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**UNDOCUMENTED HISPANIC STUDENTS AND THE POSTSECONDARY
TRANSITION: A NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE**

by
Alfred Trafford

A Dissertation

Submitted to the
Department of Educational Leadership
College of Education
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
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Dissertation Chair: Ane Turner Johnson, Ph.D.

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Abstract

Alfred Trafford

UNDOCUMENTED HISPANIC STUDENTS AND THE POSTSECONDARY TRANSITION: A NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE

2014/2015

Ane Turner Johnson, Ph.D.

Doctor of Education

Undocumented students transition to college in extremely low numbers due to a high degree of marginalization, inequity in access to higher education, and constitutional confusion regarding federal and state issues of supremacy and inferiority in immigration, tuition, and financial aid policies. Such students must contend not only with traditional challenges of teenagers in high school – including identity and development concerns and academic and social pressures – but also with the issue of not being in the United States legally.

A narrative strategy of inquiry was used to collect, analyze, and interpret data from extensive participant interviews and a research journal; the interviews focused on each participant's life history, lived experience, and the meaning of their history and experience as it related to the study topic. Literary elements of creative nonfiction such as characterization, plot, setting, viewpoint, dialogue, and conflict were incorporated into the writing of participant stories and an interpretive memoir.

The participants in the study were outliers, i.e., all of them made the postsecondary transition to higher education, in stark contrast to the paths of most of their undocumented peers. Findings show that they benefited from a structure of support, the ability to assimilate, and the empowerment of voice. Family also played a large role in the participants' ability to navigate the postsecondary transition successfully.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Presently, there are more than 11 million undocumented immigrants – i.e. people born abroad who are not U.S. citizens or legal residents – of all ages residing in the United States, including more than one million under the age of 18 (Passel & Cohn, 2011). States with the largest estimated undocumented immigrant populations include: California (2,550,000); Texas (1,650,000); Florida (825,000); New York (625,000); and New Jersey (550,000) (Passel & Cohn, 2011). Approximately 65,000 undocumented students graduate from high school each year and as many as 13,000 undocumented students are enrolled in college throughout the U.S. (Gildersleeve, 2010). The countries that provide the largest number of undocumented immigrants to the U.S. are Mexico, El Salvador, and Guatemala and many come from the Philippines, China, and Korea. They also come from many other countries in South and Central America, Bangladesh, Canada, Croatia, England, Fiji, France, Ghana, Hungary, Indonesia, Iran, Israel, Mongolia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal, South Korea, Taiwan, and Tonga (Chan, 2010; Drachman, 2006). However, it is estimated that over three-quarters of the nation's undocumented immigrants are Hispanic and that current immigration trends will persist at least through 2050 (Passel & Cohn, 2008).

On June 15, 2012, the 30th anniversary of *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) – the Supreme Court decision entitling all children, regardless of their immigration status, to a public education through high school – President Barack Obama initiated a program through executive action that allows an estimated 800,000 undocumented immigrants, who were brought to the U.S. as children, to apply for work permits and temporarily be safe from

deportation (Preston & Cushman, 2012). Under the *Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals* (DACA) program (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2013a), eligible immigrants would not be deported if they came to the U.S. before the age of 16, have been here at least five years, and are under the age of 30. They must be attending school, have graduated from high school or have earned a general education development (GED) certificate, or have been honorably discharged from the U.S. military. Additionally, they cannot have been convicted of a crime or pose a threat to public safety or national security. During the first eight months of the program, 438,372 applications were received and 199,460 were approved (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2013b).

While not a panacea – there is, unfortunately, no path to citizenship under DACA – this policy will buy time for many undocumented students who are in the U.S. illegally through no fault of their own as they await passage of the *Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act* (DREAM). The DREAM Act would allow eligible undocumented students to pay in-state college tuition rates at state colleges and universities and to receive federal and state financial aid, in addition to providing a path to legal residency that is presently not available to them (Price, 2010).

The DREAM Act was first introduced in the U.S. Senate in 2001 as an amendment to the *Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996* (to give states the authority to determine state residency as relates to higher education and to provide a path to U.S. citizenship for eligible alien students) and was re-introduced in the U.S. Senate in 2009 (Gildersleeve, Rumann, & Mondragon, 2010). The most recent

push for the DREAM Act came in 2010 when it mustered 55 votes in the Senate, just short of the 60 needed to overcome a filibuster threat (Meckler & Jordan, 2012).

The political climate regarding the issue of immigration reform can be attributed to what Anderson (2011) refers to as cycles of increasing effectiveness and decreasing influence: the cycles tend to converge at an optimum level in the early stages of the second term of a presidency. This opened a policy window, which can affect both the national policy agenda and the queue priority of policies on the agenda (Kingdon, 1995). As the electoral power of Hispanic voters increases – in 2008, Hispanics gave Obama 67% of their votes (Caraley, 2009) and in 2012 Obama received 71% of Hispanic vote (Lopez & Taylor, 2012) – the political climate appears to be rife for immigration reform and with it a solution to the higher education transition challenges of undocumented students.

Obama courted Hispanics during his 2012 presidential campaign by making immigration reform a significant part of his re-election platform (Democrats.org, 2012). Then in his state of the union address on February 12, 2013, the President stated, “As we speak, bipartisan groups in both chambers are working diligently to draft a bill, and I applaud their efforts. . . . Send me a comprehensive immigration reform bill in the next few months, and I will sign it right away” (The White House, 2013, para. 49).

The bill to which the President refers – Senate Bill 744 (2013), *The Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act* – was introduced in the U.S. Senate by eight bipartisan senators on April 17, 2013 and passed on June 27, 2013 by a margin of 68 to 32 in the Democrat-controlled Senate (Parker & Martin, 2013); Section 2103 of the Senate bill is auspiciously titled *The DREAM Act*, and would allow

eligible undocumented immigrants who came to the U.S. as children to become citizens after just five years (Preston, 2013). The bill then was sent to the U.S. House of Representatives, where it has languished since.

But Obama made it clear that he would not give up on the issue, which supports Eshbaugh-Soha's (2005) contention that a president tends to pursue reelection during the first term and his legacy during the second term. And on November 20, 2014, in response to the U.S. House of Representative's inaction on the immigration law and the dominance of the Republican Party in the November 4, 2014 mid-term elections, the president issued new executive actions expanding the scope of the DACA program and granting eligible undocumented parents of U.S. citizens and permanent residents similar privileges (Nelson & Lee, 2014; Shear, 2014). Federal courts have since been called on to decide the legalities of Obama's executive actions (Shear, 2015) and in January of 2015 the U.S. House of Representatives introduced legislation that would counteract the executive actions of the president (Parker, 2015).

This, however, is not a story of complex legal and policy issues, even though they loom large both in the background and the foreground. It is a story of people – people who were brought to the United States from other countries at a young age, through no volition of their own, and whom do not have the papers necessary to remain here legally. They come from different cultures and speak different languages, yet they long for the conditions that Yalom (1989) contends are common to all human beings: a life filled with meaning, a life lived without loneliness, freedom to live as one chooses, and acceptance of the inevitability of death. And they want to have access to the same opportunities that are available to their peers through the accident of birth.

The Relationship of Federal and State Government

To understand fully the implication of undocumented students attending college in this country, it is necessary to consider the U. S. Constitution, relative to education and immigration, and the policy supremacy relationship between federal and state government. Anderson (2011) states that the goal of the Constitution framers was to insure a separation of powers among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the federal government, in addition to assigning certain powers to the states through the principle of *federalism*. Constitutionally speaking, Manheim (1995) and Zota (2009) attribute ultimate federal power to the Supremacy Clause, which preempts state and local governments from enacting legislation that would conflict with federal legislation, while Ryan (2004) asserts that the Spending Clause ultimately gives the federal government the power to set policy due to a reluctance on the part of the states to turn away federal funding. Additionally, there is a requirement for the inferiority of state courts to the Supreme Court in terms of oversight and supervision (Pfander, 2007).

Federal supremacy in immigration issues is the *rock* and state supremacy in higher education is the *hard place* between which undocumented students are caught. In the absence of federal intervention public colleges and universities have the authority to charge undocumented students the non-resident tuition rate, which can be as much as double the resident tuition rate, and to deny them the opportunity to obtain state-based financial aid; at Rutgers, for example, the annual 2014-2015 tuition for a New Jersey resident is \$13,813 and for a non-New Jersey resident it is \$28,591 (Rutgers, 2014).

Without the benefit of the federal and state financial aid and resident tuition rates that accompany citizenship and permanent residency, undocumented students will

continue to transition to college in low numbers. In New Jersey, however, the dream is inching closer to reality with the December 19, 2013 passage of S2479, a bill that allows undocumented students who graduate from New Jersey high schools (after at least three years of attendance) to pay in-state tuition rates at New Jersey state colleges (Friedman, 2013). But there remains no opportunity for undocumented students to receive government financial aid in New Jersey.

Social Capital, Counseling, and the Postsecondary Transition

Social capital is a term that appears often in the literature associated with both undocumented students and the transition to higher education; the relationship between education and social capital and mobility is strong. A measurement of the value of social networks, social capital refers to the bonding of people who are similar and the bridging of people who are different, with reciprocity as the desired result (Dekker & Uslander, 2001). According to Qian and Blair (1999), education is critical in determining future socioeconomic status and while social capital between children and parents is crucial to social mobility, support from schools and other institutions also is important. Byun, Meece, Irvin, and Hutchins (2012) contend that such process and structural elements combine to shape educational aspirations.

School counseling plays a critical process and structural role in the postsecondary transition, especially the transition to higher education. Gonzales (2010) states that adolescents – regardless of their immigration status – are at a stage developmentally in which they are developing independence, but still need to be guided in the process through an accessible support structure. Although the alignment of student-parent goals can be a predictor of success in making the transition from high school to college, it also

is necessary for students to access information from a broader perspective, i.e., that of guidance counselors and college advisors (Kim & Schneider, 2005). This is especially true of female and minority students who are encouraged by Lin (2000) to challenge inequity and inequality in social status by accessing resources outside their traditional social circles.

The likelihood of students successfully transitioning to college is driven by college readiness and readiness is dependent upon students' prior personal and educational experiences (Conley, 2008). High among such experience is the development of an academic ethic, which Smith and Zhang (2009a) suggest is more likely to follow students from high school than to be developed in college. Other facilitating factors include parents, friends, high school counselors and teachers, college advisors and professors, orientation programs and first-year seminars (Smith & Zhang, 2009b). For the transition to be successful, it should begin early in the high school years, especially for first-generation college students (Malone, 2009). Through one such program for first-generation Hispanic students, the *Futures Project*, Saunders and Serna (2004) relate the transition process in terms of the mobilization of support around academic, financial, personal, and family issues. Such support is critical to the development and sustenance of a college-going identity.

Problem Statement

The problem of undocumented Hispanic students and the postsecondary transition begins with a highly marginalized Hispanic population in general (Gandara & Contreras, 2009) and is framed by two related larger issues: confusion in federal and state immigration policy (Johnson & Janosik, 2008) and inequity in access to higher education;

it is estimated that only five to 20% of undocumented Hispanic high school students go on to college (Perez, 2009; Russell, 2011). Additionally, the high school years are difficult for most teenagers as they learn to deal with issues of personhood, i.e., self, moral and civic development (Lerner, Brentano, Dowling, & Anderson, 2002), and such a process is exacerbated by undocumented immigration status. With the exception of Blacks, Hispanics have a higher unemployment rate (U.S. Department of Labor, 2012), lower high school graduation rate (Chapman, Laird, Ifill, & KewalRamani, 2011), lower college attendance and completion rates (Contreras, 2009), and more children who live in poverty (Chau, Thampi, & Wright, 2010) than all other races in the United States. Add to this additional challenges associated with living in the U.S. illegally and one can only begin to fathom what it is like to be an undocumented Hispanic student.

As a guidance counselor and college advisor in a school district that has grown to a 36% Hispanic population, from 14.8 % in 2000 (census and school report citations have been withheld to protect the identities of the study participants), I have encountered a number of undocumented students in my practice and I suspect there are others of whom I am not aware. Person-centered counseling, developed by psychologist Carl Rogers (1951), has been especially useful in working with undocumented students because it incorporates several concepts that enable a closer therapeutic relationship – genuineness, unconditional positive regard, and empathic understanding, which calls upon the counselor to see through a client’s eyes and to walk in a client’s shoes.

In 2011, for the first time, students confided their undocumented status to me so that I could better help them with their future plans. In 2013, four undocumented seniors were in various stages of the college application process when I asked them to participate

in my study. I uncovered a level of intensity and a sense of urgency that I had not considered prior to my initial contact with affected individuals and prior research. Once undocumented students made me aware of their situation, I observed (and continue to observe) outward manifestations of feelings of pain, anger, and fear to which I had not been privy earlier.

Although I was aware of the difficulties and challenges attendant to undocumented students, prior to my study I had barely penetrated the film that floats over the top layer of this issue. The key reasons for conducting this study were: (a) to find out what it is like to be an undocumented student, (b) to help undocumented students improve their postsecondary options, and (c) to influence policies that will allow undocumented students to fully realize their educational and career goals and dreams. What if, for example, an undocumented student is able to navigate his or her way through college and graduate with a bachelor's degree (or higher), but is not eligible for a professional job due to an illegal immigration status? It is critical to understand the motivation of affected students to take such serious legal and financial risks when there is nothing but uncertainty in their futures (Chavez, Soriano, & Oliverez, 2007; Ortiz & Hinojosa, 2010).

As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) prophesy, "Things that are seen clearly from a distance and prior to fieldwork as understandable or researchable or interpretable in theoretical terms lose their precision when the daily life of field experience is encountered" (p. 145).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to narratively explore the phenomenon of undocumented Hispanic students engaged in the postsecondary transition, in order to better help them to navigate the process and to call attention to their situation. Specifically, I sought to discover what it is like to be a Hispanic student living illegally in the U.S. For the purposes of this study, I defined *undocumented Hispanic student* as: a student in the U.S. who is “of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin” (United States Census Bureau, 2013) and is not a U.S. citizen, permanent resident, or authorized visitor. I defined *postsecondary transition* as: the period between the middle of junior year in high school and the end of freshman year in college. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with undocumented students and a researcher journal kept through the duration of the study.

Due to the context of the population – i.e., immigrants who are in this country illegally – I had access to a sample of students who had confided their undocumented status to me voluntarily as they sought assistance with the postsecondary transition. With the permission of the students and their parents, the research was conducted within the environs of the high school attended by the participants.

Research Questions

1. What is it like to be an undocumented Hispanic student engaged in the postsecondary transition?

Sub-questions

- a. What emotional challenges are associated with the postsecondary transition for undocumented Hispanic students?
- b. What is my role as a school counselor in the postsecondary transition of undocumented Hispanic students?
- c. How do the stories of undocumented Hispanic students foreshadow their postsecondary paths?

Conceptual Framework

Miles and Huberman (1994) state that a conceptual framework is a narrative or graphic representation of the relationships among the key concepts, factors, and variables of a study. Maxwell (2009), however, suggests going a step further by including the researcher's assumptions and beliefs regarding the study. The conceptual framework for my research project consists of the following components: (a) worldview, (b) research problem, (c) assumptions and beliefs, (d) prior research and theories, (e) experiential knowledge, (f) theoretical considerations, and (g) methodological assumptions (Appendix A).

My philosophical worldview, a complementary combination of social constructivism and advocacy/participatory assumptions, is the umbrella under which my research study falls. My research problem – i.e., what it is like to be an undocumented Hispanic student – is the hub around which all else revolves. Social constructivism informs both my experiential knowledge and theoretical considerations: key connections to constructivism are that it is inductive (moves from specific to general), epistemological (knowledge building), and interpretive (explanatory). However, these assumptions do

not continue beyond understanding and do not advocate for changing the contexts of those who are marginalized (Creswell, 2009), hence the addition of advocacy/participatory to social constructivism.

Some of my assumptions and beliefs about undocumented students include the following:

- Undocumented students often do not have as many postsecondary options as citizens;
- Undocumented students exist in a constant state of fear, longing, and ambiguity both in and out of school;
- The nature of this phenomenon is not well known or understood in K-12 contexts;
- Undocumented students are often not well prepared for college and careers;
- National and state DREAM policies will help level the playing field;
- A coherent national immigration policy will help undocumented students; and
- Counselors should advocate for all students.

My experience has been informed largely by my worldview. I have worked in two primary areas since graduating from college, initially as a writer (journalist and public relations/marketing practitioner) and most recently as a counselor in a school setting; I have been a researcher in all my settings, including as a graduate student at the masters and doctoral levels. The work – and research – all is similar from a paradigmatic standpoint: to build knowledge inductively through the consideration of questions, observation, and other material, and then to develop general conclusions about the topic or subject or client. (In a counseling situation the answers ideally will come from the client.) Conversely, my experience informs my worldview in the sense that the essence of

my work and research compels me to remain faithful to the social constructivism-advocacy/participatory paradigm as a reciprocating relationship.

My theoretical considerations for this study have been informed both by my worldview and from prior relevant research and theories regarding undocumented students. As a counselor I have a strong interest in the knowledge brought about by person-centered counseling, especially through a concept known as empathic understanding. I also believe that leadership theory is useful in gaining an understanding of the research problem; I consider myself to be an emotionally intelligent leader who leads transformationally at the macro level and situationally at the micro level. Other theoretical considerations that are presented based on my worldview and prior research and theories are immigration theory and critical race theory, which I will address in more depth in Chapter Two.

All of the above informs my research problem – what it is like to be an undocumented Hispanic student. My concept then funnels into prior research and theories (also known as the literature review), thus providing the rationale for conducting the study. According to Creswell (2007), my study “may fill a void in existing literature, establish a new line of thinking, or assess an issue with an understudied group or population” (p. 102). A comprehensive review of the literature indicated that undocumented Hispanic students engaged in the postsecondary transition represent an understudied group and conducting such a study will fill a void in the existing literature.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it contributes toward a deeper understanding of undocumented Hispanic students and the postsecondary transition in the areas of policy,

practice, and future research. Such understanding will change those who are both directly and indirectly affected by the study topic by providing them with information and data that will be useful in ameliorating the problem.

Policy

It is my intent that the results of my study will aid in stimulating the development of a national and New Jersey DREAM policy, which will allow affected students to receive federal financial aid, and to pay resident tuition rates and qualify for state financial aid at state and county institutions of higher learning. In the absence of a national DREAM act, a state DREAM act is the next best thing as evidenced by the small number of states that have instituted such policies. Lawmakers in New Jersey had been proposing legislation allowing undocumented students to pay in-state tuition rates for more than a decade (New Jersey State Legislature, 2002), before it was passed in 2013. There presently is little research on undocumented students that originates in New Jersey and this may be a contributing factor to a lack of understanding by lawmakers of the extent and scope of the problem in the state. My research will help open the eyes, minds, and hearts of legislators – and the general public – to the problem by showing them the vulnerability of the people their actions, inaction, and systemic attitudes affect.

Practice

The results of my research study on undocumented Hispanic students will particularly benefit high school counselors, college advisors, and anyone else who will be dealing with such students in ever-increasing numbers well into the middle of the century (Passel & Cohn, 2008). Presently, there exists an underground culture in which undocumented students are loath to self-identify due to fear of reprisal; in such an

environment counselors are not positioned to make the best recommendations to those students, especially as regards college and career decisions (Hernandez, et al., 2010). Through my research I provided insight into the plight of the undocumented student in such a manner that counselors should be able to better understand the nature of the problem. Such insight will enable counselors to gain an advantage in the effective counseling of undocumented Hispanic high school students, which in turn will benefit affected students in the postsecondary transition process.

Research

My study results regarding undocumented Hispanic students have the potential to inspire additional research, most immediately to gain an understanding of the transition process involved in advancing from community college, which Perez (2009) states is the typical pathway to higher education for undocumented students, to a four-year university. Although it is difficult to generate statistics regarding this population due to their vulnerability and risk of deportation, research on Hispanics in general suggests that the number of students who transition from community college to four-year universities is low – approximately 74% of Hispanic students in community college express interest in obtaining a bachelor's degree, but the rate of transfer is under 13% (Gonzalez, 2012). Such a study would build on my present research and consider the transition in terms of resilience and persistence and process and structure.

Additionally, my study results have the potential to inspire research seeking to understand what it is like to be an undocumented Hispanic college student preparing to graduate from college. This is based on the assumption that only a small percentage of the undocumented students who transition to higher education will obtain a degree and

attempt to transition to the professional work force (Contreras, 2009). Such a scenario presents a cultural conundrum in the sense that while citizens and eligible non-citizens are concerned with finding jobs when they graduate from college, undocumented students are concerned with being allowed to work due to their immigration status (Ortiz & Hinojosa, 2010). Although the president instituted a program granting temporary work permits to eligible undocumented immigrants, (a) it is not law and may be revised or rescinded at any time, and (b) it does not provide a path to citizenship (Preston & Cushman, 2012). An understanding of the motivation of these young people to take such serious legal, financial, and personal risks, when nothing but uncertainty is guaranteed, would be of value to educators, ethnographers, and sociologists.

Limitations

There are several potential limitations to my study – i.e., factors that are beyond the control of the researcher, which may have influenced the results. These are related to the research design, participants, and timeframe of the study.

Because I used a narrative inquiry strategy, my findings were dependent on stories that my participants and I constructed from their individual and collective life histories as related to the topic of understanding and helping undocumented students. However, as researcher-as-instrument, I had my own set of pre-existing assumptions and biases about undocumented students that were necessary to factor into the analysis and interpretation of the collected data, a problem that Pezalla, Pettigrew, & Miller-Day (2012) suggest I handled through enhanced self-reflexivity. The challenge was to identify the relevant material from the narratives as they unfolded, while filtering out my internal biases and assumptions regarding “personal values, judgments, culture, and history”

(Gearing, 2004, p. 1445), a concept the author refers to as reflexive – or cultural – bracketing. Per Tufford and Newman (2010), I maintained a reflexive research journal to explore race, gender, socioeconomics, power, values, and roles as these issues pertained to my research study and participants.

