some different kind of people. But I told you, every time we see each other it's, we sit, we talk. My feeling about the people are the same as from December. The only thing is that we don't see, I mean we saw each other every day because we had classes every day. Now, it's not like that. It's not because we don't want to, but we have different schedules and different, most of us work and go to school. So but I feel completely the same about all of them. The way I felt in December.

Sonja appears to have constructed a concept of friendship that does not depend directly on continuous interaction or on shared understanding. She shares this with Serge, who like Sonja is moving into Self-Authorship. In his final interview, he, too,

expresses ongoing affection for and comfort with members of the cohort. Also like Sonja, Serge makes use of the group to enhance his comfort with communication with people who differ from him.

Some of the students speak English better than me. And, you know, you see someone can speak better than you, sometimes you usually want to avoid that person, because you make a mistake, so after a couple of classes, we realize that we help each other to accomplish this, so we help each other in the class. We still see each other, talk to each other, still have affection for each other. I think it was a good experience when you have a class that understands you. Not to say that because everybody is from another country, but I think it's because everybody understands that we need to help each other. So they were trying to see if they can be, how can I say it, at least they can be a little close and we can speak each other and we can have a little practice ourselves so whenever we speak to someone else, we can communicate. That's what we usually do, we sit down, we talk and trying to be in the culture of everyone.

In his third interview, Serge recounts all of the help he has gotten from people over the year: from his teachers, tutors, computers, the learning center, his girlfriend, and others in his cohort. However, he seems to use these various supports in service of the enhancement of his own capacity to act on his own behalf. He tells us he has arrived at the point where he no longer is in need of such supports, while still appreciating them. In that sense, he seems to have used all these supports as scaffolding toward becoming more independent. On reflection, if he had to “restart the year,” he tells us “I would study by myself.” Like other learners, it sounds as if Serge retreats from collaborative learning. Serge, however, had expressed an interest in group learning from the beginning of the year. Here, he seems to want to try something new for him, to “try to be more independent.” Serge seems to be emphasizing the importance of taking charge of his own learning by making sure he has the skills, knowledge, strategies, and resources available to educate himself and get the necessary help where and when he requires it. It is interesting to speculate on how Serge would have conceived of the potential for group support had the cohort remained in place. Perhaps he would have found other uses for group support to his own development. Instead, like Sonja, he in effect “cuts his losses” of the cohort experience without evident personal struggle. What he may have relinquished without awareness are learning opportunities presented by the group that would have challenged him to grow in new ways toward interdependent forms of thinking.

At BHCC, the combination of teacher and peer supports proved, while in place, to be both flexible and responsive to the learners' overall needs. The range of opportunities for students to increase their learning by accessing appropriate supports

was enhanced by the absence of a single-minded approach to teaching or by too much uniformity in thought and practice among peers. Still, the vulnerabilities the learners in our study expressed and experienced are consequences of supports retrieved too soon. The program overall might consider finding ways to carry over the positive environment they create so consciously in the fall to later student experiences.

## SECTION VI: CONCLUSION

A developmental analysis of learners' experiences frames both the possibilities and constraints intrinsic to any educational experience for a learner at a particular level. As with any framework, the focus for analysis reveals the primary commitments of the theory and its aims for action. Developmental theories of education are primarily committed to making systematic sense of predictable change and supporting wholesome change in appropriate ways. While the forms of transition the participants in our study encounter are predictable, the common ways in which they come to make sense of them are not. The participants in our study are highly diverse; their cultural and personal histories would suggest there would be more difference than similarity in their aims, ideals, and motivations for schooling. Instead, we see a kind of regularity to their interests and expressions of their hopes that can be interpreted somewhat successfully by applying a theory of consciousness development.

It has been our implicit recommendation throughout that teachers and program designers might benefit from learning to look at their students' responses to challenging transitions through a developmental lens. Coming to recognize the common developmental positions underlying particular expressions of participants' experiences at BHCC would allow program leaders greater flexibility in their responses to learners' difficulties and successes. That recognition may also shape the ways in which teachers introduce or emphasize particular skills and ideas. And it might provide a framework for evaluation that incorporates the learner's perspective among the more typical measures of literacy or exhortations on behalf of progressive schooling. As an analytic tool, the theory opens up an exploration of aspects of participants' experience that other frameworks may obscure. These aspects include, at least, an attention to the process of how participants make sense of program experience, an awareness of the possible forms the program can take on for learners at different developmental levels, and an assessment of program demands from the point of view of the timely needs of the learner. The adult learners who participated in our research have helped expand our understanding of the forms of transition both

common and necessary if students are to be successful, in their terms, in settings such as BHCC.

Practical ends are sometimes accomplished through transformational means. Growth can be inordinately pragmatic in that it may allow for ready access to skills that previously escaped our best efforts. By emphasizing the forms of growth that learners undergo and the types of support that scaffold them, we can attend to the immediate agenda learners put forward to advance their socioeconomic opportunities while also enhancing their capacity to envision greater goals for themselves than they originally conceived. In this way, agency is enhanced, and barriers to personal enhancement may be eventually dissolved.

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*In our final meeting with Gilles, he seems a bit tired. Looking back on the year, he tells us that he learned a lot but that learning was often hard. He values his teachers, whom he describes as friendly and supportive. He also appreciates the opportunities he had in the ESOL program to make new friends and work with other students. "This was the best thing. I can learn faster when I work with good people." Now, Gilles tells us that he misses these friends and feels a little sad that they no longer to take classes together. He has not been able to complete all his classes successfully, taking an incomplete in English during the second semester. But he plans to continue at Bunker Hill and maintains a sense of belief in his abilities. "I just have to finish my college, that's it," he says. "I think of my family. I have a good family."*

*Sonja also has many memories of her year at Bunker Hill. Like Gilles, she describes close and supportive friendships she made and tells us how she cried at the end of the first semester because of the strong connections she felt with the other students in her program. She also misses studying with these students and with her first teachers who taught her so much and believed in her, even when she doubted herself. Although the second semester posed challenges for Sonja, particularly in math, she was able to complete her courses successfully. She talks about the differences she now sees in herself. "I think I know more English. I'm more confident. Now, when I have to deal with American students, I'm not afraid of them anymore. I think I'm more organized now than I used to be. I am a different kind of student. I think that I'm more responsible student. Maybe that comes with the age. I'm more mature now and I'm taking everything more seriously." Sonja continues to set hopeful goals for her future, planning to transfer, get her bachelor's degree, and pursue her dream*

*of working in radio broadcasting. “Always hope for the best,” she tells us. “Hope is the last to die. And then hope give me the strength to actually do it.”*

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