As such, it was important to realize that the participants in my study were in this country illegally and that they may have held back or edited some of their information. And although all my participants spoke English (as a second language), there was the potential for misunderstanding and/or misinterpreting the questions from my interview protocol. Therefore, the level at which I was able to collaborate with the participants was also subject to limitation, as the collaboration had an effect on the restorying – or retelling – of the account (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) contend that the retelling is more difficult and important than the telling of a story because it is the retelling that provides the basis for change and growth.

Prolonged engagement in the field is suggested as an important validity check (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Creswell & Miller, 2000). In their conceptual model for strategic planning, Lane, Bishop, and Wilson-Jones (2005) refer to “planning to plan” (p. 199) and contend that this is the critical first step of the process; by pre-planning through my conceptual framework I already had a good idea of what I thought was going on with my study (Maxwell, 2005) and was able to devote my limited time in the field purely to fieldwork.

Organization of Dissertation

Chapter 1 is an introduction of my topic in terms of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, conceptual framework, significance and potential limitations.

In Chapter 2 I review the literature relevant to my study on the basis of empirical and theoretical contribution. In Chapter 3, I detail my study methodology through strategy of inquiry, context, sampling (setting and participants), data collection, data analysis, rigor, and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 presents my findings through participant stories and thematic analysis. And Chapter 5, the discussion, is a creative non-fiction memoir informed by my interpretation of the data and reflecting on the process and the insights I have gained from conducting this dissertation study. The participants' names and the location of the study have been changed to protect the identities of the participants.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

At the macro level, the issue of undocumented Hispanic students and the postsecondary transition is grand in scale, as it is tied into the much larger issues of immigration reform (Ryan, 2004) and the achievement gap inherent within the general Hispanic population (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). At the micro level, affected students who were entitled to a free primary and secondary education as a result of *Plyler v. Doe* (1982), and were protected by no-questions-asked benefits, now must individually navigate the difficult admissions and financial aid landscape that exists in higher education in absence of a national Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) act and the existence of limited state DREAM policies (Gonzales, 2011; Harmon, Carne, Lizardy-Hajbi, & Wilkerson; Lopez, 2005; Munoz, 2009; Rumbaut & Komaie, 2010; Varela, 2011). In between, the literature is rife with empirical and theoretical analyses of undocumented students attempting to navigate the postsecondary transition.

On June 21, 2013, four undocumented Hispanic students graduated from Midville High School and, along with 76 other seniors, embarked upon the postsecondary journey. For the undocumented students the journey has been, and will continue to be, more complicated and difficult than for many of the others, due to their immigration status. What follows is the story of the literature of undocumented students and the postsecondary transition, through which my research study is grounded: the story incorporates immigration theory, law and policy, access to higher education, resilience, advocacy, and racism.

Immigration Theory

When we read newspaper articles and watch television reports about immigration reform it is difficult to understand the complexity of the issue. Parents leaving their children, children separated from their siblings . . . what forces could possibly motivate such extreme action?

Push-pull theory emphasizes the tendency of human beings to move from densely populated to sparsely populated areas and/or from low-income to high-income areas. Bodvarsson and Van den Berg (2009) state that migration-influencing incentives fall into four categories: (a) negative incentives (in the source country) that push people toward emigration, (b) positive incentives (in the destination country) that pull people toward emigration, (c) positive incentives (in the source country) that encourage people to stay where they are, and (d) negative incentives (in the destination country) that persuade people to stay away from there. The authors contend that “when push and pull factors are strong relative to the stay and stay away factors, immigration will grow, as has occurred worldwide over the last few decades” (p. 6).

Although Espenshade (1995) calls upon neoclassical economics and the *new economics of migration* to explain why potential migrants will move to another location when anticipated gains in income are high enough to justify such a move, there also are other factors at work. These include immigrants’ avoidance of political and religious oppression, reuniting with family, social mobility for themselves and their children, as well as educational and medical benefits (Wasem, 2010; Bodvarsson & Van den Berg, 2009). Based on the results of a three-year survey, Gallup (2010) reports that 6.2 million

Mexican citizens would move to the United States if they were given the chance; it can be assumed that such factors as the above have a bearing on the results.

Unfortunately, according to Baldwin-Edwards (2008), migration can turn into an illegal act through the occurrence of one of four primary activities: unauthorized entry, fraudulent entry, overstaying one's visa, and violating the terms of one's visa. He states that illegal migration also is referred to as clandestine, irregular, and undocumented and that such activity has turned migration into a putative crisis in developed countries. There is some dispute, however, regarding the term *illegal*, considering that being in the U.S. without legal documentation is a civil – not criminal – offense. Deportation is dealt with as a civil sanction, as opposed to punishment, even in cases in which it results from a criminal conviction (Stumpf, 2006).

Rubio (2011) uses the case of Jose Antonio Vargas, the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist-cum-paperless immigrant, to make this point: when Vargas came out as an undocumented immigrant after decades of hiding this fact, he was branded by the fourth estate as *illegal*, a term widely used in immigration reform reporting in the media. She states that the term *illegal* alludes to criminality and has a dehumanizing effect on immigrants. LaMarche (2007) asks and answers the question “What is it that makes a person *illegal*? Ordinarily it is *conduct* [emphasis added] that is legal or illegal, not existence” (p. 20). Several qualitative studies concerned with access to services by undocumented immigrants suggest that the term *illegal* connotes criminality, a perception that could lead practitioners to disengage from the population (Cleaveland, 2010; Furman, Sanchez, Langer, & Negi, 2007; Hancock, 2007).

That said, advocates often use the term *illegal* rhetorically – even grandiloquently – when discussing undocumented students at the postsecondary level. “Undocumented children move from protected to unprotected, from inclusion to exclusion, from de facto legal to illegal” (Gonzales, 2011, p. 602). As the result of a mixed-method study conducted over a five-year period in Orange County, California, Gonzales and Chavez (2012) refer to the transition of the undocumented to adulthood as “awakening to a nightmare” (p. 255), and sprinkle their article with bombastic repertory, going so far as to develop a new form of the word *abject* – abjectivity – which, the authors suggest, brings together the notions of abject subjectivity and status.

Policy and Law Regarding Undocumented Students

On another level, Harmon, Carne, Lizardy-Hajbi, and Wilkerson (2010) point to the marginalization of undocumented students as an issue that has created an *outlaw culture* of counselors and administrators who are willing to circumvent procedures and policies in the name of social justice. In the study of social work students and practice dilemmas presented by undocumented immigrants by Furman, Sanchez, Langer, and Negi (2007), many of the participants say they would adopt a *don't ask, don't tell* stance and several report that they would be willing to break, or operate beyond the scope of the law with respect to protecting their undocumented clients.

The federal laws that apply to undocumented youth and ineligibility for postsecondary education benefits are the *Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act* (IIRIRA) and the *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act* (PRWORA), both enacted by Congress in 1996; however, IIRIRA gives leeway if the same benefits are offered to U.S. citizens and PRWORA allows states

to pass their own laws allowing such eligibility (Varela, 2011). Enter the federal DREAM Act, which was first introduced in Congress in 2001 as a bipartisan effort to clarify state rights to charge in-state tuition rates to undocumented students as well as to provide a path toward citizenship, but has not been enacted (Gildersleeve, Rumann, & Mondragon, 2010).

The DREAM Act, which has been lumped in with the hot-button, overarching issue of immigration reform, currently is languishing in the legislature (Beamon, 2012). Although it is not a panacea, the DREAM Act, with its guarantee of in-state tuition, government financial aid, and path to citizenship for undocumented students, may be the closest thing to immigration reform on the horizon for those engaged in the postsecondary transition. Without this legislation, undocumented students who are in this position through no fault of their own – many of whom have not known any other country – will be in a poor position to contribute socially and economically to the future (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). In addition to supporting federal legislation, Diaz-Strong, Gomez, Luna-Duarte, and Meiners (2011) recommend that educators work with the states to initiate state DREAM policies and laws; in-state tuition and financial aid is essential to the ability of undocumented students to progress in higher education.

Some eighteen states, including New Jersey, have enacted laws that allow undocumented students who have graduated from their state high schools to pay the same resident rates at state institutions of higher learning as all other resident students (National Immigration Law Center, 2014) and five states offer state financial aid opportunities to eligible undocumented students (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2014). New Jersey did not change its in-state tuition policy until 2013

(Friedman, 2013) and, in fact, made prior headlines when it was sued for policies restricting citizen-residents from receiving in-state tuition or state financial aid if their parents were not citizens or eligible non-citizens (Oliva, 2012). Lopez (2010), who conducted a qualitative ethnographic study in North Carolina, and used undocumented high school students and teacher-allies as participants, contends that severely restrictive educational opportunities for such students are causing the states to miss out on the students' potential transnational capital.

Through an event history analysis, Sponsler (2009) considers numerous potential influences that could motivate states to adopt favorable tuition policies for undocumented students. They include: lower state educational attainment levels and postsecondary enrollment rates, a higher percentage of Hispanics in the state population, greater Latino legislative presence, a more liberal state government ideology, a greater level of fiscal health, and more neighboring states that have adopted similar policies. Such an analysis is important because Flores and Chapa (2009) incorporate geographic information system mapping (to illustrate where relevant policies exist) and logistic regression (to estimate the impact of tuition policies on undocumented students in different places) to find that undocumented students are likely to take advantages of policies and programs that improve human capital potential.

The above fits with Contreras' (2009) contention – based on a case study approach to understanding the challenges that face undocumented students as they navigate Washington's higher educational process – that Washington (even with its state DREAM act) implements the policy inconsistently and is not as responsive to the needs of undocumented students as other states. This may be influenced by a low percentage of

Hispanics in the state population, a lesser Hispanic legislative process, and few neighboring states that have enacted undocumented student policies (Sponsler, 2009).

Undocumented Students' Access to Higher Education

While it is fortunate that all children in the United States are entitled to a publicly financed primary and secondary school education, access to higher education is not guaranteed to anyone, regardless of immigration status. In most states, one must graduate from high school in order to be accepted at a community college, and one must perform at an acceptable level in high school to gain admittance to a four-year college, at which there are varying requirements for entry. Two major barriers to undocumented students making the transition to higher education are academic preparation and money.

As part of a larger study of a California college-access program called Puente (*bridge*) Gandara and Contreras (2009) have discovered “The poor achievement record of Latino students in K-12 is reflected in the rates at which students begin and complete college” (p. 19). Conversely, Chavez, Soriano, and Oliverez (2007) find that in spite of their efforts at overcoming myriad challenges and achieving academic success, undocumented students are severely limited to postsecondary options due to their ability to access financial support, i.e. resident tuition rates and financial aid. However, in a study of undocumented and formerly undocumented Hispanic students Diaz-Strong, Gomez, Luna-Duarte, and Meiners (2011) find that motivated students pay for college through work, contributions from family members, scarce scholarships, and creative strategies that combine working more hours with taking fewer classes; still, the authors conclude that stress from the above conditions negatively impacts retention and graduation. Also, a study by W. Perez (2010) indicates that students who reach out and

seek information are able to create opportunities for themselves. But Gonzales (2010) says he is suspicious of much of the research because of a tendency to include primarily high-level students in the studies, ergo any conclusions drawn represent only a part of the picture.

On the other hand, Abrego and Gonzales (2010) believe that the largest structural barriers to undocumented students accessing higher education are poverty and the law and suggest such solutions as legalization, educational pipeline improvement, and community integration efforts. And taking the discussion a step further, Garcia and Tierney (2011) concede the barriers of financial constraint and academic preparation and add perceptions of belonging. The authors suggest that because a person's legal status is critical to how one views one's self and how one perceives that he or she is viewed by others, feelings of inclusion diminish during the postsecondary transition where there are no guarantees of educational attainment.

This view is supported by a study of future expectations of educational attainment by Turcios-Cotto and Milan (2013) in which Hispanic ninth graders report significantly lower rates of educational attainment expectation than Black and white students; according to the authors, this is due partly to Hispanic youth feeling an obligation to put the financial needs of the family ahead of individual goals for educational attainment, especially when parent and children goals differ. Adding to the problem is a general lack of parental engagement – a positive predictor of academic achievement and future success - with schools among undocumented families; beyond the obvious language barriers, parents report feeling intimidated by school administrators and teachers and this

adds to their worries about deportation (Suarez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, Teranishi, Suarez-Orozco, 2011).

Of the estimated 65,000 undocumented students who graduate from U.S. high schools each year, it is further estimated that only five to 20% go on to college due to their immigration status and uncertainty regarding the process (Perez, 2009; Russell, 2011). Perez (2009), who interviewed high school, community college, and university students, as well as undocumented and formerly undocumented college graduates, surmises, “Most undocumented students cannot muster enough strength to continue their educational ambitions. The barriers are too high, and the struggles too severe” (p. 147).

Resilience of Undocumented Students

In order to overcome adversity, oppressed individuals must develop the ability to endure hardship and misfortune. Internal (personal) factors that foster resiliency include: autonomy, the ability to solve problems, social competence, and a sense of purpose; external (environmental) factors are high expectations, caring relationships, and opportunities to participate and contribute (Morales, Herrera, & Murry, 2011).

As a professor teaching a course in the sociology of immigration at City University of New York (CUNY) Munoz (2009) had six of the 2,000-plus undocumented students identified by the CUNY Immigration and Citizenship Project in her class. During that semester the family members of several students were deported, one student’s workplace was raided by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (he escaped), and two students dropped out of school because they could no longer afford to attend. Although there is some existing literature, Garcia and Tierney (2011) suggest that the resiliency of undocumented students would be a good topic for future study but

recommend that researchers resist the urge to focus on poverty and consider structural means by which undocumented students are able overcome their problems.

Cabrera and Padilla (2004) incorporate a *life course perspective* to study resilience in two Mexican heritage students who, despite backgrounds of high poverty and extreme adversity, were able to graduate from Stanford; in addition to family support and personal motivation, the authors attribute success to the students' understanding of the culture of college and its role in the postsecondary transition. Additionally, through a mixed-methods study examining the academic resilience of undocumented Hispanic high school, community college, and university students from across the United States, Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, and Cortes (2009) find that, despite such risk factors as feelings of societal rejection, low education levels of parents, and high levels of work when not at school, students with high levels of personal and environmental protection – i.e., friends, parental support, and school activities participation – have higher levels of academic success than those who do not.

Key themes that emerge in Contreras' (2009) study of undocumented community college and university students in Washington State are living in fear, financial difficulty, discriminatory campus experiences, will to persist, and worry about the future. Those who make it to higher education represent a resilient, determined, and inspirational group, the author postulates.

Advocacy for Undocumented Students

Harmon, Carne, Lizardy-Hajbi, and Wilkerson (2010) offer six ideas for educational practitioners to consider in support of higher education access for undocumented students: (a) promote resident tuition policies, (b) promote undocumented

access in the public arena, (c) stay abreast of legal issues and practices, (d) establish supportive systems for undocumented students, (e) communicate with all parties thoughtfully and frequently, and (f) exemplar practices in support of undocumented students. However, rather than operating in a vacuum, it is recommended that school districts evolve from a traditional K-12 framework to a P-16 or even P-20 system, through which there is collaboration at all levels and a trusted and visible lead organization to facilitate the process (Collins, Weinbaum, Ramon, & Vaughan, 2009). The following statement by Hess (2008), in support of a P-16 education system, seems especially appropriate when considered in the context of undocumented students: “The most significant new challenge is the aspiration that every child will master academic subjects and the prerequisites of citizenship and be equipped to pursue rewarding work or higher education” (p. 513). Partnerships are key to developing comprehensive efforts that will address the needs of undocumented students (Diaz-Strong, Gomez, Luna-Duarte, & Meiners, 2010).

While the above concepts represent potential big-picture solutions to the problem, much can be accomplished at the small-details level. Based on interviews with 54 undocumented students in Los Angeles, Enriquez (2011) concludes that while emotional and financial support is often readily available from family, friends, and teachers, specific information related to undocumented students’ legal status, relative to postsecondary education, is generally not available institutionally. (I can particularly relate to this position: as a high school guidance counselor with a growing undocumented clientele, before I began to research this topic for my doctoral classes and dissertation, it is unlikely that I would have been able to provide services specific to the population of

undocumented students.) That said, at the individual level, the school counselor – with the cooperation of teachers and administrators – can form the first line of support for undocumented students.

In a discussion of relationships and the educational experience, Garcia and Tierney (2011) relate the story of a college senior who in the tenth grade told her high school college counselor that she was undocumented. Armed with this information the counselor was able to help the student develop a college plan, which included taking college preparation and Advanced Placement courses, becoming involved in activities, and lining up scholarships due to the lack of financial aid available to her. The student credits her counselor's long-term involvement with helping her to both attend and graduate from a four-year college. Gildersleeve (2010) concludes that it is critical for counselors and admissions representatives to understand the pre-college contexts of undocumented students as a starting point for shaping educational pathways. He recommends that they become college-going pedagogues by helping such students to develop a college-going literacy, thus allowing for more effective advocacy regarding the policies, programs, and services that can make college a more normal experience for the undocumented.

W. Perez (2010) refers to his prior research (Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortez, 2009) in suggesting that college-eligible undocumented students often possess achievement, leadership, and civic engagement capacity that is greater than that of their U.S. citizen-counterparts and that counselors serve as advocates for undocumented students by advising them and by connecting them with faculty mentors who can facilitate the navigation of the higher education process for such students, many of whom

are first-generation college students. Drawing from 78 in-depth life histories of undocumented young adults in Los Angeles, Gonzales (2010) speculates on the ways immigration policies collide with school practices to shape success and failure: many undocumented students do not disclose the details of their undocumented status to school officials – due to a fear of reprisal – and, therefore, lessen their chances for needed assistance. However, fear of reprisal, does not need to be of concern to undocumented students. “Educators are required not to *expose* children and families to the Immigration and Naturalization Service... The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) also prohibits schools from providing information to outside agencies that would expose students’ citizenship status” (Morse & Ludovina, 1999).

Because many undocumented students prefer to stay off the radar, and identification is the first step toward helping such students, Gin (2010a) offers four tips for identifying undocumented students: (a) they use passports as primary identification, (b) they won’t participate in prestigious programs even if eligible, (c) they will not apply for government financial aid even if they receive a free or reduced-price lunch, and (d) they will not obtain driver’s permits after passing driver’s education. Additionally, there are numerous ways that counselors can help undocumented students: don’t ask them to self-identify, make relevant available to all students; don’t make assumptions about who is undocumented; get informed about programs and scholarships available to undocumented students; help undocumented students develop support networks; identify role models in the form of older undocumented students; and, when necessary, refer affected students to qualified legal sources (Gin, 2010b).

Racism/Critical Race Theory and Undocumented Students

Any review of the literature on undocumented Hispanic students would be incomplete without the consideration of racism. Tatum (1997) explains the concept of racism as follows: “Racial prejudice when combined with social power – access to social cultural, and economic resources and decision-making – leads to the institutionalization of racist policies and practices” (p. 8). As a male Latino teacher, Prieto (2009) says that when he relates instances of racism that he has experienced, white students have difficulty believing that someone like him could be treated in such a manner. When they run out of possible justifications for the incidents, Prieto says the students are forced to consider the possibility that racism is real.

Critical race theory (CRT) operates on the premise that (a) racism is ingrained individually and institutionally in American society, (b) the dominant ideology must be challenged, (c) a commitment to social justice is crucial, (d) experiential knowledge is central to process, and (e) an interdisciplinary perspective challenges the status quo (Solorzano, 1997; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). For nonnative English speakers who are discriminated against in education or the workplace, CRT provides an effective means of inquiry through *intersectionality*, i.e., the ways that race, gender, class, national origin, and sexual orientation intersect with language to shape and interpret discrimination (Kubota & Lin, 2006). Sometimes, according to Delgado and Stefancic (2000), CRT takes the narrative form, through which writers analyze the myths and assumptions that fan racist beliefs in an effort to change the relationship of race, racism, and power.

It could be the blatant racism of hate crimes that Clark-Ibanez, Garcia-Alverdin, and Alva (2012) relate: “Our participants described an overwhelming feeling of fear,

anxiety, and hopelessness due to the hyper hate community that surrounds the university and other societal factors” (p. 498); in fact, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, in 2007 Hispanics were victims of more hate crimes than any other ethnic group in United States history (Castro-Salazar & Bagley, 2010). It could stem from the rampant display of institutional racism exhibited by schools in failing to understand how racial identity affects the achievement of immigrant and undocumented students (Rodriguez & Cruz, 2009). It could be caused by the present framing by nativists of all Hispanics as negatively linked to undocumented – read *illegal* – immigration in spite of their efforts to succeed (Perez Huber, 2009).

Castro-Salazar and Bagley (2010) blame the racism on internal colonialism, arguing that people of Mexican ancestry have been living in the southwestern United States since the early 1800s, before those territories even became the U.S. and colonization breeds racism through cultural and social processes. In a study of narrative accounts of legality, King and Puntí (2012) find that immigration status primarily is understood and experienced racially and that racial discrimination initiates a trajectory of disempowerment. The authors point to a 2010 study by the Pew Hispanic Center, which states that more than 30% of Hispanics 16 or older either experienced racial discrimination during the prior five years or knew someone who did. However, in a study of discrimination among California high school students, Rodriguez (2011) finds that there is more discrimination perpetuated by older Latino/a youth (than institutions) as they process into the dominant culture and participate in the dominant narrative.

“Counternarratives create the means through which those outside the law are able to gain legitimacy and personhood in dominant discourses” (Harmon, Carne, Lizardy-

Hajbi, & Wilkerson, 2010). As such, Solorzano and Yosso (2002) incorporate critical race theory by composing counter-stories that can be used to challenge racism and perpetuate social justice. Use of a master narrative to present one group will generally produce a very narrow perspective. Such a master narrative is addressed by Takaki (2008): “*American* has been defined as *white*. Not to be white is to be designated as the *Other* – different, inferior, and unassimilable.” (p. 4).

Need for Further Research

While there has been considerable research on the topic of undocumented students and college access, my review of the literature suggests several things: first, many of the studies state the obvious – that affected students are poorly prepared for college, that financial aspects of the issue are monumental, and that support of federal and state DREAM legislation by advocates is crucial; second, much of the research originates from California and Texas, states that have the highest undocumented immigrant populations and that share borders with Mexico, a major provider of immigrants to the United States; and third, most of the research focuses on students who have already transitioned from high school to college.

The lack of research that originates in New Jersey justifies the need to conduct research through which to further and better explore the problem. New Jersey is doing little to improve the situation of undocumented high school graduates who wish to further their education. This may be because policymakers do not have an adequate understanding of the problem, which may be a result of the fact that there has been little research and publicity regarding the issue as relates to New Jersey.

According to the authors I have cited above, the major themes inherent in the postsecondary transition of undocumented students are the law and policy, access, resilience, advocacy, and racism. Through my dissertation study, I will add to the available knowledge regarding these themes in the specific context of the transitioning postsecondary student. As such, the data I produce will be of value in the changing landscape of the postsecondary transition for undocumented students, Hispanic and other.

It is important to understand the college-going process of undocumented Hispanic students for a number of reasons, ranging from uncovering effective student assistance strategies to improving the economy and reducing shortages in the professional workforce (P. Perez, 2010). However, in the context of my research problem, I am particularly swayed by the author's final reason: "Although the literature on undocumented students has grown, focusing specifically on their postsecondary experiences and college options will inspire more focused research that will ultimately improve practice" (p. 22).

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to narratively explore the phenomenon of undocumented Hispanic students engaged in the postsecondary transition, in order to better help them to navigate the process and to call attention to their plight. Specifically, I sought to discover what it is like to be a Hispanic student living illegally in the U.S. For the purposes of this study, I defined *an undocumented Hispanic student* as: a student in the U.S. who is “of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin” (United States Census Bureau, 2013) and is not a U.S. citizen, permanent resident, or authorized visitor. I defined *postsecondary transition* as: the period between the middle of junior year in high school and the end of freshman year in college. Data was collected from semi-structured interviews and a research journal kept through the duration of the study.

Due to the context of the population – i.e., immigrants who are in this country illegally – I had access to a sample of students who had confided their undocumented status to me voluntarily as they sought assistance with the postsecondary transition. With the permission of the students and their parents, the research was conducted at the high school in the community of the participants. The following research questions formed the basis for inquiry:

1. What is it like to be an undocumented Hispanic student engaged in the postsecondary transition?
 - a. What emotional challenges are associated with the postsecondary transition for undocumented Hispanic students?

- b. What is my role as a school counselor in the postsecondary transition of undocumented Hispanic students?
- c. How do the stories of undocumented Hispanic students foreshadow their postsecondary paths?

Assumptions of and Rationale for a Qualitative Methodology

There has been a general reluctance on the part of practitioners to quintessentially define *qualitative research*. Potter (1996) attributes this to the belief that “definitions reflect a linear process of presenting words and concepts, whereas the qualitative approach is non-linear, multidirectional, an asymmetrical bundling of nonessential conditions” (p. 6). Flick (2009) contends that circularity, in fact, is one of the strengths of the qualitative approach because it forces the researcher to permanently reflect on the whole research process and on particular steps in relation to the other steps (p. 92). According to Hatch (2002), researchers have attempted to define the qualitative approach in many and varied ways: Strauss and Corbin (1990) ascribe qualitative qualities to any research with findings that are not produced through statistical or quantifiable means, Bogdan and Taylor (1975) describe qualitative research as an entity whose data is not reducible to a variable or hypothesis, and Anderson (1987) views the qualitative paradigm as social and subjective (as cited in Hatch, 2002).

Taking the definition construct further, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) surmise that qualitative research incorporates an interpretive and naturalistic approach, which involves making sense of the meanings people bring to the phenomena under study. It is a process for understanding social problems through distinct approaches of inquiry – narrative, phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, and case study (Creswell, 2007).

Maxwell (2013) sees qualitative research as a process that helps the researcher understand phenomena through “its inductive, open-ended approach, its reliance on textual or visual rather than numerical data, and its primary goal of particular understanding rather than generalization across persons and settings” (p. viii).

Characteristics that distinguish qualitative from quantitative research include: rich, thick description; a natural setting; the researcher as key instrument; multiple data sources; inductive analysis of data; participants’ meanings; emergent design; theoretical lens; interpretive inquiry; and holistic accounting (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Eisner, 1991; Hatch, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam, 1988, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002a). Contrasting quantitative characteristics are numerical data, deductive analysis, a laboratory or contrived setting, empiricism, fixed design, and statistical measurement (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). There also is a difference in language employed in the conduct of qualitative and quantitative research; qualitative research uses such words as explore, understand, describe, and examine, while quantitative research uses words such as test, predict, confirm, and compare (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Gravetter & Wallnau, 2009; Schwandt, 2007; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

The rationale for using a qualitative methodology stems from my constructivist worldview through which, as a researcher, I embrace inductive processes to understand and interpret the meanings of others through the data I collect (Creswell, 2009).

Constructivists are more interested in gaining a deep understanding of specific cases in context than in hypothesizing generalizations (Patton, 2002b), in understanding versus prediction (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Guba (1990) refers to worldview as a set of

action-guiding beliefs that are characterized by the researcher's response to ontological, epistemological, and methodological questions regarding the nature of research. Per Costantino (2008), Guba and Lincoln (1994), and Hatch (2002), the respective paradigmatic questions relative to my study were:

- Ontological question: What is the nature of reality? In my study, reality was relative, multiple, and socially constructed as opposed to being singularly generated through a hypothesis.
- Epistemological question: What is the nature of the relationship between me (as inquirer) and my research? For my study, knowledge was constructed subjectively between the participants and me and not objectively through a survey.
- Methodological question: How can I find out the knowledge that I seek? Regarding my study, inquiry was hermeneutic – i.e. interpretive – versus experimental or instrumental.

Hatch (2002) states that qualitatively-produced knowledge provides sufficient contextual detail and representation of the participants' voices that readers will be able to place themselves in the shoes of the participants and judge the quality of the findings based on criteria other than those used in quantitative research paradigms. Because the purpose of my study was to understand what it means to be an undocumented Hispanic high school student navigating the postsecondary transition, a qualitative inquiry process was the clear choice.

Throughout my study, I subscribed to Maxwell's (2005) interactive approach to qualitative research design. Based on the model, my research questions formed the central component of the design and the other components – goals (purpose), conceptual

framework, methods, and validity (trustworthiness) – revolved around and interacted with the questions from the beginning to the end of the study. I discussed my purpose and conceptual framework in detail in the first chapter and provide details regarding methods and trustworthiness in this chapter.

Strategy of Inquiry

Narrative, which is defined as the artistic representation of an event or story (Merriam-Webster's, 2012), served both as the strategy of inquiry and method of research in my study and, as such, was the fundamental unit I used for understanding and analyzing the human experience of the participants (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Additionally, I incorporated the literary techniques of creative nonfiction to analyze and interpret the data from the study. Colyar and Holley (2010) state that narrative is a textual form that can be attributed to both product and process: "For Frye, narrative is a text that can be described using a set of categories or constructs; for Polkinghorne and Bruner, narrative is a human meaning-making tool, the process by which individuals explore and later explain their experiences" (p. 72). The process is that of a narrator narrating and the product is the narrative being told (Kramp, 2004).

Polkinghorne (1995) distinguishes between two forms of narrative research – *analysis of narratives* seeks to identify common themes and concepts among stories that have been collected as data and *narrative analysis* coordinates actions and events toward the advancement of plot. Although the author presents the two forms in an either/or scenario, both forms contributed significantly to my study in terms of understanding, interpreting, and reporting the experiences of undocumented Hispanic students.

Narrative Inquiry

Schwandt (2007) refers to narrative inquiry as the process of generating and analyzing stories of life experiences and reporting such research. The ways in which human beings live out their lives give credence to narrative communication and understanding (Shacklock & Thorp, 2005). Sequence and consequence are the factors that distinguish narrative from other discursive forms, i.e., “events are selected, organized, connected, and evaluated as meaningful for a particular audience” (Riessman & Speedy, 2007, p. 430). Polkinghorne (1995) uses the term *narrative* as it relates to texts thematically organized by plot – or emplotment. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state simply and succinctly, “narrative inquiry is stories lived and told” (p. 20).

As narrative inquiry is research through storytelling, I relied on interviews and a research journal as the methods of data collection (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The authors contend that human beings, both individually and collectively, lead storied lives and thus are storytellers by nature and narrative offers an opportunity to better understand how people experience the world. They view research as a collaborative, mutually constructed document, which constructs a story from the lives of both researcher and participant. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) evoke the sense of wonder that derives from connecting through stories in what they refer to as *the midst*:

As we worked within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, we learned to see ourselves as always in the midst – located somewhere along the dimensions of time and place, the personal, and the social. But we see ourselves as in the midst of another sense as well; that is, we see ourselves as in the middle of a nested set of stories – ours and theirs. (p. 63)

Operating within *the midst* consists of negotiating constantly changing variables, such as relationships, purposes, transitions, and usefulness. Through it all, narrative inquirers must maintain an awareness of the narrative layers, intersections, and threads at work in their inquiry space. Lindsay (2006) suggests that context – as regards names, dates, events, and locations – is of prime interest, understanding of the phenomenon should change during the inquiry process, and that separation of the narrative researcher from the inquiry is not possible because he or she is part of the data.

According to Moen (2006) “creating a narrative implies a process whereby an accurate story that occurs in collaboration between the researcher and the research subject becomes fixed in a written text” (p. 6). The author points out the basic underpinnings of the narrative research process: (a) humans tend to organize their experiences into narratives; (b) stories are based on past and present experiences, values, audience, and situation; and (c) narratives are constructed from multiple voices. And Ospina and Dodge (2005), list the characteristics of narrative that are essential to inquiry: accounts occur over time, with a beginning, middle, and end; they are retrospective from a specific point of view; they focus on intention and action; they are used to construct identity; and they are co-authored by the narrator and audience. Salmon (as cited in Riessman, 2008) states, “A fundamental criterion of narrative is surely contingency. Whatever the content, stories demand the consequential linking of events or ideas. Narrative shaping entails imposing a meaningful pattern on what would otherwise be random and disconnected” (p. 5).

Like most research methods, narrative inquiry has many challenges, and Savin-Baden and Van Niekerk (2007) delve into the positive and negative aspects of the approach. Some pros of narrative inquiry are: it is easy get most people to tell stories,

especially about themselves; thick description often evolves from narration; in-depth meaning and reflection can often be gleaned from participants' stories; and people tend to be truthful in their stories. Cons of narrative inquiry include: interpretation of stories can be difficult; story ownership issues can arise; difficulties deciding on the relationship among the teller, the listener, and the re-telling of the story; interpretation and presentation of data can be problematic. The authors contend that ownership of interpretation issues is particularly relevant because it is a major consideration in the trustworthiness of a study.

Narrative theory offers literary tools, terms, and techniques for researchers to use in the construction of narrative texts, including elements of story, character, point of view, and plot, which underscores the role of the researcher as storyteller (Colyar & Holley, 2010). Of the literary elements, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) are most concerned with scene and plot. "Place is where the action occurs, where characters are formed and live out their stories and where cultural and social context play constraining and enabling roles . . . time is the substance of plot" (p. 8). While Coulter and Smith (2009) do not dismiss the importance of scene and plot, they are especially interested in the nuances of point of view, under which they include such elements as person, omniscience, narrator reliability, narrative voice, and authorial distance. Add characterization to the mix – arguably the most important aspect of storytelling (Elwood, 1989) – and this is the *stuff* of creative writing.

Creative Nonfiction

As a writer and researcher, I am both inspired and challenged by the opportunity to combine narrative inquiry and creative writing. According to Roorbach (2001):

All writers of nonfiction use every tool at their disposal – voice, language, drama, passion, characters, literary talent – and every scrap of learning. . . . Some writers of nonfiction use their tools so magically well that their work can be generally regarded as art. And these are the writers of what we’ve come to call creative nonfiction. (p. 2)

Also known as literary or narrative nonfiction, creative nonfiction uses literary craft in the presentation of nonfiction narratives i.e., factually accurate prose about real people and events written in a compelling and vivid manner (Gutkind, 2012). Lounsberry (1990) lists four characteristics necessary to the construction of creative nonfiction: documentable subject matter from the real world (not the writer’s mind), exhaustive research, scenic description, and fine writing in the form of a literary prose style. Creative nonfiction emphasizes the incorporation of inventive, dramatic means to support factual narratives. Some of the more widely used forms of creative nonfiction are the essay, memoir, journal, poem, biography, history, documentary, and literary journalism (Creative Nonfiction Collective, n.d.; Gutkind, 2012; Roorbach, 2001, 2008).

Creative nonfiction has not gone unnoticed by qualitative researchers. Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) confess that Richardson, prior to the millennium, yawned her way through many supposedly high-quality qualitative studies because the writing was boring. Recently, the author contends, qualitative writers have been learning to write in new and exciting ways. When Patton (2002b) invoked a creative writing style to examine coming of age issues he “found the writing far more challenging, difficult, cathartic, and illuminative than the usual academic and evaluation reporting I had done for years” (p. 270). Caulley (2008) recommends the use of literary techniques to make qualitative

writing more lively and readable: “The word *creative* in creative nonfiction might imply that it does not keep to the facts, but the aim of creative nonfiction is to tell the truth, and this certainly applies in its application to writing qualitative research reports” (p. 424).

Because my objective was to understand what it means to be an undocumented Hispanic student engaged in the postsecondary transition, relative to my own perspective as a high school guidance counselor, a narrative strategy of inquiry incorporating creative nonfiction literary techniques was the ideal approach to take in the conduct of the study. Utilizing Seidman’s (2006) three-interview series and my research journal, I constructed multiple narratives of my study participants (including myself) and collaborated in the creation of participant stories and an interpretive memoir – forms of creative nonfiction – which are presented in Chapters 4 and 5.

Context

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), qualitative researchers study phenomena in their natural settings in an attempt to understand relative meaning; talking to people and observing them in their context is, in fact, one of the major characteristics of qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). Patton (2002a) refers to this as naturalistic inquiry, suggesting that qualitative methods entail “studying real-world situations as they unfold naturally” (p. 40), and Miles and Huberman (1994) describe this approach as studying people in-depth as they are “nested in their context” (p. 27). By engaging my participants in a setting that is familiar and comfortable to them, I was able to optimize participation in my study and thereby gain an in-depth understanding of their situation as undocumented students navigating the postsecondary transition.

Naturally, I conducted my research within the environs of Midville High School – a 300-plus-student public high school in New Jersey – where I have been employed as a guidance counselor and college advisor since 2007 and the participants are former students. I requested and received permission to conduct this study from the principal of the high school, who was the gatekeeper of the institution and my supervisor, and I received written permission from the superintendent of schools (Appendix B).

The U.S. Census Bureau reports that Hispanics accounted for 14.8% of Midville's population in 2000 and that by 2010 Hispanics made up 26.7% of the town's population. New Jersey School Performance Reports for the 2011-2012 school year report that at Midville High School 33% of the students are Hispanic and that 2.1% are Limited English Proficient (LEP). At the middle school, 37.1% of the students are Hispanic and 4.7% are LEP. And at the elementary school, 39.1% of the students are Hispanic and 7.5% are LEP. (Census and school report citations have been withheld to protect the identities of the study participants.) This data indicates that the number of Hispanic families moving into the Midville school district is increasing and the implication is that the number of undocumented students also will increase, thus making gaining an understanding of the population even more crucial.

As a result, the residents of Midville are in a position to reap the benefits of *glocalization*, which refers to the combining of global and local forces in social, economic, cultural, and educational issues, among others (Weber, 2007). Brooks and Normore (2010) contend that students who receive a myopic, locally focused education will be at a disadvantage when they must compete on a global scale with people who have been educated on a global scale. Roudometof (2005), considers glocalization in

terms of cosmopolitanism, “whereby [situational] detachment allows for transcending the boundaries of one’s culture or locale” (p. 113). A glocal perspective will allow students whose first language is not English to learn more about American culture, while encouraging the generally provincial students from Midville to expand their horizons culturally and globally.

Participants

“Qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples, even single cases (N = 1), selected *purposefully*” (Patton, 2002a, p. 230); the author states that criterion sampling is a strategy that can be effectively used to study a phenomenon in which all the participants meet a set of pre-determined criteria. Such sampling, also referred to as judgment sampling, relies on an expert’s judgment to choose participants who are representative of the population being studied (Deming, 1990; Teddlie & Yu, 2007).

Sampling

Based on information provided to me by students in my capacity as a guidance counselor, I purposefully selected four study participants who met the following criteria:

1. Hispanic ethnicity – born in Mexico, Central or South America to Mexican, Central or South American parents.
2. Undocumented immigration status – not U.S. citizens, permanent non-residents, or authorized visitors.
3. Member of the Midville High School Class of 2013.
4. Engaged in the postsecondary transition.

Creswell (2007) states that in narrative research there are numerous examples of studies using small samples, some with only one or two individuals, which is appropriate since the goal is elucidation and not generalization.

As the college advisor to juniors and seniors I conduct individual college conferences in the spring of junior year and fall of senior year. The number *four* represents all the students whom I was aware met the criteria to participate in the study, as the result of disclosures made during the college and/or other conferences. Although I cannot state with 100% certainty that the sample is a census – data from an entire population is preferable to a sample in that there are no representativeness concerns (Harding, 2006) – I am confident that the sample is highly representative. In the end, three of the four students chose to participate in the study.

The Sample

Jacob was a high-performing student who, despite a Herculean effort on his part, had all but resigned himself to attend community college. Leala, also an excellent student, was embarrassed to attend community college because she didn't think she belonged there. And Maria learned that even though she could attend community college she would not be able to pursue the interest of her dreams. All three participants were accepted into four-year colleges, but without the benefit of federal and state financial aid could not afford to attend.

Some of the characteristics these students share are resilience, ambition, faith, humility, respect, courage, compassion, conscientiousness, creativity, determinedness, enthusiasm, honesty, empathy, hard-working, independence, loyalty, optimism, dependability, resourcefulness, sensitivity, sensibility, adaptability, responsibility

persistence, ethics, and sincerity. Words that often are used to describe their situation are poverty, ignorance, anger, fear, racism, stereotype, failure, and illegal.

An in-depth focus on a representative sample “gives enormous power to the stories of a relatively few participants” (Seidman, 2006, p. 55). My objective, therefore, was to achieve data saturation on the topic (Bowen, 2008; Padgett, 2008). A criterion sampling strategy is consistent with my conceptual framework, generally, and my research questions, specifically (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Additionally, this sample informs the purpose, methods, and rigor of my research design, which, along with my conceptual framework, interactively revolve around my research questions (Maxwell, 2005). Criterion sampling was the best fit for the design.

Data Collection

Prior to entering the field, I refined my research questions (Maxwell, 2005), developed an interview protocol (Creswell, 2007; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012), began my research journal (Ahern, 1999) and continued to review the literature (Hart, 1998) on the topic of undocumented Hispanic students and the postsecondary transition. Data collection methods for this study were consistent with expectations for qualitative narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Polkinghorne, 1995).

Semi-structured Interviews

Much of the data for this narrative inquiry emanated from participant interviews. Specifically, I used Seidman’s (2006) *three interview series* as the format for data collection with all participants. Through the first interview I developed a focused life history of each participant by reconstructing the experiences – in terms of family, school, and culture – that led to their present situation of being undocumented students engaged

in the postsecondary transition. In the second interview, the participants provided details on their lived experiences regarding the study topic – undocumented students engaged in the postsecondary transition. The third, and final, interview was devoted to the assignation of participant meaning to the history and experiences uncovered during the first two interviews as was related to the topic.

The *three-interview series* contrasts with McCracken's (1988) *long interview*, which can take several hours to complete but lacks the opportunities for reflection and relationship building that were provided by conducting multiple interviews over time. Dolbeare and Schuman are credited by Seidman (2006) with the development of the three-interview format to enable both interviewer and participant to mine and contextualize the experience. Lessons from Schuman (1982), who at the time was an inexperienced researcher attempting to understand the impact of higher education on a person's life, include: do all interviews personally, compare the transcripts with the actual interviews, limit the number of participants in the study, and study the prior interview to prepare for the next.

Per Seidman (2006), each interview with each participant was approximately 60 to 90 minutes in length and conducted from three to seven days apart. The interviews took place at Midville High School and its environs. I recorded all interviews with a digital voice recorder and had them transcribed verbatim. Full transcription – as opposed to partial or summary transcription – was necessary to provide for the high level of analysis required to depict the experiences of the participants (McLellan, MacQueen, & Neidig, 2003). I also followed Patton's (2002a) recommendation to take notes both as a backup contingency and to facilitate analysis.

For qualitative interviewing to be effective, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) encourage the researcher to plan for seven stages of interview inquiry, prior to conducting the first interview:

1. Thematizing: the topic of my study was the phenomenon of undocumented Hispanic students and the postsecondary transition;
2. Designing: my study had a qualitative research design and a narrative inquiry strategy, incorporating creative nonfiction techniques;
3. Interviewing: I interviewed four participants, in three 90-minute interviews each, using an interview protocol developed from my research questions;
4. Transcribing: I prepared verbatim written transcripts of verbal interview recordings for analysis;
5. Analyzing: I used narrative coding and vignette writing due to the phenomenon and the narrative nature of the study;
6. Verifying: I established rigor through intensive, prolonged engagement with participants, thick, rich description, member checking, an audit trail, and triangulation; and
7. Reporting: I communicated the results of my study through a dissertation that features life histories and a nonfiction novella, using creative nonfiction techniques.

Kvale (1996) discusses the concept of a *semi-structured life world interview*, which he defines as “*an interview whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena*” (p. 5-6). This fit well with Seidman’s (2006) three-interview concept in the

sense that when the interviews were completed, it not only set up a life world for each interviewee, but also a life world for the sample.

Research Journal

The second method I used for data collection was a reflexive narrative research journal with a two-fold purpose: to identify the biases, values, and personal background that could impact my interpretation of the study and to tell the story of the research process as it related to my study of undocumented Hispanic students and the postsecondary transition.

According to Wood (2013) a narrative journal can be written as a simple descriptive-historical account or as a complex reflexive exercise through which the writer engages with the material to challenge assumptions and biases. Gearing (2004) refers to the “setting aside of presuppositions and rendering explicit the studied phenomenon” (p. 1433) as *bracketing* and argues for its rigorous application in qualitative research. By employing the research journal as a method, and bracketing as a process, I was able to gain a universal understanding of my topic and apply those insights to the experiences of the participants.

To understand the invaluable contribution of the research journal as a method, it is first necessary to understand the concepts of *reflection* and *reflexivity*. There are numerous explanations of the relationship of the two concepts in the literature, but a synthesis of Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith (2004) and Krishnamurthy (2007) was enlightening to me: reflection is introspection that occurs after the fact while reflexivity is introspection that occurs during the fact, by considering how one’s own predilections affect the situation. Reflexivity is a process that exposes and turns back on itself the

researcher's assumptions, attitudes, behaviors, and priorities in interaction with others (Ahern, 1999; Bolton, 2010; Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Ryan, 2005). I achieved reflexivity in journal writing through the exploration of my assumptions regarding race, gender, socioeconomics, power, values, and roles (Tufford & Newman, 2010) and my interaction with these issues.

One of Gosse's (2005) data collection strategies, while launching a narrative inquiry into homophobia in elementary schools, was to make reflexive journal entries about his classroom experiences with homophobia as a teacher; this helped him to create provocative composite characters and settings. Osterman and Kottkamp (2004) include journaling as a reflective strategy that is useful when it comes to challenging assumptions. Borg (2001) suggests that a research journal serves the dual purpose of supporting "processes central to *doing* research and to *developing* as a researcher" (p. 158).

Because I was the instrument of research and my study was narrative in nature, it was appropriate to place major emphasis on the contents of my research journal (Janesick, 1999, 2011; Watt, 2007). "For qualitative researchers, the act of journal writing may be incorporated into the research process to provide a data set of the researcher's reflections on the research act" (Janesick, 1999, p. 505). As a first-person account of the myriad nuances of my study, my research journal enabled me to maintain the perspective – in terms of proximity and distance – required to produce a rigorous study. Jasper (2005) refers to such positioning through reflective writing as *centrality* and links it to the creative interpretation of experience. Writing about ideas in the context that they occurred served as the beginning of the analytic process for me (Watt, 2007).

Instrumentation

Data collection from interviews necessitated the development of a three-pronged interview protocol, one for each component of the three-interview series (Appendix C). My interview protocol and Seidman's (2006) recommendations on technique served as a veritable blueprint for my interviews: ask open-ended questions, spend more time listening than talking, follow up without interrupting, and don't share too much. It also is recommended that interviewers incorporate basic counseling skills, such as attending and reflecting, into their interviewing repertoire to encourage sharing by participants (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012) and empathy, especially at the beginning of an interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). My counseling background enabled me to do this. Additionally, Seidman (2006) is highly focused on the part that stories and language play in both the interview process and qualitative research overall and this is the very crux of my narrative study.

Rubin and Rubin (2012) recommend using main questions to generate information about general experiences and understanding and following up with additional questions and probes to deepen understanding and gain meaning. "You are looking for material that has depth and detail and is nuanced and rich with vivid thematic material" (p. 101); the technique is called *responsive interviewing*, and I used it to insure that answers to the research questions came from the perspective of the participant. This led to the incorporation of *timeline interviewing*, a technique of life history research that enables the researcher to incorporate linearity and coherence into the interviewing process in an effort to improve organization (Adriansen, 2012).

A study's research questions form the heart of the research design – i.e., "What do you want to understand?" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 65) – because, in the final analysis, the

research questions are the only component that directly connects to all the other design components. Through my research questions I wanted to understand what it is like to be an undocumented Hispanic student in the throes of the postsecondary transition . . . what the challenges are, what we can do as counselors and advocates to help or better help undocumented students, and how the stories of undocumented foreshadow their postsecondary paths.

In the first interview (of three per participant), questions primarily were geared toward developing a life history of each participant and most of the questions were designed to answer the central question of what it is like to be an undocumented Hispanic student in postsecondary transition and the sub-question concerned with stories foreshadowing postsecondary paths: such questions pertaining to early memories in the former country, estrangement from family, treatment by members of the new community, English language skills, descriptions and information about the self, and academic practices and habits formed the bulk of the data collection. Other questions regarding postsecondary plans and parent attitudes and education served to answer both the research questions discussed above as well as the research question dealing with the emotional challenges of this transition.

Questions posed during the second interview were designed to elicit details of the undocumented experience: interview questions that included such subjects as the when and how of discovering that one was undocumented and associated feelings, knowledge of immigrant policies, personal changes and challenges regarding one's undocumented status, and outlets for advocacy. These interview questions provided data useful in

answering all three of the above questions and the question about the role of school counselors in the process.

Reflection on the meaning of undocumented status was the focus of interview three and answers to questions about meaning applied to all four of research questions: this included the meaning of undocumented postsecondary transitioning student status, postsecondary path relative to history and experience, feelings about oneself, relationships with advocates, and understanding gained from emotional challenges encountered during this time.

I also relied on my narrative reflexive research journal to help answer the research questions. As stated above, I developed the research journal to serve two purposes: to reflexively identify my biases and assumptions and to tell the story of the research process regarding my study of undocumented Hispanic students and the postsecondary transition. The narrative structure of the journal consisted of four sections that were based on each of the four research questions. In contrast to the third-person data generated by the interviews, the data from the research journal approached the questions from my point of view.

The research questions for this study evolved from my literature review of the topic (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Maxwell, 2005), through which I identified themes of immigration, law and policy, access, resilience, advocacy, and racism. Appropriately, the interview questions and research journal topics emerged directly from the research questions, thus providing the data that was analyzed to answer the research questions.

Data Analysis

A researcher must challenge himself to explore every conceivable angle regarding collected data, in an effort to locate patterns that can lead to increased understanding. Among the data analysis techniques Mills (2003) recommends are: identifying themes, coding, asking key questions, concept mapping, displaying findings, and stating what is missing. Additionally, he suggests using the following as interpretation techniques: extending the analysis, connecting findings with personal experience, seeking the advice of critical others, contextualizing with the literature, and turning to theory. In narrative research, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) narratively code field texts by seeking characters' names, places of action or events, and storylines that interweave and intersect; they then develop themes by comparing multiple texts.

My primary data analysis techniques consisted of theme identification and analysis. There is strong support in the literature for developing a system of analysis early on in the study, which I accomplished through the organization of my research journal: Miles and Huberman (1994) contend that such consideration, prior to beginning fieldwork, forces the researcher to introduce research questions and conceptual frameworks to the data at a formative stage in the study. Saldana (2009) recommends beginning analysis as the data is collected and not waiting until the fieldwork is finished.

Because I conducted a narrative study, I was drawn to literary and language methods of analysis – specifically narrative thematic analysis (Riessman, 1993; Emden, 1998), which is discussed in depth in Chapter 4. Through this approach, I was able to consider the data from the perspectives of setting, plot, characterization, viewpoint, and other literary elements, including foreshadowing, flashback, irony, motif, symbolism and

metaphor (Saldana, 2009). The author goes on to recommend additional ways to analyze narratives, one of which is a good fit with my study and my context . . . vignette writing. “Vignettes never stand alone: Vignettes are tools for understanding that are complementary to other forms of analytic display” state Graue & Walsh (1998, p. 222). A vignette is always connected to a larger issue, the authors add, and such a connection is helpful in understanding the importance of a study.

According to Saldana (2009), “A theme is an *outcome* of coding, categorization, and analytic reflection, not something that is, in itself, coded” (p. 13). Therefore, when I turned to identifying themes from my narratives, I followed the advice of Ryan and Bernard (2003) and looked for repetitions, analogies, metaphors, indigenous typologies, similarities and differences, and theory-related material in the data.

I was, however, wary about what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) worry is a tendency to write narratives that are either reductionistic downward to themes or formalistic upward toward theory. It was the middle ground that I sought, that three-dimensional narrative inquiry shangri-la where the authors state that composing and revising texts is an interpretive process in which questions are asked – and answered – regarding meaning and significance.

Rigor

All of the above served to increase the rigor of my study, which Davies and Dodd (2002) state is a measure of research brought about by a “systemized, ordered, and visible approach to research methods” (p. 280). Ultimately, my goal was trustworthiness. In all qualitative research, trustworthiness is achieved through the synthesis of the naturalistic

qualities of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Toma, 2005).

In qualitative terms validity refers to credibility and transferability. Qualitative validity checks that are discussed by Creswell and Miller (2000) and Miles and Huberman (1994), and that are especially relevant to my study, include: intensive and prolonged engagement with participants; thick, rich description; member checking; and triangulation. Regarding intensive and prolonged engagement, Creswell and Miller (2000) and Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that because I have known and worked with my potential participants for two to three years my data is more direct and less dependent on inference, allowing for an increased opportunity to compare interview and other data, and that because my data came from varied and detailed interview transcripts and descriptive journal observations of the setting and participants of my study – i.e., thick, rich description – I was able to transcend facts in the pursuance of essence. And extracts from my research journal provided an audit trail of my emotional and other reactions to participant stories, thus increasing the trustworthiness of the findings (Smith, 1999). Finally, through member checking, I incorporated the opinions of my participants regarding the credibility of my interpretations, which, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985) is critical to the establishment of trustworthiness.

It is, however, triangulation – the cross-verification of multiple data sources that are aligned with the overarching research question, which, when analyzed similarly, confirm the researcher’s findings (Craig, 2009) – that I relied upon to insure overall trustworthiness. As cited in Miles and Huberman (1994), “Webb, et al. (1965) seem to have coined the term” (p. 266) and Denzin (1978) developed the distinctions of

triangulation – *data source* (including people, places, and times, among others), *method*, *researcher*, and *data type*; the citing authors state that a researcher should choose triangulation sources that are complementary in terms of strengths and biases. Per Melrose (2001) I examined these sources for themes and patterns, with the goal of establishing clear trends in the data.

In narrative research, trustworthiness is paired with authenticity: a study is considered authentic when the process is sufficient, the participants' ideas are presented appropriately, and there is insight that can lead to improvement in the situation (Holloway & Freshwater, 2007). This means that when the researcher interprets the participants' stories, he is faithful to the meaning and experience. However, Polkinghorne (2007) cautions, it is the reader who ultimately will judge the trustworthiness of the work. By adhering to rigorous research practices, I was able to anticipate and provide the answers that readers require to credibly view my findings and interpretations.

Ethical Considerations

The primary ethical issues associated with this study concerned the protection of my participants in terms of confidentiality and consent (Appendix D). As human subjects in a research study, my participants were entitled to the basic protections spelled out in the Belmont Report (1979) – respect for persons, beneficence, and justice: I respected my participants' autonomy through their informed consent and I was truthful in all matters regarding the study; I operated under the premise of *do no harm*, while maximizing study benefits and minimizing participant risk; I treated all participants fairly and equally in all matters pertaining to the study. A major benefit of my study is that a greater

understanding of the problem of undocumented Hispanic students and the postsecondary transition will set the stage for changes in attitude and policy.

I am a guidance counselor, first and foremost, and my study participants were my students and former students. As such, I am governed by the ethical standards of the American School Counselors Association (2003), which detail the responsibilities of school counselors in terms of confidentiality, respect, trust, records, policy, and the law. Additionally, I subscribe to a multi-paradigm approach to ethics, which incorporates the ethics of justice, critique, and care (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001). The ethic of care makes those who are vulnerable the highest priority through the administration of attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness (Tronto, 2005).

Because my study used human subjects, I submitted an application to the Rowan University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and was approved to conduct the study (Appendix E). As a condition of the application, I indicated that the study involved minimal physical, psychological, emotional, or behavioral risk to the participants, i.e. no more than normal risks generally faced in daily life. I certified that I had completed the Social and Behavioral Responsible Conduct of Research Curriculum, had obtained informed consent from the participants, would obtain approval from the IRB prior to amending or altering the scope of the project or changing the approved consent form, and would maintain project documentation for a minimum of three years upon completion of the study (Rowan University, 2013).

Since I was conducting this study within the environs of Midville High School in Midville, New Jersey, I requested and received permission to proceed from the principal, who is the gatekeeper of the institution and my supervisor (Seidman, 2006). I also

received written permission from the Midville superintendent of schools (Appendix B) in accordance with Midville School Board Policy 3245, *Research Projects by Staff Members* (citation withheld to protect the identities of the participants).

Due to the nature of my research – a narrative study of undocumented Hispanic students and the postsecondary transition – it was necessary to consider ethics from two additional perspectives: narrative research and the situational vulnerability of the participants:

Narrative research is, essentially, a relational pursuit. “Every aspect of the work is touched by the ethics of the research relationship” (Josselson, 2007, p. 537). Because the narrative is constructed from the details of participants’ lived experiences (“artefact”) and the interpretations of the researcher (“exegesis”), there is in the end a question of “who owns the story?” (Arnold, 2009, p. 74); through member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) I gave each participant the opportunity to read the parts of the narrative that pertained to them and to remove any references that made them uncomfortable in terms of confidentiality or emotional impact. In doing so, and by using my judgment to maintain participant consent throughout the process, I was able to reduce my participants’ vulnerability and further protect them from harm. (Smythe & Murray, (2000). As Flinders (1992) contends, in relational ethics research is informed primarily by respect and consideration for those whom we seek to understand.

Situational vulnerability refers to fact that the participants in my study were undocumented students who, at the time of the study, were not authorized to be living in the United States. The major and most immediate danger to my participants would appear to be the threat of deportation if their immigration status were to be discovered by the

U.S. government. However, all my participants have applied and been accepted into the *Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals* program, through which they have informed the U.S. government of their undocumented status, paid the \$465 application fee, and have been granted a social security number to allow them to work and to obtain a drivers license (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2013) or have legitimately applied for permanent residency.

Beyond situation, vulnerability extended to ethics of cultural responsiveness related to undocumented participants. As Lahman, Mendoza, Rodriguez, and Schwartz (2011) maintain, there are eight tenets of culturally responsive relational reflexive ethics (CRRRE). In my study, I complied with the following tenets: I gained sociocultural awareness through my literature review and in-depth interviews; I developed an affirming attitude toward my culturally-diverse study participants; I committed to act as an agent of change through the research process; I approached culturally responsive research as a constructivist; I learned everything I could about my participants and their lives; I employed reflexivity through my research journal; I sought goodness through research; and I integrated the above tenets into my research practice. Additionally, I subscribed to the concept of *process consent*, through which I checked in with my participants at various points during the study to make sure they were still comfortable with participating in the study (Lahman, Mendoza, Rodriguez, & Schwartz, 2011; Smythe & Murray, 2000).

While the subject of ethics is complex and fluid, the principle that guides me both as a researcher and as a person is one that Ciulla (2003) attributes to Kant – the categorical imperative to *do the right thing*, which the author states is an expansion of the

golden rule “do unto others as you would have others do unto you.” Adhering to such a principle did not eliminate ethical dilemmas in my research, but it provided me with a framework for consistency in dealing with them.

Chapter 4

Findings: Participant Stories and Themes

Material for the participant stories emanated from semi-structured interviews in which I used Seidman's (2006) three-interview series as the format for data collection. Through the first interview I developed a focused life history of each participant that led to their present situation of being undocumented students engaged in the postsecondary transition. In the second interview the participants provided details of their lived experiences as undocumented students engaged in the postsecondary transition. The third and final interview was devoted to assigning participant meaning to the life history and lived experiences uncovered during the first two interviews, as was related to the topic.

Channeling the work of narrative analysis pioneers Polkinghorne, Labov, and Mishler in data analysis procedures, Emden (1998) devised specific techniques to reduce lengthy, unwieldy interview transcripts into succinct core stories as an aid to the narrative analysis process. Likewise, Riessman (1993) developed a process for extracting excerpts from long and unwieldy interview transcripts and using the extracted material as the basis for sequential story creation. In my analysis, I incorporated the steps of both authors – as well as my own experience as a writer and researcher – through a framework I designed specifically for the task. For each of my three participants, I:

1. Read the full interview texts numerous times to grasp content.
2. Identified subplots from ideas within the text.
3. Extracted essential excerpts from the subplots located in the text of the interview transcripts.

4. Wrote vignettes to interpret and expand upon the essential excerpts, using additional information from the interviews.
5. Joined the subplots vertically to create sequential participant stories.
6. Identified themes by moving across the sequential subplots of the participant stories.

As I wrote the stories I used transcribed quotes generously to show that the emergent themes are congruent with the data I collected through my interviews with the participants (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002).

The participants, whose names and location have been changed to protect their identities, were provided with penultimate drafts of their individual stories and asked to respond to six questions, per McCormack (2000):

Was this the story you thought you were telling me? Does what I have written make sense to you? How does this account compare with your experience? Have any aspects of your experience been omitted? Please include these wherever you feel it is appropriate. Do you wish to remove any aspects of your experience from the text? Please feel free to make any other comments. (p. 299)

Changes agreed upon by the participants and myself were incorporated into these, the final stories.

Jacob's Story

I first met Jacob in the spring of his sophomore year of high school when, as his new guidance counselor, I scheduled him for his junior-year classes. Jacob's reputation had preceded him: he was the third-ranked student in his class, he often was called upon to serve as a translator for newly arrived Spanish-speaking students, and there were

rumors that he was living in this country *illegally*. Jacob did not confide his undocumented immigration status to me until the middle of his junior year when he began his college search, at which point I became highly interested in the topic of undocumented students and the postsecondary transition, especially as it related to my students.

Immigration Aspects

The immigration process began for Jacob when he was just three years old. Seeking a better life for her children, his mother moved from Peru to New Jersey, leaving Jacob and his two sisters with her parents in Peru. Then, when Jacob was six years old, his mother returned for the children and they all moved to Maryland, where Jacob entered the first grade. Life was difficult for a single mother with three children and, so, rather than risk overstaying their tourist visa Jacob's mother brought the children back to Peru. There, they lived alternately with their father and stepmother and their mother's parents while their mother went to California to work.

When Jacob was 12, his mother brought him and his sisters to New Jersey, where they settled in Midville. His sisters eventually returned to Peru to live and Jacob and his mother remained in the U.S. Jacob applied to become a permanent resident of the U.S. in 2009 and is still waiting. Because of his age, Jacob had a voice in the decision to overstay his visa and he chose to stay rather than return to Peru and risk not being able to return for a very long time.

There was precedence to Jacob's decision in that, prior to making it, his older sister had been the victim of an immigration incident, due to a violation of the rules on her part: "It was my middle sister, my nephew (my older sister's son), and my older

sister. And since my middle sister and my nephew were born here, when they go through immigration they go separate ways because one is for U.S. citizens and one is for visitors. So my nephew and my middle sister were good, but my older sister never came out.” While the horrified family waited, Jacob’s sister called and said she was being deported back to Peru and that her son would have to be sent back at a later date. As a consequence, Jacob’s sister was barred from entering the U.S. for 10 years.

Jacob initially was not eligible to apply for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which offered the opportunity to work and drive, when it first was instituted because he had not lived in the United States long enough at the time. Even when he became eligible he did not choose to apply to the program because he believed he would be receiving permanent residency status in the not-too-distant future under the sponsorship of his mother. And when his mother finally received her permanent residency Jacob felt that his change in status was imminent.

Jacob also was suspicious of the DACA program because it did not provide a path to citizenship nor qualify participants for financial aid. “I first thought that they were going to use it to find people that were illegal,” Jacob says. His mother, in fact, told Jacob about one of her co-workers who applied to the program, didn’t qualify, and was deported. However, as it turned out, the person in question had a criminal record, which came out during the DACA application process.

Birth and Family of Origin

Both sets of Jacob’s grandparents live in Peru. Of his father’s siblings, five brothers live in Peru and their sister lives in the U.S. Two of Jacob’s mother’s sisters live in the U.S. and one lives in Peru.

Disappointment and instability began for Jacob at an early age. He has been a product of parental separation and divorce since the day of his birth and, as a result, has not benefited from the consistent inclusion of a strong male figure in his life. When he was very young, Jacob (and his two older sisters) lived variously with his mother and father, his mother, his father and stepmother, his grandparents, and his mother and grandparents.

“I think my earliest memory is when I used to have a maid when my parents were good and we used to go to the park and pick up my sisters from school,” Jacob recalls. “And I think the saddest was when my mom left Peru. Not that I remember a lot because my parents divorced early and when I was young . . . two or three . . . so my dad was never really in the picture. Then my mom had to come here [to the U.S.] and she left us in Peru with my grandparents.” Living with his father, Jacob enjoyed all the accouterments of the upper middle class – big house, nice things, and private school – but when he lived with his mother and grandparents his environment was considerably more humble.

From his mother’s side of the family Jacob learned humility and from his father’s side he learned respect. Jacob describes his mother as humble but emotional: “She cries over everything and I don’t think she has a sense of authority over me.” Jacob’s father, on the other hand, is very strict. When Jacob went to live with him and his stepmother at the age of seven, he was afraid of his father and little has changed since then. “He doesn’t yell at me, he just wants to know what I’m doing, how I’m doing in school – I’m afraid of him and I don’t know why.” Jacob says that even his cousins, when they visited Peru, were afraid of his father, even though he is not mean. He has a very strong sense of authority.

Jacob believes he has inherited a large degree of spirituality from his mother, who is deeply religious. And from his father he has retained a sense of morals and values. “When he talked to me he always emphasized that it doesn’t matter if I do good in school or how smart I am, I still need to have my values, help my mom, be respectful, and all those things,” Jacob recalls.

But Jacob truly admires his grandmother – his mother’s mother – whom he discussed eloquently in his salutatorian speech at graduation as instilling in him the attitude of never giving up. Jacob’s grandmother is illiterate but she didn’t let that stop her. She also used to sell vegetables without knowing how to do basic addition or subtraction, or even how much the different coins were worth. “Compared to my grandmother, we have so many more advantages than she did so we have no excuse to not follow our dreams,” says Jacob.

Cultural Setting and Traditions

When Jacob moved from Peru to Midville at the age of 12, he barely spoke a word of English; numbers and colors were the extent of his knowledge. He watched a lot of Spanish television shows on a Spanish television channel but as his English improved, and as he became more interested in American culture (or his “American side” as he calls it), he lost interest in such shows and now prefers to watch movies and other types of entertainment.

Although Jacob and his mother adhered to some Peruvian traditions initially – his mother cooked Peruvian food, they spoke Spanish in the home and when in the company of other Spanish-speaking people, and they occasionally attended festivals celebrating Peruvian culture and traditions – Jacob feels that he became Americanized very quickly.

To Jacob, being an American goes far beyond having immigration papers; it gives people a voice in the process: “Being an American gives me hope to do what I want. I just like America. I like almost everything about it.”

Jacob finds it ironic that his cousins, who were born in the U.S. and have been to Peru just once, are more interested in Peruvian culture than he is. According to Jacob, his cousins started dancing the Marinera, which is a famous Peruvian dance, when they were two or three. And they still dance, attend festivals in Paterson, New Jersey, where there is a large Peruvian population, and celebrate Peruvian Independence Day on July 28 every year. Jacob has not completely given up his Peruvian heritage and he plans to return one day for a visit during the holidays or while on vacation but he is adamant about never returning there to live.

Religion is another area in which Jacob is affected, but to a lesser degree as he gets older. “For my family it’s really important, especially my mom’s side. Like we go to church every Sunday but there are times that I don’t know what to think – I don’t know – sometimes I don’t believe that there is a higher power. I do know there is, or I think there is, but since like my mom always says that I need to pray to God to help me with my papers and stuff like that and just sometimes I wonder why does it take so long, then I doubt, then I don’t know.” Although he assigns credence to a higher power, Jacob has relegated it to a space that is further away from him than it once was.

Social Factors

Jacob considers himself to be extremely shy and always has had difficulty making friends. Initially, he attributed this to his lack of English language skills, but he recalls that he also was shy and did not make friends easily in Peru. “Some of my family say it’s

because of my parents' divorce and everything. I don't know. But my sisters were never that shy." Of course, they are older than Jacob and have different personalities and characteristics.

Although he did not feel particularly loved and nurtured as a child by his parents, he did feel loved by his grandparents and his sisters, especially the younger of his two sisters (his middle sister) who is now in her mid-20s and has always assumed the role of eldest child due to health issues experienced by her older sister. "She was kind of more mature than the oldest one so I have a strong feeling for her, a strong bond with her because she was kind of like my mother and my grandmother."

As a child, Jacob was interested in trying new things – volleyball for example, which was offered at his school in Peru – “. . . but my dad said that guys don't play volleyball." Instead, his father insisted that Jacob play soccer and enrolled him in an academy that offered soccer and Jacob was “. . . forced to play soccer for one summer." He was not interested in soccer and was not very good at it and, sadly, was relegated to a group of boys that was separated and played on a different field.

The most significant event in Jacob's life has been making the speech as class salutatorian at graduation. "I really worked hard for that. I think it's very significant because I never thought of giving a speech because I thought I was really shy." Overcoming his shyness was one reason Jacob participated in the spring musical during his senior year. He had hoped to take public speaking in high school but was not able to fit it into his schedule, and, so, he is planning to take it in college. "I wanted to not be afraid of speaking up."

Social class has always been an issue in Jacob's life due to the nature of his various living situations. When he lived with his father, he went to a private school. "It was a really good school in Peru. I learned French, Spanish, and English a little bit. And my grandparents were kind of lower class so I was embarrassed to say where I came from. I think I changed a little bit. I still think I could be important sometimes but I don't worry about that too much anymore like I used to before."

Still, Jacob has strong feelings regarding the lower classes of society. And while he believes that some undocumented and formerly undocumented Hispanic people will benefit the economy – they will get college degrees, and work in critical careers, and pay taxes – he suspects that others may have a negative impact. "There are a lot of people that go to church and use the government to basically support them. They have lots of kids to receive aid from the government."

When the subject of undocumented people comes up outside the family, Jacob tends to be reticent. "I never say anything if I agree or disagree when they talk bad about undocumented people. I just listen." At family gatherings, where the identities of many undocumented people are known, there is much conversation about what is happening. One such gathering was where Jacob first heard about the DACA program, for example.

Some of Jacob's best relationships are with other undocumented students because they can relate well to one another. They want the same things – college, a driver's license, to work – but are limited due to the immigration status they share. And they become particularly irritated by people who are citizens or residents and do not take advantage of that which is automatically available to them. "They take it for granted and it is really frustrating," Jacob states.

Jacob believes that American society ultimately will benefit from the legalization of undocumented people through benefits that will come from more diverse backgrounds. Diversity is important “because you look at things a different way and then you have different perspectives and not just one view on something,” he states.

Education

All the above said, Jacob literally burst out of his shell during his senior year of high school. He had wanted to join the tennis team freshman year, but didn't and regretted it. Sophomore year was the first year he took honors classes and he wanted to have additional time for studying. Junior year he took two Advanced Placement (AP) classes and felt he would not have the time. Finally, senior year, in spite of the fact that he was taking four AP classes, he joined the tennis team because he knew it would be his last chance. “I really enjoyed playing tennis. I still play tennis at Rutgers for a club. I'm not good. I just started playing recently. It makes me forget all the stress of homework and everything.” Additionally, Jacob was the Spanish club president, the biology club treasurer, in the math league, the drama club, French club, tennis team, National Honor Society, and National Art Honor Society.

Jacob has traveled an incredible distance, in miles and in emotions, from where he began his education – kindergarten in Peru: “I remember the first day, I cried a lot because I didn't want to be in school and my mother was leaving me. She was dropping me off and I'd just cry. But then I really liked my kindergarten experience. It was fun.” Jacob went slightly off course in elementary school in Peru when he was caught cheating in third grade. “I felt that was like the scariest thing ever because I had never done that and I was always a good student. Since I was living with my dad at the moment I was

more scared. He yelled at me but he didn't say much. He just told me always to be honest because it's not going to help me to achieve that way." Jacob learned a valuable moral lesson early on and has never repeated himself since.

Halfway through seventh grade Jacob and his family arrived in Midville with Jacob speaking virtually no English. He formed a strong attachment with his English Language Learner (ELL) teacher, but by the time he entered ninth grade he had tested out of ELL. Jacob is particularly proud of the B+ he received in AP English senior year – he got an A- in Honors English junior year – and that he was able to move from the third ranked student in the senior class at the beginning of senior year to the second ranked student in the senior class at the end of third quarter of senior year. As such, he became the class salutatorian and prepared a speech focusing on the future possibilities of the Class of 2013. His favorite classes in high school were AP Calculus and Honors Physics because he feels the teachers prepared him well for college math and science courses.

Outside of the classroom, Jacob is known to his friends, teachers, and family as a helper. When he was a junior and senior he would often be called upon to serve as a translator and guide for new ELL Spanish-speaking students who spoke little or no English. Jacob also received assistance from several staff members in high school: transportation, help with college essays, and letters of recommendation, among other things. Regarding his relationship with his guidance counselor, Jacob says, "it's one of the closest that I have with someone that is not my family."

And now Jacob has finished his freshman year in the engineering program at Rutgers University, where he plans to major in Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering. "It's going pretty well," Jacob says. "I don't think it's as hard as some people say it is."

The transition between high school and college for me was good. I know how to study, how to make plans to study.” (Jacob is referring to the ability to manage one’s time effectively.) Although he is highly interested in engineering Jacob’s other long-term goal has been to learn to fly, perhaps to become a pilot for American Airlines, and he is looking into ways to achieve that goal.

Due to Jacob’s immigration status, he is not eligible for government financial aid and he only recently became eligible for the resident tuition rate at Rutgers, thanks to the change in his mother’s immigration status. Prior to this, Jacob’s father had stepped up and agreed to pay for his son’s tuition, an act that allowed Jacob to sidestep the usual undocumented student path to higher education – community college.

During Jacob’s senior year, his father had bought him a laptop computer and agreed to pay for college applications, which Jacob could not have afforded on his own. However, he could not have afforded to pay the much higher non-resident tuition rate of \$27,523 vs. \$13,499. “I feel really lucky because to be honest I didn’t want to go to community college . . . thinking that I worked my hardest to accomplish what I did and then I just didn’t think community college was right for me.” Due to his financial obligations to other children in the family, Jacob’s father has only been able to commit to paying for his first two years at Rutgers; that is why Jacob’s impending permanent residency has taken on even a greater urgency than before.

This, in fact, embodies Jacob’s understanding of what it is like being an undocumented Hispanic student engaged in the postsecondary transition. “My understanding is that I’m pretty fortunate to be going to a good college because not a lot of undocumented students get to go to a really good school.” Jacob is grateful to his

father and is happy to have established a connection that they have never had before. And he wants to establish an even better relationship, one that is not based so much on financial need.

Jacob considers education to be extremely important in one's life because "it makes you decide based on what you know. If you are ignorant about something and you have to make a decision you just don't want to make the right decision or the best decision, but the best decision for you." Both of Jacob's parents are high school graduates and they fully support their son's educational aspirations, emotionally and financially. Jacob's father, who has attended college, manages a family shipping business in Peru. Jacob's mother works three jobs: one at a fast food restaurant, another cleaning houses, and a third as a cook at a university.

Surprisingly, Jacob is not well informed about immigration issues even though they have a major impact on his life. He has heard about the DREAM Act and is aware that undocumented students are eligible to pay resident tuition rates in some circumstances, but attempts to explain it as thus: "I think in my case my only hope was my mother and since she was in the process [of attaining permanent resident status] it was just like I don't need to know anything else, just wait for her to get her papers and then I'll get mine. So I think that's why I just didn't care, I guess."

As a result of what he has learned about himself and his situation, Jacob can see himself joining an organization for first generation college students and reaching out to others in the same situation and trying to help. If he could Jacob would tell them to "focus on what they are going to be able to do . . . nothing can stop you if you want to do something."

Moving Forward

In terms of influences, Jacob points to his middle sister as the one who has helped him the most. When he returned to Peru after first grade in the U.S. Jacob still could not read and his sister taught him how to read. Jacob was always good in math so there was no problem there. "I keep communication with her like on Facebook and stuff, and like I ask her questions. She tells me what I should do, what I shouldn't do, what's right, what's wrong. If I need advice I always go to her. When I get into arguments with my mom I talk to her. I don't know, I just feel really comfortable talking to her." She is Jacob's moral and spiritual compass.

"For me, the purpose of life is to live happy and accomplish the things you want," Jacob states. Even though he sometimes fantasizes about having a big house and a lot of money he has firsthand familial knowledge of some of the tradeoffs that may be involved. Presently, Jacob does not feel that he is in control of his life because he has to depend on so many people for help, i.e. his mother for food and support, his father for college tuition, his friends for transportation. But as he gets closer to resolving his immigration issues, Jacob is feeling better about achieving his goals. By moving forward, one step at a time, things for Jacob are continuing to fall into place.

Still, there are disappointments, like when Jacob was initially required to enroll in remedial language arts due to his low score on the placement test, even though he received a B+ in AP English the year before in high school. He resolved the issue through communication with the department, and was placed in a more challenging English class. "When I disappoint myself I try not to be too negative or too hard on myself because I used to be really hard and make myself feel so bad, but I don't think that helps at all,"

Jacob reasons. “Just be positive and be like I will get this next time, I will try harder, I will do better.” When others disappoint Jacob, it is more difficult “because it depends on the person and how much you care about the person that disappointed you. If you really care about the other person you can help them and not judge them for what they did. Forgive them.”

Jacob’s emotional challenges as an undocumented Hispanic student engaged in the postsecondary process run the full gambit of the emotional scale: fear, love, anger, and pain. There is the constant fear of the unknown as he navigates all aspects of his life. There is the love of learning and experiencing new things. There is anger with the process of getting the papers he needs to live a full life. And there is pain from the frustration of constantly waiting. One of Jacob’s goals, as an outcome of what he has learned about himself through this study, is to be more patient and understanding.

A work in progress, Jacob is actively seeking ways to change. He wants to become more independent – to make his own decisions without being influenced by others. He wants to be affected more by love and happiness than by pain and unhappiness “because every time I am happy or feel good about myself I feel like doing something I love is going to make me want to keep going. If I feel pain and anger I don’t want to keep going, I just want to stop there.” Although Jacob feels that he is just one of more than seven billion people in the world he wants to be one who makes an impact.

Leala’s Story

At the beginning of her senior year, I unwittingly badgered Leala for a social security number so she could take advantage of a gifted student program; I suspect she confided her undocumented status only because she thought I was going to turn her over

to the authorities. One day, several of her family members appeared in my office where, upon my assurance that I was under no obligation to breach confidentiality regarding immigration issues, they informed me of their student's problematic immigration status. An excellent student, Leala's pride initially interfered with her plans to attend community college and in spite of the approximately \$7,000 annual tuition difference, she decided to attend a four-year state university. In the end, however, practicality trumped pride and she enrolled in community college instead.

Immigration Aspects

Leala, her mother, and her younger brother came to the U.S. from Colombia when she was six years old. Her father had arrived before them and was working for his brother, through whom he was being sponsored for permanent residency. "My dad was an accountant over there [Colombia]. He was working in a bank and they closed it so he was unemployed for a while and he was trying to find a job but it's really hard to find a job over there," Leala explains. Unfortunately, Leala's father returned to Colombia after the residency process had begun and, in doing so, violated one of the requirements of residency and has not been able to reinstate the process.

The family moved to an apartment in Midville shortly after arriving and then to a house, where they have lived since. Leala learned about her undocumented immigration status while in middle school because her parents wanted her to understand what her situation was and what her options were. She is grateful that her parents were honest about her immigration status early on because she has heard stories of others who did not find out until they were applying to college and for financial aid.

“It was something that I just kind of accepted, because I learned it so early. It wasn’t like I was living a lie or anything like that. I already knew,” Leala states. “When I started getting older that’s when I realized it kind of sucked because when my friends were getting their license I couldn’t get my license. When people traveled on an airplane, I couldn’t travel.” She is irritated by people who have such opportunities – especially to go to college – and do not take advantage of them.

While Leala did not have a voice in the family’s initial immigration decisions (she was too young to understand) she had a clear voice in her later plans. When she was a senior, Leala applied for Deferred Admission for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and through this program was allowed to get a New Jersey driver’s license and a permit to legally work and pay taxes in the U.S. She presently is a student at Raritan Valley Community College, but is not eligible for federal or state financial aid or the STARS program, even though she is academically eligible.

Birth and Family of Origin

Leala was the first grandchild from her mother’s side of the family and, so, admits to being very spoiled. “I was kind of the center of attention at the time because my older cousins were here [in the U.S.] and I was the older one in Colombia,” Leala recalls. “I know that I started walking on my [first] birthday. . . . I didn’t crawl, apparently. I would like slide on the floor – I wasn’t on all fours crawling – I would just slide to wherever I needed to get. And then on my first birthday I just stood up and started walking.” Early memories of Leala’s life in Colombia include outings with her mother everywhere, but most poignantly to the Miss Colombia pageants, where they would enjoy the modeling and shows together.

Leala describes her grandparents: “They’re really nice, they’re very down to earth. They like to help whenever, even when you don’t ask them. And they want to know everything. They want to be involved. I think more on my mom’s side they’re more involved. They want to know more. My dad’s side they’re the same way but they give you your space.” Her grandmother on her mother’s side has the capacity to be extremely persistent and when she makes up her mind about something it is difficult to get her to change her mind.

According to Leala, her mother is strong in character, very much like her grandmother. “She’s always supportive of whatever I do or my brother does or my dad. Even if sometimes she doesn’t agree as long as it’s something good. . . . She’s amazing. My dad’s very supportive too. I think that’s one of the things that I really like about my parents, they always let us make decisions. . . . And my dad is very protective too, especially of me, and they’re very loving.” Leala considers herself to be a blend of both parents; she is laid back and calm like her father and she is strong in character like her mother.

Even though the two sides of Leala’s family literally live next door to each other in Colombia, Leala has always been closer to her mother’s side of the family. She attributes this to the propensity of her father to not divulge much information about his side of the family and her mother to divulge much more. Leala has landed somewhere in the middle: she values her privacy but is open when she wants to be.

Cultural Setting and Traditions

Leala’s parents and grandparents were born in Colombia. Her great grandfather migrated there from Spain and her great grandmother is believed to have been born in

Colombia. Although Leala's family retains some of the aspects of their culture – they still speak Spanish and eat Colombian food – they were, and continue to be, extremely open to American culture.

“It's not like we totally left our culture,” Leala explains. “But there are people that still celebrate and do things that we don't. There are some people who still dress like they're in their country. We're just – I don't know, I am Americanized.” What makes someone American? According to Leala, it is not simply a piece of paper. “You have to speak the English language, be involved, vote.” Leala already pays taxes and relishes having the opportunity to vote.

“Something that was important for my parents was for me and my brother to still speak Spanish because we're Colombian and that's our first language,” Leala says. She became fluent in English in first grade, the only year she was assigned English as a Second Language classes. She attributes this linguistic success to her young age, an excellent ESL teacher, and the fact that she had taken some English classes in Colombia, where students begin to learn a second language when they are little.

Religion, i.e., Catholicism, is extremely important to Leala's family especially the aspect that is related to attending and participating in mass. This is particularly relevant to the family because one of Leala's aunts is a nun. It took the family some time to get used to the idea, but now they are comfortable with having a direct servant of God as a member of their family.

Social Factors

Leala considers herself to be open-minded and nonjudgmental and her dream is to be a psychologist one day. “I don't really judge people. I just try to understand and look

at where they're coming from instead of automatically judging. I think that's one of the flaws that a lot of people my age have. But I do have strong beliefs, like I'm kind of stubborn sometimes. I feel like I have a good balance of having a strong character but also being calm at the same time."

However, Leala is prone to chastising herself on occasion for being what she considers lazy: "When I want something or when I want to achieve something I'll go for it. But sometimes it takes people to talk me into it or give me that push because sometimes I give up too easily."

As a child Leala was always encouraged to try new things and that has carried through to the present. "I don't like thinking oh, I should have tried this or I should have done that. I prefer to know that I tried something instead of knowing that I didn't try it at all and not knowing what the outcome would have been." Leala spent, and still spends a considerable amount of time with her parents, initially because the family is very close, but later because she served as a translator. Even now, she says that her parents understand English but neither one speaks it very well.

When Leala was in middle school there was always dinner, and family time afterwards, when they would sit around the table and talk about the day and all the things that were going on at the time. Her parents made it important. However, in high school, as Leala began to have more homework and to participate in more activities, it was difficult to sustain this. At that point, Sundays became family days. "We always hang out. We like to go to New York a lot. I've been to New York so many times, it's like I should just live there. We like to do different things," Leala says. One of those things is seeing a Broadway show.

Now that Leala is over 18, in college, and employed as an office worker, her life has become a balancing act. She stays busy with a mix of old and new friends and is considering joining some clubs and activities at her college. In high school Leala played soccer, was in the Spanish Club and the National Honor Society, and was president of the Student Council senior year.

Although she likes to contemplate the future, social class is not important to Leala. “I do think about being successful but if I don’t end up being rich or anything like that I’m not going to be depressed or sad about it.” Her primary goal is to provide a decent living for herself and to achieve at the highest level possible. However, even though she is more interested in intellectual than materialistic pursuits, she would not reject *the good life* in the process.

To Leala, “success means having a career and doing well in my career and not having this [immigration] situation. To feel peaceful and not having to worry about little things. . . . Because this is always in the back of your mind . . . I’m sure there are people out there that are scared and insecure and I think that is not good.”

Other than family members, Leala is hard pressed to point to specific individuals who have helped her to gain an understanding of herself. “I think it all reflects back to my family – my mom and my dad. I feel like if you are family oriented like I am that’s what you know best.” Leala concedes, however, “I think that everyone I’ve met in my life has kind of influenced me and made me realize who I really am.”

Leala is an extremely private person and, in the past, when the subject of undocumented people came up, she has avoided talking about it. She is not aware of any friends who are undocumented, either now or while in high school, but the reason she is

not certain is her reluctance to discuss the subject. “My parents have told me it’s not always good for people to know that you are undocumented so I never told any of my friends.”

Leala also is at odds with the amount of emphasis to be placed on her undocumented status and is concerned about it assuming a high level of importance in terms of her life. “It’s not like a characteristic . . . it does identify me but it does not define who I am.” She adds that her undocumented situation is not something that she feels passionate about, that it is just a part of her life. “I’m pretty sure that there are other people that have really dwelled on this and they have come to some sort of connection and something meaningful about it. It’s just what it is.” Perhaps if she had been involved in a dangerous border crossing or had run-ins with the law, she would feel differently about her undocumented immigration situation, Leala surmises.

Leala believes that undocumented people have the potential to be a tremendous boon to the United States and to the economy through the filling of specialized jobs and the payment of taxes. “My point of view is that I’m here and I know I don’t have documents . . . so I’m trying to do all the right things because I think I deserve to be a citizen,” she contends. Although she concedes that there are some undocumented people who are here for the wrong reasons – to commit crimes and to be a burden to the system – Leala believes that the positive of having more educated individuals contributing outweighs any negatives.

Education

The first memory of school for Leala is pre-school in Colombia and wearing a uniform when she went there. She has always loved to learn but elementary and middle

school are a blur to her. Her favorite teachers in high school were the upper level Spanish teacher and the shop teacher, even though Leala only took shop during senior year. From the shop teacher, who has a reputation for being a bit of a blue-collar philosopher, Leala learned about genuineness and humility and added to her character bank.

Leala never confided her undocumented status to any of her high school teachers even though she liked and respected many of them. In fact, the only staff member she discussed the issue with was me, her guidance counselor and, as stated above, that was only after I badgered her for a social security number at the beginning of senior year so for the STARS program for gifted students. Of course, this was prior to DACA and she felt compelled to discuss her immigration status so that I could advise her on college options, which she knew were limited. In other words, Leala shared her story, but only out of necessity.

“I don’t think you could have done any more than you did,” Leala told me. “It’s not like you could find financial aid for me. It’s things that you can’t change right now because of the law. So it’s something that you can’t do anything about.” Her best advice to counselors working with undocumented students? “Just be aware of everything that’s happening . . . know everything . . . be informed.”

The most useful class Leala took in high school was a pre-college summer program in psychology at Lebanon Valley College. She says that this experience was a defining moment in her life, in that she had already developed an interest in psychology, and it encouraged her to work harder to take advantage of the opportunities she is seeking. As a freshman at Raritan Valley Community College, she was well prepared for beginning *Psychology* and the process of majoring and pursuing a career in psychology.

“Psychology class has been very helpful. You figure out how you think. So, if you know how you process things and how you think about things it helps you when it comes down to your real life situations. You know how to deal with them.”

Leala says that her most important lesson outside the classroom “would be to never give up and keep going. If you fail, pick yourself right up and keep going.” She uses her present immigration situation, and the lack of financial aid available to her, as an example: “Like not having financial aid to go to my dream school. I wasn’t going to let that one stop me. It’s hard at first, but I’m not going to let it stop me, definitely.”

“I think education is really, really important,” Leala states, “because without education you can’t really go anywhere . . . you can’t even get a job. I mean, just to even have a conversation with someone you need to know a little bit of everything.” Leala’s parents both went to college in Colombia – business school, where her mother learned secretarial skills and her father learned to be an accountant. Both parents are highly supportive, emotionally and financially, of their daughter’s educational aspirations.

Interestingly, however, Leala is not well informed on the issue of immigration or the various programs that are available and being proposed. Part of the reason is that she is very busy with work and school, but she also feels like “there’s so much talk about it but nothing really happens.” Although most of the information she gets, including that about the DACA program, comes to her from her parents, Leala has vowed to be more aware of what is going on.

Leala also can see herself becoming more active in the future, i.e., joining a group and perhaps, at some point, speaking and reaching out to others in her situation. “Just the other day I was walking [on campus] and I saw they had set up a table and they were

trying to advocate something and I was like oh that's pretty cool," Leala recalls. And she does want to get into a helping profession so some of her desire to reach out may be resolved through work at some point. "One of the goals for later on is to write a book about my whole experience as I think it's pretty interesting."

Moving Forward

Aside from her immigration issues, Leala feels that she is pretty much in control of her life and she has little doubt that she will attain her goals and dreams. She is a perennial optimist who always looks at the positive side of things. "I can't think of anything that's been a huge struggle, which I'm grateful for." When disappointment does come, Leala handles it by not dwelling on it. "I am like, OK this happened and I just have to move forward because I am not going to do anything by being disappointed all the time."

One of Leala's biggest disappointments to date, and truly one of the major challenges of being an undocumented student, was the 11th hour decision to attend RVCC instead of William Paterson University (WPU), one of several four-year colleges to which she had been accepted. Her parents already had agreed to pay the tuition and fees of \$11,918 (the policy of WPU is to allow eligible undocumented students to pay the resident rate) and she had agreed to commute to campus to save on room and board. However, on the day of orientation a gut feeling changed her mind. "It just didn't feel right," Leala explains.

RVCC was a good decision under the circumstances and now she likes it there. "I think that things happen for a reason because going through community college the first

two years is just the same as the general classes you take at a four-year college, so you're saving money."

Although she is generally confident and mature, Leala naturally worries about the future. "Thinking that maybe I won't get where I want to be or what I want to do scares me a little bit, but what gives me hope is knowing that I am going on the right path." She also is concerned about her little brother and that he will choose the right path and do the right thing. Sometimes she finds the uncertainty to be nerve wracking, especially in the case of her parents. "I wish that they could get licenses so we can travel easier and take vacations," Leala says.

For Leala, the purpose of life is "to have an influence in some sort of way even if it's not to change the world or country or anything like that . . . even if it's a small thing, even if you just influence one person I think that it's important to have an impact on other people, not just yourself or your family." Leala feels like once she achieves the above she will have a sense of accomplishment.

Maria's Story

When she was a junior, Maria learned that she would not be permitted to enter the nursing program at the county community college because her undocumented immigration status would not allow her to be eligible for registered nursing licensure upon graduation. She has since developed an interest in becoming a medical laboratory technician and has hope that she will be eligible for financial aid and professional licensure in the years to come. Maria applied and was accepted to several four-year state universities, primarily to prove to herself (and her friends) that she could get in, but

practicality won out due to the approximately \$7,000 annual difference in tuition and she decided to attend community college.

Immigration Aspects

Maria was just four years old when her father traveled by himself from Guatemala to New Jersey to reunite with his brothers, who had migrated there earlier. As the eldest son in the family, the reason for the trip ostensibly was to reclaim his place as head brother and “to get a better job, which is what everybody usually comes to the U.S. for,” Maria states.

One year later, Maria and her mother followed under the visa sponsorship of an aunt. What began as a simple visit became complicated when Maria’s mother got pregnant and, so, like Maria’s father, they overstayed their visas and Maria has not gone back to Guatemala. Since then, two more children were born, and, as such, half of the family members are undocumented and half of the family members are American citizens. The family initially lived in Plainfield, and then moved to Midville when Maria was in the first grade, where they have resided since.

Because Maria was only four-years-old when the decision was made to stay in the United States she had no voice in the process. Her parents explained their immigration situation to Maria when she was still in elementary school and they felt she was old enough to understand that she was different. “I always knew that I wasn’t here legally, that I didn’t have a green card . . . and as I got older, in middle school, then that was when I started understanding more what it was,” Maria explains.

“I felt different than everyone else. I wasn’t sad, I wasn’t mad . . . maybe I was sad because I knew I wouldn’t see my cousins or my grandparents,” Maria recalls. She

did not think she would ever be allowed to drive or to attend college. Then, in the fall of 2012, Maria applied for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program and after almost a year received a social security number so that she could work legally and get a driver's license.

Birth and Family of Origin

Maria was born in Guatemala City, the capital of Guatemala, at a hospital where her mother had to share a bed with another woman who was also giving birth. The first house that Maria and her parents lived in was a tiny one-room house with only a bed, a kitchen, and a small table. Maria and her mother used to stay there alone while her dad would work and it was scary because it was in a rural setting and there were no other houses nearby.

One of Maria's earliest memories is of a famous castle in Guatemala, which she has long since forgotten the name of, "but I had the little sneakers that have the lights on them and the castle is all dark and we were – we walked ahead like a guided tour and I was leading everybody because I was running with my little shoes that would light up the way. . . . I mean I was walking, so I am guessing I had to be around two years old." That said, however, Maria can't remember most of the things she did in Guatemala because "basically my life started over here [in the U.S.]. . . . I was used to being here. I was used to the American culture and everything."

According to Maria, her grandparents are very strong in character; if they like or dislike something they will speak their mind and state their opinions no matter what other people think. They have tried to instill in their grandchildren the same attitude – to always stand up for what they believe. From what Maria has been told, they are 100%

Guatemalan and “they are always proud of whatever I accomplish, even if it is something very small. That’s my favorite thing about them. It’s like the love is completely different than what the love is between parents.”

Maria’s says her father is extremely impulsive and the family can’t plan too far ahead because of it. He also is a man of strong character who expresses himself in few words. Her mother, she says, is a strong tempered woman who is prone to speaking her mind and then apologizing and compromising afterwards. Maria is proud to have inherited traits from both of her parents.

According to Maria, “It’s a very tough love type of thing like everybody is going to say, ‘Oh, I hate my parents, they don’t let me do this, they don’t let me do that,’ but if I didn’t have it that way, I don’t know how else it would be because I love the way that they have raised me. It makes me feel secure and I know that they are always going to be there for me. I think it’s two things: love and security – emotional security, physical security, even financial security because I have been given everything by them.”

Cultural Setting and Traditions

When Maria’s family first moved from Guatemala to the U.S., it was their language, food, and clothing that set them apart culturally. Additionally, the extended family of aunts, uncles, and cousins was extremely close and they did most things as a group. They lived together, played together, and went out together. Maria says that more than a decade ago the Hispanic population in the Midville area was much smaller than it is today and, that her family was very noticeable.

As a testament to the closeness of the extended family – and practicality – they lived together in the same house, initially in Plainfield and then in Midville. “First my

dad had to sleep with his brothers and some cousins, and as soon as my mom came they gave him a room just by himself, and then it was us. Even when my sister was born we were still four people living in one room. There was my parents, me, and my sister and it wasn't very comfortable at first, but that's why I am still so close to my family."

Maria has never felt uncomfortable in the U.S. due to her culture, "because I already had an idea of the American culture before I came here through my dad and because I took bilingual classes in Guatemala," she recalls. "So when I came here and went to kindergarten I picked up everything really fast." As an example, Maria was such a quick learner and adapter that she was only required to spend half of a school year as an ELL student, working primarily on pronunciation.

"We got Americanized very quickly," Maria states. "I think that if you were very cultural when you were in your country then you're going to bring it to whatever country you go to. We weren't from an area that dressed completely different because there were a lot of American products that were sold over there and my dad would always send things." According to Maria, it's usually easy to tell when a person has just arrived from another country from the way that they dress. Her family was already a step ahead when they got here.

To Maria, being an American "does not mean that you have a green card and that you are fair skinned and that you have blue eyes and blond hair." It means knowing the culture, practicing it, and loving being in the United States. "I love being in this country even though it didn't love me for years," Maria states. "So if you're going to come here and say 'I hate this place,' 'I hate these people,' 'the U.S. is horrible,' 'I'm just here for the money,' then you are not American and you shouldn't deserve documents. But if you

come here and you love the place and you learn to be proud of where you are at and the things that surround you, then you do deserve it.” In other words, you have to participate.

Religion (in this case Christianity) is an area that plays a major role in Maria’s culture and her family. Both sets of grandparents and her mother are deeply religious. Maria’s father, however, takes it less seriously and as she has gotten older, Maria is following in his steps. “It is important because I’ve always grown up around it. I am kind of like my dad. He believes, but he questions a lot and he believes a lot of the scientific side.” In spite of the importance of religion to the older generation, Maria’s parents have left it up to her to decide what part religion will play in her life.

Social Factors

Maria concedes that as a child she was not merely loved and nurtured, she was downright spoiled. “I was the first one and my parents would give me everything that I asked for and they never said no to me and they always spent time with me.” Because her father worked a lot, Maria spent most of her time with her mother and developed a very close relationship with her.

A quiet child, Maria spent much time playing by herself and was reluctant to stray from her comfort zone. She was a loner, and enjoyed being alone, and prior to high school she did not get involved in school activities. As a result, she was bullied through much of elementary and middle school. Finally, when she was a freshman in high school, Maria stood up to her bullies, “which was very relieving and it changed me a lot. I started talking to people I had never talked to before in middle or elementary school. I became more open to doing things and I felt more secure about not being talked about or laughed at or ridiculed.”

Then in sophomore year, Maria joined the girls' soccer team (which turned out to not be her thing) and then track, which she enjoyed immensely. She competed in throwing events – javelin, shot put, and discus. By senior year, Maria had joined the drama, art, French, and Spanish clubs, and was the secretary of both language clubs. Her career in drama culminated senior year with a part in the ensemble of *Damn Yankees*, the spring musical that year. “That was a huge step for me my senior year to actually stand up in front of my whole school basically, and then some, and kind of pretend that I was someone else, but at the same time it was me.”

As she has matured, Maria has taken great pleasure in watching her parents succeed, buying their own home, and starting a family in a country that is completely different than where they grew up. “I can't say that for me, because I practically grew up here, but it was a huge step for them,” Maria contends. It made a strong impression on her. “I was always taught by my parents to appreciate what I have and to want more, but don't think that someone is less than you and don't think that someone is more than you either, because you are who you are and it's good to aspire to be better but at the same time be happy with what you have.”

As such, Maria is sympathetic to others in her situation. She believes that Hispanic people will do many jobs that others will not do (i.e., manual labor) and cannot do (i.e., technical jobs) and looks at this as a means of improving the American economy. That said, however, she worries that because she feels the U.S. government is lax on background checks, there is a danger of letting in the wrong kinds of people – those who are involved in “drugs, gangs, and all these things that are very negative things about our countries.”

Although she believes that she is too young to have a full understanding of herself, Maria credits family members and friends with helping her to gain what understanding she presently has. “So there is definitely much more for me to learn from life, education, everything basically.”

Maria is very open about her undocumented immigration status. “I never hid it from my friends but I didn’t go around telling everybody, ‘hey, I’m not the same,’ but my closer friends knew from the beginning.” She credits this to the fact that many of her friends in middle school and high school were Hispanic and most of them had families that were in the same situation. Almost everyone Marie knew was connected somehow to that situation whether they were in the situation themselves or just knew someone.

Education

Maria’s strongest early memory of school is kindergarten, when she came to the U.S., even though she had been attending school in Guatemala since the age of three. “I love school and even though it gave me headaches and I wanted to quit sometimes in high school, I always enjoyed coming the next day and seeing everybody and learning things. I always loved art and she [Maria’s art teacher in elementary school] was the one who told me to keep going and to try and that I was good at it and to not give up.”

In high school Maria had positive relationships with most of her teachers. She describes what she liked about one of her teachers: “He was a teacher I respected, but he was fun. It wasn’t like ‘I rule here’ but like we’re all involved in the class, and that made me feel very comfortable to tell him, well, I don’t understand this and he was never like, ‘I can’t believe you don’t understand that.’ And I loved the way he talked because people respected him, but people could laugh with him at the same time.”

Another positive relationship Maria had in high school was with me, her guidance counselor. When she was a junior, she claims that she was completely lost as regards her college and career plans but did not feel comfortable talking to any of her teachers about her undocumented immigration situation. She didn't know that she could go to college and she thought if she was able to go it would cost her much more than the average student. Maria felt compelled to be honest because she needed help and knew that the exercise would be futile if she lied. "It helped a lot because I opened up and I didn't feel so constricted to say something. Let's say that I was just open about what my status was and who I am basically."

Maria believes that education is crucial not only because of the knowledge it imparts, but also because of the emphasis placed on relationships. "School is extremely important because it's going to help you become a bigger person and you will never stop learning because there is no possible way that you're going to know every single little thing in the world by a certain age and I am pretty sure we'll all die not knowing everything," Maria states. "There is so much information out there that we don't know. There are still things that are unknown and it's very crazy to think about it."

AP Biology was the high school course that Maria considers most important to her. It was, in fact, the only advanced level course she took in high school. "I felt very intimidated because everyone in there had been taking honors courses for all their lives. But it pushed me a lot and it helped me to realize that I am very capable of doing things. At the same time it showed me that I am very capable of being lazy. It showed me a lot about myself."

Maria's parents support her educational aspirations enthusiastically, even though they come from different backgrounds educationally. Her father graduated from college in Guatemala as an agricultural engineer while her mother stopped going to school after the sixth grade. Not able to work in this country in his chosen profession, Maria's father presently owns his own transportation business and her mother is an at-home mother.

Transitioning from high school to freshman year at Middlesex County College was difficult for Maria, primarily because she felt lonely. "I make friends fairly easily, but I feel like over there if you didn't know the person before you went to that school and if you're not involved in clubs like that, you are not going to know anybody." Additionally, Maria had to depend on others for transportation and lacked the flexibility necessary to participate in activities, unlike when she was in high school.

Maria is not proud to admit that she has little knowledge about the issue of immigration or the various policies and programs that comprise it (although she did write her senior English research paper on deferred action). She has heard about the DREAM Act, but confesses to know little about it. In Maria's case, she is on a list to receive a green card in four years (having applied through an uncle six years ago) and any permanent residency plan from proposed DREAM Acts likely will take five years from the date applied.

Moving Forward

"I am a very family oriented person," Maria reflects. "I just feel like never compromise your family, like never do anything that would get them against you in any way because they are your family and it's horrible when there are family issues. . . . A lot of people say now that I'm 18 I could do whatever I want but it's not the case for me. My

parents are very strict in a way. Yes, you can do certain things, but it's not going to be like, 'Oh, mom, I'll be back.' It's, 'Mom, can I go somewhere?' Something that I've always had to do.”

However, that same sense of family obligation also makes Maria feel as if she lacks control of her life. “The sense that while my parents have given me everything, it is also like they took away the control that I have over what I want to do . . . so even though they have given me everything and I appreciate it, at the same time it's like let me work for something, let me have my own opinion, let me do something – fail – and then realize, oh, I am not going to do that again, like let me learn by myself in a way.”

Maria is a very emotional person and most of the time when she is disappointed or disappoints, she cries, when, “I disappoint myself with something that I have done that I shouldn't do or I've hurt someone that I shouldn't have hurt . . . and I am always apologizing. It's mostly because I have disappointed myself.” After getting her driver's license (which Maria accomplished recently) a major concern is fixing her relationships with other people.

Maria also is challenged, emotionally and physically, by the way she has been (and is being) held back by her undocumented immigration status. Even though she has overcome the issue of driving – she was able to get her driver's license in the fall of 2013 – there still is much to overcome in the areas of education and careers. For example, Maria's dream always has been to be a pediatrician because “I love kids and I love anything that has to do with caring and medicine, but then I had to lower it to like maybe I could be a nurse. But then that was affected because I can't.” Maria was not allowed to

take clinical nursing classes at MCC because her undocumented status made her ineligible for licensure.

So for the time being, Maria has set her sights on becoming a medical laboratory technician, a job that does not require any kind of licensure or certification. This, she surmises, will allow her to get her foot into the door of the medical profession and then when she becomes a permanent resident she can focus on higher order dreams such as becoming a nurse, physician's assistant, or a doctor. "So that I could go back to other countries and help because I see all these things that happen, like for example in Guatemala, Mexico, and all Central American countries . . . they don't know anything about a flu shot . . . I've always wanted to help people that don't have the same opportunities that we have here."

Surprisingly, for someone her age, Maria is not totally enamored of technology. "I feel uneasy because everybody is forgetting about personal communication, being personal with someone. It's all through the phone. . . . It's like everything is revolving around social media and all these things, like what are we going to be later on? Are we going to end up getting a chip installed in us when we're born? That's what makes me uneasy. Technology is taking over everything."

However, the same things about technology that scare Maria also give her hope: "For example, back then, there was basically no cure for anything. For a simple cold you could die. There are things that are evolving that are helping us and that's what gives me hope, like how everybody says someday we'll find the cure for cancer and things like that." It would be awesome to Maria to be a part of that. "I would definitely like to make a huge impact in someone else's life. I want to be, not trying to sound egotistical, I want

to be the same way that my dad is my hero in a way. I want to be someone else's hero. I want to be the person who, for example, one of my siblings says helped him out. She pushed me to be the person I am today.”

Coda

When I approached Jacob, Leala, and Maria individually during their last days of high school, and inquired about their interest in participating in my upcoming research project, I wasn't sure what to expect – even after knowing and working with them for several years. They expressed interest in the project, gave me their phone numbers and email addresses, and we agreed to touch base in the fall. I was delighted to discover that as college freshmen they were still enthusiastic about participating in my research study and, so, we worked out the logistics of conducting the interviews.

The interviews proceeded according to plan in terms of format, length, and schedule. At the end, I asked the participants some closure questions, and the general feeling was that it had been a worthwhile experience: Jacob, the scholar and future engineer, thought it was extremely interesting to be a variable in a research study; Leala, the budding psychologist, was intrigued by the opportunity to talk about herself in such detail – she says she has never talked to anyone about her life before and it was cathartic; and Maria, the soon-to-be health practitioner, said that opening up the way she did was therapeutic in that she learned things about herself she didn't know before.

Jacob's story is thorough and analytic, Leala's story is concise and to the point, and Maria's story is flowing and expansive – remarkably similar to the characteristics of the participants but as different as the participants are from one another. I was pleased with the tone and tenor of the interviews and, upon transcription, ended up with almost

300 single-spaced pages of data, organized along the lines of my interview protocols. I immersed myself in the data, struggled mightily with the currents of the research process, and surfaced with a deeper understanding of my participants and their situation as undocumented Hispanic students and their postsecondary transition.

Findings

Jacob, Leala, and Maria are outliers. While, typically, five to 20% of undocumented Hispanic high school students go on to higher education, 100% of the undocumented students in the Midville High School Class of 2013 made this leap (Perez, 2009). (This includes Jacob, Leala, Maria, and a fourth student who chose to not participate in the study.) There is something that compels undocumented students at Midville High School to transition to higher education in numbers that are much higher than the norm.

Riessman (2008) discusses four approaches to analyzing narratives: structural analysis, dialogic/performance analysis, visual analysis, and thematic analysis, which relies on the categorization of narrative accounts (Lichtman, 2013). Through “themeing the data . . .” some qualitative researchers “. . . recommend labeling and thus analyzing portions of the data with an extended thematic statement rather than a shorter code . . .” (Saldana, 2009, p. 139).

In narrative thematic analysis the emphasis is on text content, “‘what’ is being said more than ‘how’ it is being said, the ‘told’ rather than the ‘telling’” (Riessman, 2005, p. 2). Another facet of thematic analysis that is critical to my study is what Mishler (1995) calls “temporal ordering” (p. 90); Riessman (1993) refers to this as “attention to

sequence” (p. 27), and goes on to contend that the comparative analysis of plot lines across events and participants is an effective and useful analytic tool.

Toward this end, I reduced and transformed the transcripts of nine 60 to 90-minute interviews into three sequential participant stories. Then, adhering to the sixth step of the narrative analysis framework discussed at the beginning of this chapter, I identified themes by moving across the sequential subplots of the participant stories, using the well-researched definition of *theme* provided by DeSantis and Ugarriza (2000, p. 362): “A theme is an abstract entity that brings meaning and identity to a recurrent experience and its variant manifestations. As such, a theme captures and unifies the nature or basis of the experience into a meaningful whole.”

The trifecta of major themes that are most prevalent among the stories of the participants, and thus represent the findings, are: a structure of support, an ability to assimilate, and the empowerment of voice. A fourth theme – that of family ascendancy – also permeates the stories, not at the level of the above three but more than the remaining themes that emerged from the study, which include: language, identity, entitlement, impact, control, change, and resilience. The major themes stand on their own as well as percolate among one another, while the lesser themes appear in varying degrees and locations throughout the stories.

Structure of Support

The participants benefited from exposure to a high level of support that was available to them (and, most importantly, that they took advantage of) from the beginning of freshman year to the end of senior year in high school. This includes support from

guidance counselors, teachers (including mentors, coaches, and activity leaders), family and friends, as well as academic preparation and participation in extracurricular activities.

It also is noteworthy that the participants share a love and respect of learning that began in pre-school and kindergarten, continued through elementary, middle, and high school, and is stronger than ever now that they are in college. “Without education you can’t really go anywhere.” (Leala) “It makes you decide based on what you know.” (Jacob) “There is so much information out there that we don’t know.” (Maria).

Counseling. I lead off with counseling not because it is the most important component of structural support but because the data from this study suggests that counseling serves as a hub to which the spokes of the wheel are connected. As the participants’ guidance counselor, and the school official responsible for insuring that students not only meet state and school graduation requirements but also are poised to make their optimum postsecondary transition, I am responsible for knowing as much as I can about each student. As stated in the participant stories, Jacob reported his undocumented immigration status to me in the middle of his junior year, and the others reported it to me during their senior years – Maria voluntarily and Leala due to pressure inadvertently exerted on her by me.

One of the most salient findings of my study is that undocumented students benefit from having a trusted and knowledgeable mentor to help them become informed and direct their efforts during the entire postsecondary transition process. There is a tremendous amount of misinformation surrounding undocumented students and college attendance. For example, Maria initially did not think she would be allowed to attend college in the United States. Leala believed that the Dream Act would enable her to

receive financial aid for college. Jacob thought that he would be able to attend Rutgers and pay the resident tuition rate because he had graduated from a New Jersey high school. These misunderstandings, among many others, were correctible but only after I, as guidance counselor, became aware of the undocumented immigration status of the participants.

The term *familismo* is used to describe a collectivist culture with strong family values, one in which people who are not family or close friends are not often trusted (Ayon, Marsiglia, & Bermudez-Parsai, 2010). That is why I was particularly gratified by Jacob's statement that his relationship with me, as his guidance counselor, is one of the closest relationships he has ever had with a non-family member. Leala was satisfied that, under the legal circumstances, I did everything I could have done to help her get into college – i.e., know everything and stay informed. And Maria says that opening up to me helped her to better understand herself and her undocumented postsecondary situation.

Teachers. The data indicates that, in addition to their guidance counselor, the participants had positive relationships with many of their teachers. (This includes Leala who tends to downplay the role of others in her transitional activities.) Educational support began for all the participants with their English Language Learner (ELL) teachers. (See *Language* below.)

Jacob's favorite classes in high school were Honors Physics and AP Calculus and he feels that he was well prepared for college work by those teachers and others. He received additional assistance in the form of college advisement, essay critique, and recommendation letters. Leala received much support from her AP Spanish teacher, who, although she was not aware of her undocumented status, advised Leala on college and

other matters and wrote letters of recommendation. Maria, who had positive relationships with most of her teachers sums up her experience through her view of one of them: “. . . I loved the way he talked because people respected him, but people could laugh with him at the same time.”

Academic preparation. The participants were well prepared for the postsecondary transition to college based on a combination of advanced level courses they took in high school and pre-college programs they had attended. Jacob took virtually every AP course offered at the school; additionally, the summer after junior year, he attended a pre-college program in actuarial science at Lebanon Valley College, which affirmed his interest in pursuing a college major and career in the sciences. Leala took most of the AP courses available to her while in high school and attended the same summer pre-college program as Jacob, but studied psychology. Maria, who was not on the honors track, engaged in a solid college preparation course of study and supplemented it by waiving into AP Biology (as she was not recommended by her Chemistry teacher), a course she believed would be helpful to someone pursuing a career in healthcare.

The academic challenges of the participants complement their social challenges with respect to resilience. For Jacob, the transition to college was easier than it is for others because had already developed effective time management skills while in high school. He knew “. . . how to study, how to make plans to study.” Leala attributes knowledge she gleaned from her summer psychology course to helping her stay on track: understanding how you think can help with real life situations, she says. “You know how

to deal with them.” AP Biology gave Maria the confidence she needed to achieve more. “. . . it helped me to realize that I’m very capable of doing things.”

Extracurricular activities. Another important aspect of structural support can be found in the opportunity the participants took to participate in non-academic activities. Although they all were loners as children, each had an interest in trying new things and each approached participation in extracurricular activities for different reasons: for Jacob, it was a simple matter of needing to be involved and he participated in a remarkable number of activities considering his heavy academic load; Leala very much wants to help people – to work with others to attain common goals – and extracurricular activities provided her an outlet for this; and Maria wanted to belong – being a member of the track team and of the drama club gave her an opportunity to make a contribution.

Additionally, each of the participants had a unique culminating senior experience regarding extracurricular activities, which illustrates their ability to understand the transition process. Jacob finally was able to fit joining the tennis team into his demanding schedule and he has continued by joining a club tennis team at Rutgers, Leala was elected student council president, and Maria, who had joined the drama club junior year, worked up the courage to win a part in the ensemble of *Damn Yankees*, the spring musical that year: “That was a huge step for me my senior year to actually stand up in front of my whole school basically . . .” Although it has been difficult for the participants to participate in activities in college – due to transportation, work, and time issues – they miss that part of high school and are looking for ways to replicate it.

Family. The participants’ families are highly supportive of their efforts to attain a strong and useful college education. With the exception of Maria’s mother – who left

school after the sixth grade – all the participants’ parents are high school graduates. Jacob’s father, Maria’s father, and both of Leala’s parents attended their country’s version of higher education before they immigrated. Education is highly valued in all the participants’ families as evidenced by Jacob’s father’s willingness to pay the higher cost of Rutgers vs. community college for his son and Leala’s parents’ commitment to pay for her to attend William Paterson University instead of community college (even though, in the end, Leala chose not to go there). In Maria’s case it was clear from the beginning that she would be attending community college.

The fact that the participants’ parents are willing to do whatever is necessary to afford their children the opportunity to go to college – without the benefit of state or federal financial aid – is a strong indication of the value these families placed on education. It also is a counter to the dominant narrative that Hispanic families do not value education.

Ability to Assimilate

Absorption by the participants both of and by a new and different culture is a major theme of this study, for without the ability to assimilate there would not be the opportunity for movement and growth. Other than speaking Spanish and eating foods that are popular in their first country, the families of the participants did little to adhere to the cultural traditions they had left behind and much to blend in with the new culture and situation. (This is in opposition to the cultural embracement of the bicultural movement.) Speaking the native language was more practical than cultural due to the inability of the parental generation to speak English and the constant requirement for translation services. This point of leaving the first culture behind/relegating it to a less prominent place is also

supported graphically by the fact that the *Cultural Setting and Traditions* subplot of the participant stories is much smaller than others; it stemmed from the smaller amount of data available from the interviews, due to the lack of connection.

Family. The theme of family permeates the stories of the participants. Part of the undocumented experience consists of spending much time with the family and extended family, something that all the participants tended to do. All the participants adore their family members – grandparents, parents, and siblings, as well as members of the extended families. This is not to say that they do not disagree or fight. Even Jacob, whose family has been fractured by the divorce of his parents and blames the act for many of the difficulties he has endured, loves his parents deeply and wants to please them on every level possible. Leala and Maria both report being loved and nurtured by their parents to the point of being spoiled.

Language. One of the first steps toward assimilation for the participants was learning the new language, English, which their parents found difficult to do. Of course, the children were young and in school – Maria was in kindergarten when she began to learn English (although she had taken bilingual classes in Guatemala while in preschool) and Leala was in the first grade. Both girls adapted to the new language very quickly. Maria was only required to be in ELL classes for a half-year and Leala for one year.

Jacob, who arrived in the U.S. at the age of 12 and knew virtually nothing of the English language, also was a quick study. He spent time in ELL classes during middle school but tested out by the time he entered high school and, in fact went on to take Honors English junior year and AP English senior year. Leala took Honors English sophomore and junior year and AP English senior year. Although Maria was not on the

honors track in high school, she performed competently in English classes and earned Bs and Cs.

Americanization. Even before the influence of language ensued, there was a conscious effort by the parents to downplay the culture they had left and to embrace the culture to which they were assimilating. The participants benefited from heads of household who came here first and passed on experiences and observations to the rest of the family. It's not that they totally abandoned their culture, but they replaced the more visible aspects of it – dress, food, and products – with those of American culture. They did their best to blend in. It has been Maria's experience that those who are more cultural in their first countries tend to have more difficulty letting things go.

The participants also have formulated a practical idea of what it is to be an American. For Leala this constitutes speaking the language, paying taxes and voting, all of which she presently does. Maria says it is about knowing and practicing American culture and loving being here. And to Jacob, it is the hope it gives him to do the things that he wants to do. All became Americanized very quickly. To the participants, being an American is less about having a green card or citizenship and more about having a voice in the process.

Social class. The participants are, of necessity, pro-immigration and there is consensus in their opinion that undocumented immigrants will be a boon to the United States. Jacob believes that the added diversity will provide more points of view and lead to more and better solutions to problems. Leala points to the advantages of being able to fill technical jobs and adding to the economy through spending and the payment of taxes. And Maria echoes Leala's sentiments, but adds that Hispanic people are willing to do the

less glamorous jobs that others are not willing to do, which is an advantage. Although the participants concede that there is a potential danger to letting the wrong kinds of people into the United States – criminals, drug dealers, gang members, and parasites, among others – to them, the positives of having a more educated population outweigh the negatives.

Identity. This can be a confusing concept for many people, young and old, but adding the undocumented dimension makes it even more complicated, especially for a young person who is still trying to figure out who he or she is. Leala's argument that being undocumented identifies her but does not define her speaks volumes about how these young people view themselves and their situation, but they each approach the subject differently. Maria is very open about her immigration status and although she doesn't shout it out, she doesn't try to hide it either. Jacob is more cautious: when the subject comes up he usually just listens. And Leala is such a private person that she completely avoids any discussion of the situation.

The participants are well practiced at being undocumented, as they have been aware of their status since middle school (and before). While Jacob and Maria have friends and know friends of friends who share their immigration status, Leala claims that she is not aware of anyone outside her family who falls into this category. While I was not comfortable pressing Leala on this point, I suspect that she has more of a connection with others in the same situation than she will admit. Some of Jacob's closest relationships are with friends who are undocumented because they want the same things – to drive, travel, and attend college. And, due to their own government-imposed

limitations, all the participants are irritated by people they know who don't take advantage of the opportunities that come automatically to them.

Empowerment of Voice

According to Merriam-Webster's (2012, p. 1401) voice, for these purposes, is defined as “. . . wish, choice, or opinion openly or formally expressed . . . influential power.” As a theme, voice surfaces early in the stories and weaves its way through all the subplots; there is both voice and lack of voice evident in the stories of the participants. For example, while Maria and Leala did not have a voice in the initial decisions that led to their lack of documentation due to their young age, they had a voice in their decision to pursue the DACA program when it became available to them. Jacob, on the other hand, had a voice in all his decisions regarding immigration. Additionally, Leala and Maria were encouraged by their parents to try new and different things when they were children; Jacob was pushed by his father to try things that his father believed would be best for him – soccer, for example.

Of course, in the larger picture it can be construed that these young, undocumented people have no voice in the political wrangling of the immigration law, just as I don't. However, because one of the reasons I have undertaken this study (and the participants have agreed to participate) is in the hope of influencing immigration policy, these participants will have a voice in this process when my dissertation is published. Through this dissertation, they also will have a voice in improving the practice of guidance counselors in their work with undocumented students.

It also should be noted that prior to beginning the interviews I asked the participants to choose the pseudonym they would like to use for the duration of the

research project then, later, to review the first two interview transcripts in preparation for the third interview, and finally to read and comment on the penultimate drafts of their stories, all toward the end of having a collaborative voice in this study. Additionally, the participants had a voice in the decision to use the word *Hispanic* instead of *Latino* and the word *undocumented* instead of *unauthorized*. They chose *Hispanic* because it sounded better to them and *undocumented* because they felt it was more representative of their situation.

Family. Although there are similarities and differences among the participants' parents and grandparents, the participants are comfortable with and proud of the characteristics they have inherited from both generations, which has inspired them to make use of their voices. The love and respect the participants hold for their grandparents is epic, and the participants credit their parents' parents with setting a high bar for success.

Jacob is grateful for the attitudes of humility and respect he has gleaned from his parents. Leala is proud to be a blend of both her mother and father (who, themselves, have taken on many of the characteristics of their own parents); she is calm and laid back like her father but is capable of being forceful like her mother when it is warranted. Maria has inherited the impulsiveness of her father and the forcefulness of her mother – and the temper of both – and like her mother she often tends to, “. . . apologize and we will end up talking about it and compromising . . .”

Jacob credits his functionally illiterate grandmother with instilling within him the drive to pursue his dreams without giving up: “. . . we have so many more advantages than she did so we have no excuse to not follow our dreams.” Leala's grandparents are

involved at a high level; they want to know about everything she is doing. And Maria's grandparents have instilled an attitude in her of standing up for what she believes. Maria sums up the place of and feelings about their grandparents for all the participants: "... they are always proud of whatever I accomplish, even if it is something very small. ... It's like the love is completely different than what the love is between parents."

This is who the participants are and, as such, how they project and are empowered by their voices. However, having a voice and using one's voice are two different matters.

Resilience. Adjusting to misfortune and change is critical to the attainment of success as well as to life in general and the participants have had ample opportunity to foster resilience. This began with the undocumented paths chosen by their parents, muddled with the feelings of inferiority and difference visited upon them in middle and high school, and continues with the hassles and problems the undocumented path has generated regarding college attendance, i.e., not being eligible for government financial aid, not attending the colleges of choice, and settling for programs that fall below those which are desired. Not surprisingly, the participants complain about lacking control in their lives – Jacob because he is dependent on so many others for help, Maria due to parental pressure to do things their way, and Leala, who is dogged primarily by the aspects of being undocumented that affect them all: college, driving, and travel.

A large part of resilience is handling disappointment and the participants deal with it characteristically. Leala deals with disappointment by not dwelling on it and moving forward in spite of it. When Maria is disappointed she cries and then moves on. Disappointment stimulates Jacob to try harder: when he disappoints himself, Jacob tries to be positive and do better the next time; when others disappoint Jacob, he tries to "...

not judge them for what they did. Forgive them.” The major point to be construed here is that due to their undocumented status the participants are being held back but they are not holding back. As Leala summarizes, “. . . never give up. . . . If you fail, pick yourself right up and keep going.”

Entitlement. Even though a certain amount of the humbleness that accompanied the participants on the journey from their first countries remains within their psyches – courtesy of their familial backgrounds – they each have assumed a sense of entitlement. This appears to stem from a combination of Americanization and being a teenager in America. Each of them believes that, by virtue of being in this country for as long as they have been and observing the rules of society, they deserve to have all the things that citizens and permanent residents have – to drive, to work, and to receive financial aid to attend the college of their choice. Leala suggests (and it fits with the situations of the other participants) that perhaps if there had been a dangerous border crossing or run-ins with the law, the sense of entitlement might be less and the scope of possibilities might be lower. Surprisingly all the participants are extremely nescient about the laws, policies, and practices surrounding the topic of immigration, which I tend to attribute to the above notions of being Americanized teenagers and prone to the apathy and self-absorption that this implies.

Making an impact. To the participants, the purpose of life is being successful and making an impact. It is overcoming the obstacles necessary to becoming an engineer (and pilot), a psychologist, and a doctor. It is, as Jacob suggests, taking one’s place among all the people in the world and being among those who take advantage of the opportunities, no matter what the challenges may be. It is that sense of accomplishment that Leala

believes will come from having an influence on someone outside of her family. For Maria, it is being someone else's hero, helping someone out and having them say, "She pushed me to be the person I am today."

This is the empowerment of voice.

Conclusion

By the time I met with the participants to member check their stories for interpretive accuracy, and to catch up on their lives, they had completed their freshman year of college and were poised to begin sophomore year. The corrections were minimal – a few numbers, dates, and timeframes – and the participants felt that the stories I wrote based on the information obtained from the interviews were spot on in describing their lives, experiences, and feelings regarding their undocumented immigration status. Through this participant feedback, I was able to verify the veracity of the themes that contribute to the findings.

The participants are doing well in college, although the journey has continued to be bumpy and winding. Leala is having second thoughts about majoring in psychology; she is concerned about the long course of study involved and employment prospects in the field due to licensing requirements and her continuing undocumented immigration status. Maria, who changed her course of study to medical technology second semester, worries about completing her studies on time, finding a job when she graduates, and advancing to a higher level in a field where many jobs require licensure. And Jacob, whose permanent residency has been *imminent* for several years, worries that when his father stops paying tuition at the end of sophomore year he will not be able to continue his studies at Rutgers if he still is ineligible for financial aid.

Based on the findings of this study, however, I am confident that the participants will find their way and will make the impact that is so important to them. Their structures of support, abilities to assimilate, and empowerment of voice – among the other commonalities they share – will enable them to overcome the challenges associated with their undocumented immigration status and to remain outliers in terms of achievement and success. During our member checking discussion Maria talked about her new job at a restaurant, where one of the employees is an undocumented teenager from Mexico. According to her, the young man speaks limited English, does not attend school, and has no concept of the availability of options. “He is basically lost,” Maria says, a statement that is essential to understanding and surmounting the problem of undocumented students and the postsecondary transition.

Near the beginning of the *Findings* section, I state that counseling is the hub around which all the other spokes of the support wheel are connected. In this regard, high school guidance counselors are in a uniquely strategic position to assist with many aspects of the undocumented immigration experience, especially those that appear to be beyond the purview of academics. Counseling training and experience equips guidance counselors to help students with problems of family accord, alienation, bullying, control, identity, resilience, personal and social issues, and myriad other issues that are common among the high school population. By consciously attuning themselves to the aspects of undocumented life that go beyond academics, counselors will be positioned to help increase the number of undocumented students making the postsecondary transition to college.

Chapter 5

Discussion: An Interpretive Memoir

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an interpretative discussion of the findings through the synthesis of my conceptual framework, the literature, and my research questions as I consider the process of identifying, counseling, and advocating for undocumented students. I present the material in the form of a creative nonfiction memoir, using such elements as characterization, plot, setting, point-of-view, dialogue and internal monologue, and conflict.

From the beginning, my goal was to bring my interest in creative writing to the development of my dissertation, but I wasn't sure exactly how I would do it. At various points in the process I considered the novella, the story, and the essay as potential vehicles for driving the narrative home. However, considering that I was the instrument of research, the research was a collaborative effort by my participants and myself, and this chapter is meant to provide an interpretive discussion of the findings, it seemed natural to use memoir as the form for the story. With its emphasis on both recollection and interpretation it is as if the memoir form was made for a discussion chapter.

In Chapter 4, I dissected the lives of my study participants and uncovered their similarities and differences, which provided much of the data that contributed to my findings. In this chapter I put myself under the microscope – collectively examining my practice as a high school guidance counselor, my participation in the Rowan University doctoral program in educational leadership, my personal and family life, and the broader issue of immigration as it relates to undocumented Hispanic students engaged in the postsecondary transition – in order to interpret the results of my dissertation study. I tell

the story in academic school years, through the lens of a four-year slice of my life that begins in 2010 and ends in 2014.

Prologue

In 2007, having spent the better part of my life as a student, journalist, public relations practitioner, bartender, tour driver, and at-home father, I became a guidance counselor at Midville High School (MHS) in Midville, New Jersey. I found out later that I had not been the top choice for the job, that some of the interviewers were not comfortable with my lack of counseling experience; it was my first job as a counselor and they would have preferred another candidate. However, the principal wanted me, not because of any innate counseling potential he may have sensed but because of my writing and public relations experience. In his mind, anyone could learn to be a counselor, but not everyone had the ability to write and to develop programs. At that juncture I had absolutely no notion of the concept of undocumented students nor anticipated my role in counseling such students.

It had been a long road to Midville. While serving as an at-home father for more than a decade, I acquired enough credits to earn a master's degree in counseling from Montclair State University. My intention had been to become a geriatric care manager when I graduated, but fate intervened. During the same timeframe, I was elected to my town's school board and developed a keen interest in education, and an older friend became terminally ill and I helped the family with the management of his care. When both experiences were over it was clear to me that I would be better suited to a career working with students. So I went back to school, took the few classes I needed to get

certified as a school counselor, and eight years later I remain a guidance counselor at Midville High School.

Much has changed since 2007. An African American has become president of the United States and the iPhone has revolutionized the way we communicate. At Midville High School much of the staff has turned over (including the principal who hired me), the school culture has changed from one of mediocrity to achievement, and the number of Hispanic students has surged to a level that is approximately one-third of the total student population (as stated in Chapter 3). As the Hispanic population increases so will the number of undocumented students, thus requiring a level of knowledge and understanding that was heretofore unnecessary.

In the fall of 2010, before I had even considered the possibility that I was unknowingly counseling undocumented students, I began my doctoral studies at Rowan University and was introduced to the three pillars of educational leadership – leadership, social justice, and change. By then, I had completed three years of school counseling and had scaled the heights of terror and uncertainty that accompany a new job in a new field, and I needed a challenge. I already had taken a few graduate courses in educational leadership to qualify for a supervisor certificate and to move up on the pay scale, and these courses had piqued an interest in the field that had begun with my school board service.

Initially, I felt like I was in way over my head and considered leaving the program after the first class, then the second, and the third. But something happened. I discovered that the program is all about connectivity and synthesis, and I was able to make a connection between counseling and leadership. In classes that explored such subjects as

leadership, diversity, learning, policy, governance, ethics, change, and, of course, research, with cohort members who were administrators, teachers, and counselors, I set about learning how to be a counselor-leader. By adding the leadership component to counseling I was able to equip myself with an additional level of expertise to incorporate while performing my counseling duties. Whereas I was *in tune* as a counselor, I am *tuned in* as a counselor-leader. In this capacity, I am able to understand not only how to help my students to cope, but also the most advantageous way that I can assist them in approaching their problems.

My dissertation has served to connect my inner school counselor with my inner educational leader. It is the conduit through which the information and experience flows and, as a result, will add to the information and experience base of those who read it. While I am not suggesting that readers will become experts in working with such affected students, by reading this dissertation they will know considerably more than I knew before writing it.

Part I: 2010-2011 & 2011-2012

The very first time I was confronted by this issue of undocumented students was at the end of the 2010-2011 school year. (At the school where I work, the counselors return for two days immediately following graduation to deal with failures, retentions, and other issues that need to be dealt with prior to leaving for the summer.) One of the recent graduates came in with his parents, and his aunt as a translator, and said they wanted to talk to me about something. They were very nervous – especially the parents, whom I had not met before – and I tried to get them to relax by congratulating them on the accomplishment of their son. I closed the door to my office and we sat opposite each

other, eye dancing and smiling a lot. And when it became clear to me that they were having difficulty telling me something I volunteered that unless their son was in danger or in danger of hurting someone else, whatever they told me would remain confidential. I thought I could actually hear them breathe a sigh of relief.

“We would like to know if our son can go to college,” the mom finally inquired.

Because the student’s grade point average was below 2.0 I replied, “Yes. He will be eligible to attend Middlesex County College in the fall.”

“But, but,” mom stammered, “what if he does not have a green card?”

It was a good question and, fortunately, I knew the answer because it had come earlier in the year at a financial aid seminar. “He can go to college but he will not be eligible to receive financial aid,” I said, explaining that the cost of attending community college for the 2011-2012 school year was approximately \$4,000 a year, while tuition at a four-year state college was about \$10,000 to 12,000 a year.

The family appeared to be shocked at the cost of college attendance, which was not surprising considering that many families in which the parents had not attended college do not even realize that free education ends with graduation from high school. But the point here is that the family had been operating under the assumption that because the student was undocumented, he would not be allowed to go to college at all; one year later Maria, one of the participants in my study, would tell me the same thing – prior to confiding her immigration status to me she did not think she would allowed to attend college, even if her parents could afford to pay.

I don’t know what the outcome was for this young man, as I do not have access to a mechanism for keeping up with students after they leave high school. Some students

come back to visit after the first year and others request transcripts to be sent to specific colleges or letters of recommendation for programs or employers, but these are the only ways I have to stay in touch with them. Most students eventually vanish and I can only hope that they are following the path they set upon following graduation (if I even knew about it in the first place). I think it is appropriate for me to refer to this individual as *student zero*, in the sense that he was my first self-identified undocumented student and all my knowledge regarding the issue stemmed from my June 2011 meeting with him and his parents.

It would be fair to say that prior to the above incident I had given very little thought (if any) to the notion that there were undocumented people in my life until my meeting with this student. I had seen the occasional story in the *New York Times* about the high school valedictorian who couldn't go to college because he or she was not eligible for financial aid, but it all seemed to be happening in California and Texas, not in central New Jersey, so far from any kind of international border. I couldn't connect it with my situation or myself until *student zero* came forward.

Getting Schooled

And so, during my fourth year as a guidance counselor, I focused on maintaining and continuing to develop my counseling skills and on my new endeavor, returning to school to become a doctor of educational leadership. Early reflection in course assignments enabled me eventually to develop my conceptual framework and more for my future dissertation. Among the core values listed in the leadership platform I developed for my *Leadership Theory* class are: empowering others, embracing change, and striving for social justice. Research on a social justice issue at my school –

socioeconomic status – for my *Diversity* class revealed a larger amount of ethnicity and poverty than I previously had thought existed. The development of educational proficiency plans for my *Professional Learning Community* class pointed me toward struggling Hispanic students whose limited English-speaking skills were hindering their passage of the state graduation test. (Fortunately, both students were able to graduate, and on time.)

I will never forget *Action Research in Education* and the jarring introduction to my future dissertation committee chair and rigor, which would shape my research sensibilities for the duration. This was the class in which I learned how to do research. Don't get me wrong: I already had a master's degree and, for that, I had done my share of research papers. But this was different. I discovered the quality that makes research trustworthy – rigor – and the lengths to which one must go to attain it. For this class, I researched the middle school to high school transition and discovered, among many other things, that about half of the freshmen at my school were at risk academically, economically, and/or culturally, with some students at risk in two or three of the categories.

In my private life, my daughter had graduated from high school and began her first year of college, and my son ricocheted through seventh grade, changing into a different person before my very eyes. My wife and I were highly involved in our children's lives; fortunately, we were in a position to provide them with emotional, moral, and financial support, which was something I had begun to notice was lacking regarding many of my students. Parental support was not there for many of my students

and, as I studied through my classes, I discovered the primordial part that poverty played regarding this phenomenon.

All this reminded me of my school counseling internship some years before, during which I spent part of my time working in the Guidance department of an upscale suburban high school and the rest of my time working at a problem-plagued inner city elementary/middle school. Rotating between the two environments was a shock to the senses. One day I would be editing college essays about world travel, enrichment, and seemingly limitless opportunity, and the next day I was leading a group of students of whom one or more parents were incarcerated. The parents of the suburban high school students were, more often than not, masters of the universe while the parents of the urban middle school students tended to be drug dealers, addicts, and prostitutes. And, in hindsight, it would not surprise me if some of them were undocumented.

By the end of the 2010-2011 school year, I had completed the first six courses in my doctoral program and during the summer passed *Benchmark I*, which consisted of a written examination and a presentation. With a year of my life and over \$12,000 invested, I was fully vested in completing the program and began to look forward to moving into the dissertation phase of the program. The secret, in fact, that I had been harboring since the beginning was that the main reason I embarked upon the journey in the first place was to write a dissertation. As crazy as it sounds – and as happy as I will be to have a doctorate – I just wanted to write the dissertation. Everything else was ancillary. My argument has been that it will be exceptional training for writing my second novel, which is one of the most important things in my life. Due to the emphasis on narrative inquiry and creative nonfiction, and the adaptability of the topical and participant data to such

writing, I have fashioned my doctoral dissertation into the ultimate creative writing project.

Living the DREAM

In the fall of 2011, a conversation with Jacob (one of my future study participants) during which he reported that he was an undocumented student (and the understanding that there were several others in his situation) began to illustrate just how little I knew about postsecondary options for students who were in the U.S. without documentation. Later in the year, my principal would ask me to choose a student for a guidance conference so that he could observe and evaluate me, per district requirements. With Jacob's permission I conducted a college conference and geared it to his undocumented immigration status. We covered every conceivable topic – highly competitive colleges, financial aid, college-testing and, of course, immigration. The 20-minute conference lasted over an hour and the principal was so enamored of the proceedings that he evolved from an observer to a participant. And when it was over I fully realized how little I – and by association other high school guidance counselors – knew about assisting in the postsecondary transition of undocumented students.

As the college counselor for approximately 80 seniors, fall is always my busiest time of year. Additionally this year, as a requirement of my *Qualitative Analysis in Educational Leadership* course, I had to conduct a research study at my school and write a paper about the study, all during the first 12 weeks of the new school year. I already had developed an affinity for qualitative research – I am generally more interested in understanding than in measurement – and the first order of business was to flesh out my worldview, which turned out to be social constructivism. As a former journalist, writing

stories for newspapers and magazines for over 20 years, I was extremely familiar with the process of developing and writing a complex multi-viewpoint story: research the topic, observe and conduct field interviews, collect relevant material, and then sift through everything obtained to interpret the results. Later, I would add participatory-advocacy to my worldview because merely understanding something is not enough for me. I also need to be an instrument of change.

In addition to doing all the things I normally do, and the added burden of the research project, my colleague had fallen ill and was out of work for the first six weeks of the school year and I had to do all her work too. But I persevered. I worked up to 20 hours a day and by the end of November things were back to normal and I had completed an actual qualitative research study on staff perceptions of Guidance curriculum. To me it was a thing of beauty, not only because of the light it shed on the topic but also because I viewed it as a scale model of the dissertation study looming in my not-too-distant future, i.e., beginning in the summer of 2012. Such authentic learning experiences as this are a hallmark of the doctoral program and of immense value to a kinesthetic learner such as myself.

I added *Applied Ethics in Educational Leadership* to my repertoire of classes and discovered the value of a multifaceted approach. As part of a major assignment, I wrote a skit on the topic of confidentiality – concerning the counseling ethics of reporting a student who may or may not have been considering suicide – and my partner and I performed it for the class. The course and the exercise prepared me well for the upcoming focus I would be placing on participant confidentiality, which was especially relevant due to my future participants' immigration status.

Prior to the end of the 2011-2012 school year a second student, Karisa, identified herself to me as an undocumented student; she was a junior transfer student from another state who had arrived at the beginning of the school year. Karisa had attended Financial Aid Night in December with her family, whom she had introduced as her aunt and uncle and baby cousin. (I found out later that they were her mother and father and baby sister.) Once Karisa self-identified, she had a lot of questions about her postsecondary options as an undocumented student. She kept bringing up the DREAM Act, about which we were mutually confused. My initial research confirmed that Congress had been trying to pass such a law – which would grant eligible undocumented students a path toward citizenship as well as higher education financial benefits – for decades, to no avail, but that several states had instituted their own DREAM acts, which did not include a path to citizenship.

Meanwhile, as I plowed through the end of the school year I became engrossed in my *Issues in Governance* class, which required a research paper dealing with an educational issue of interest and the relationships that are inherent in resolving said issue. I initially had formulated an interest in studying the decentralization of Hawaii's highly centralized public education system. (My wife and I were both from Oahu; she was born there and I had lived there on and off since the eighth grade, hence the interest.) However, as I thought about the undocumented students I had been working with, and considered the relationship of the state and federal government with regards to the scope of the issue, I was struck with the idea of researching the DREAM Act, which left me with more questions than answers as well as the seed of an idea for a dissertation research topic. I often have wondered how events would have transpired if I had gone with my original topic.

Questions of Research

In the summer of 2012, stimulated by the onset of my *Dissertation I* class, I set about in earnest to officially begin the development of my dissertation topic. I knew I wanted to explore something related to school counseling and/or college attendance – initially I was thinking about transitions, or curriculum, but as I perused my DREAM Act research, read more articles about undocumented students, and reflected on my own professional relationship with such students and the problems they were having with the transition to college, the idea of undocumented Hispanic students and the postsecondary transition took over.

One of the early assignments for *Dissertation I* was to develop a researcher identity memo through which to examine my experience, assumptions and beliefs, and goals as they related to my research topic. During an intensive four-plus-year doctoral program, unless one wants to spend the entire time chained to a desk at home, one occasionally must be able to write on the run. In this particular instance, my wife, son, and I had arranged to meet my daughter in Rhode Island for the weekend, where she would be running in a half marathon (13.1 miles) at Jamestown. Although I love my daughter and am extremely proud of her myriad and substantial accomplishments, I remember this weekend less for the thrill of observing her blast through the finish line somewhere in the middle of the pack than for completing my researcher identity memo, which was due the following Monday.

This trip to Rhode Island is noteworthy on a number of levels: My researcher identity memo is basically the precursor to my conceptual framework and its completion represented the true start of my dissertation study; during the stay in Providence I was

able to tour Brown University and to consider it as a potential destination for my son and my students; and it showed me that I was capable of combining travel and work and, although the opposite could be argued by some, this combination added to the quality of the experience and set the tone for future travel/work scenarios. My conceptual framework represents what I think is going on regarding my dissertation study, my practice, and my life; it has been my organizer, my roadmap, my checklist for that which matters to me. (Technically, in the context of my conceptual framework, I have been working on my dissertation study all my life.) However, the most crucial thing to come out of that weekend was the development of my research questions and my assumptions and beliefs regarding my newly chosen topic of undocumented students and the postsecondary transition, which I eventually boiled down for inclusion in my conceptual framework. Prior to this I had assembled a document consisting of my personal, professional, and research experience.

Through my research study I was able to confirm my beliefs and assumptions that: 1. Undocumented students are much more limited in postsecondary options than their documented peers; 2. The nature of this phenomenon is not well known or understood in K-12 educational circles; 3. National and state DREAM policies will help level the playing field; 4. A coherent national immigration policy will help undocumented students; and, 5. Counselors must advocate for all students, despite their background or situation. The above were established in the research literature and borne out in my study findings. Conversely, through my research study I came to disavow my assumptions that, 6. Undocumented students exist in a constant state of fear, longing, and ambiguity in school and in their lives and, 7. Undocumented students are not well

prepared for college and careers. My findings indicate that although feelings of fear, longing, and ambiguity exist, they have been supplanted by irritation and annoyance due to my study participants' resilience and a sense of entitlement they have developed from living in the United States for much of their lives. Additionally, my study participants are extremely well prepared for college and careers, but college and careers are not well prepared for them.

In *Dissertation I* class that summer, I hammered out the beginnings of a dissertation prospectus, i.e., my conceptual framework, the research questions, the problem and purpose statements, and the start of a literature review. I began work in a hotel room in Providence, Rhode Island and I finished the class, although not the prospectus, in a cabin in Volcanoes National Park on the Big Island of Hawaii, where I finally developed the significance section. The distance I traveled that summer, in terms of both knowledge and miles, was extraordinary.

Part II: 2012-2013

With the completion of my conceptual framework and other aspects of a prospectus, I began the new school year with a plan, which was quite appropriate considering that in September I also began a new course – *Planning and Negotiating*. As I learned about the pros, cons, and maybes of strategic planning I sought out any nuggets that might be useful in my upcoming dissertation study. And if I remember nothing else from eight weeks of poring over *Harvard Business Review* and other articles, I will never forget the emphasis that was placed on pre-planning.

Early in the school year a third student from the Class of 2013 self-identified as an undocumented student and came to me with questions about DACA, the DREAM Act,

and postsecondary education options. Maria came to me because one of her friends said I could be trusted. She told me that she had wanted to go to community college and become a registered nurse, but was told she would not be allowed entrance to the program because she did not have the appropriated documents for licensure upon completion of the program. A phone call to one of my contacts at the college confirmed Maria's story. Although I was taken aback by this, I understood where it was coming from – the nursing program was highly competitive and students were being turned away as it was; the college administration had made this an entitlement issue in an effort to cater to the most eligible students. Although Maria was disappointed, the setback did not deter her from pursuing her goal of attending college and I attribute this to several factors presented in my findings: (a) the high value Maria's family places on education, (b) resilience, and (c) positive characteristics that she inherited from her parents and grandparents.

Then, as I assembled a list with the social security numbers of the top 15% of students in the senior class for the STARS program, I noticed that one of the students was not cooperating. I approached Leala several times and received a litany of the most popular teenage excuses – “I forgot,” “I lost the form,” and “I'll bring it in tomorrow.” After about my fourth request I explained to Leala that due to the importance of the program, i.e., students on the list would be able to attend county college at no cost if they decided to attend, I would have to call her parents and discuss the matter with them. The next morning a contingent of family members, including an uncle as translator, were waiting outside my office when I arrived. The second I saw them I knew what it was about.

Familismo

I was at the beginning of a new school year (my fifth year as a counselor at MHS), at the end of the coursework phase of my doctoral studies (readying to begin *Dissertation II*, by the end of which I would be expected to generate a dissertation prospectus), and in the middle (hopefully) of my life. My daughter was settling into her junior year of college, my son had begun his freshman year of high school, and my wife was beginning a new job assignment at the company where she had worked for many years. And all was quiet on the immigration front. It was a presidential election year and, having already appealed to the Hispanic community with his DACA executive action in June, Obama was focused primarily on getting reelected. Immigration was competing for attention with Obamacare, gay marriage, Syria and Libya, sexual abuse at Penn State, a federal budgetary fiscal cliff, and mass shootings at schools and, most recently, at the movies . . . not to mention *Superstorm Sandy*.

On Monday, October 29, 2012, following a week or so of speculation, Hurricane Sandy made landfall at Brigantine, New Jersey – approximately 120 miles away from my home in north central New Jersey. The storm, which had a devastating effect on many towns along the Jersey Shore, residually affected places that were hundreds of miles away from the spot where it came ashore. In my case, what was left of Sandy came barreling through that night, at which point we lost electricity and any semblance of life as we had known it. The lights were already out when I got up that morning at 4 a.m. to work on my first assignment for *Dissertation II* – summarizing my topical literature review. I grabbed a flashlight to check the basement for water and, as there was none and I was on a tight deadline, I worked with a miner-style flashlight attached to my head until

first light, at which point I ventured outside. The neighbors already were gathering to assess the damage, which consisted primarily of branches and limbs strewn about the neighborhood. However, across the street a tree had fallen atop a neighbor's garage. And a good-sized limb was resting on the roof of my car. With the large number of big, old trees populating the neighborhood, our cul-de-sac had fared pretty well.

I took several photos of my car – just in case – and then walked across the street where the neighbors were talking to the person whose car could barely be seen under the broken pile tree limbs and branches. The tree, from behind the house, had fallen on top of the garage, then broken off and landed on the car that was parked in front of it. There was a lot of head shaking in progress.

One of the neighbors said what we all were thinking: “Ten feet to the left and it would've hit the house.” He continued to shake his head.

“My God,” said the owner of the destroyed garage and car, “the baby was sleeping up there.”

“It's all the old trees. You never know what to expect,” another neighbor, offered.

More neighbors appeared and began to pull the limbs and branches off the car and into the yard. Someone arrived with a chainsaw and before long the car was visible. Although the remainder of the tree would have to be removed by tree experts, this was a start, and the neighbors soon dispersed, some to return to their own homes and others to venture into the further reaches of the neighborhood to assess damage and to exchange stories, opinions, and feelings.

Short of having a generator, we were about as prepared as one would expect for life without electricity and heat. Initially, it wasn't too bad. We could take hot showers,

and flush the toilets, and boil water for coffee on the gas stovetop. There was a gas grill for cooking and food that had begun to thaw slowly in the freezer. Ours was one of millions of homes in the region that was without electricity but we were able to function without it due to flashlights, back-up batteries, and charging stations. We bundled up and were reasonably comfortable in an indoor temperature that was around 50 degrees. School (and for me, work since I work in a school) had been cancelled, and there was not much to do – i.e. you couldn't really go anywhere because power lines were down, traffic lights were out, and many roads were blocked by trees that had fallen across them. My wife had bailed to New York City, where she worked and where her company had rented a number of hotel rooms for indispensable employees. So I dug in and worked on my literature review and waited for the electricity to come back on, while my son read books that had been piling up due to the proliferation of video games and social media.

It turned out to be a long wait – almost two weeks to be exact. And by Thursday the overnight low temperatures had dropped from the 40s to the 20s and our house began to resemble a walk-in freezer. As there were no hotel rooms available in the area, we decided to take a road trip to upstate New York to visit our daughter and to wait out the frigid weather and the return of electricity. We ended up 200 miles from home in a small room in a hotel just outside town and could not have been happier. We had everything – each other (including our displaced daughter), heat, free breakfast and 24-hour coffee, an expansive yard for the dog. And we spent the weekend being grateful for what we had, instead of dwelling on what we didn't have. I continued to get up early to work on the *Dissertation II* assignments that would contribute to the development of my prospectus by the end of the class. We spent time together as a complete family, sharing space and

enjoying one another's company, recharging the battery that powered our family relationship.

This focus on family provided a perspective on my research that I had not grasped before – the notion of *familismo*, in which family comes first and all else emanates from and evolves around it (discussed in Chapter 4). While the concept of family is abundant in the literature of the undocumented, it more often than not comes across as an adjunct to the topics being explored than it does as a topic itself. Eventually, I would find the same thing to be true relative to my findings: while it was tempting to include family as a finding on its own, it proved to be more useful to incorporate family as a part of each of my major findings – structure of support, ability to assimilate, and empowerment of voice. I feel that such a permeation of the results does more to emphasize the part family plays in the process than would be done by having family stand on its own. My point here is that fate intervened to provide me with an experience that would serve to be useful and valuable to my future work and life and I am grateful for both the personal and professional benefits of the experience.

When the ordeal ended two weeks after it had begun – for us, that is . . . many people on the Jersey shore continue to suffer years later – the school year was in a shambles. Momentum had been lost and calendars had to be changed to accommodate the days off. It was like starting the school year over again. However, I came away from the experience with a new appreciation of the power of Mother Nature, family, and my own ability to get work done under difficult conditions.

Moving on

By the time we got back to school and work it was approaching mid-November and I was ensconced in the development of my dissertation prospectus and in making it the centerpiece of my life. My plan for the next month was to subjugate my life – i.e., family, work, and social life – to this project and then, when it was finished, attempt to return to some degree of normalcy. The first order of business was to ensure that the seniors were getting back on track regarding their college applications; fortunately, most of the early decision and application dates had been pushed back for students in the Northeast. At my school, the college application process is broken down into several distinct timeframes: First there are the early appliers, a combination of students who want to take advantage of formal early action and decision programs and others who simply want to get the chore done; next is the January 1 group – these students are applying to colleges with January 1 deadlines and, with the rise of electronic applications are able to work on their applications over the Christmas break; then there are the students with February and March deadlines; and finally, are the students who are applying to community college. With a few exceptions and overlaps, the college application process has followed the above sequence since my first year at MHS.

Maria and Leala, two of my self-identified undocumented students, would not be ready to apply to colleges until after the first of the year. Jacob, on the other hand, had applied to several colleges, including Rutgers, by the end of November and was planning to apply to a number of highly competitive colleges, including MIT, Stanford, USC, and Cornell, by January 1. As stated above, I had begun my attempt to understand the problem of undocumented students and the postsecondary transition during the prior year,

following Jacob's self-identification as an undocumented student. I learned that a highly motivated and functioning student like Jacob would have much opportunity for financial aid at a college like MIT, where a lofty endowment fund assured the financial solvency of accepted students. The difficulty, however, is getting into such a highly competitive college.

My other task upon returning home post-Sandy was to prepare a poster for the upcoming education leadership doctoral candidates poster session at Rowan. The poster assignment, which was optional, was to incorporate the present contents of my prospectus, put it on a PowerPoint slide, have a 36-inch by 48-inch poster of the slide printed at Staples, and then display the completed poster on November 26 on a wall in James Hall for all who chose to attend to see. Through this assignment I accomplished three things: a feat of technology that was hitherto untried by me; the forced encapsulation of my study topic (in other words, I was forced to boil it down); and the opportunity to discuss my proposed research study with faculty members and, ideally, to entice one or more of them to serve on my dissertation committee. I already had persuaded my research professor to be my dissertation chair and I needed two more committee members.

My poster was – and still is – an object of symmetrically organized beauty and the poster session was a night to remember; a number of my cohort members were in attendance, as well as other doctoral candidates from other cohorts. As professors circled the displays and stopped, occasionally, to ask questions or to pontificate on their expertise in the subject area and other subject areas as well, I waited nervously and made small talk with my neighbors on both sides. I recall several interesting encounters that

night: In the first encounter, the professor spent most of her time explaining the different things she would do, were she me, to counteract the problem of undocumented students transitioning from high school to college – i.e., identifying colleges that had money to help such students and raising money in the community to help these students pay for college, among other things – which were all good ideas, but not particularly germane to the development of my research study. Another professor spent a good deal of time discussing the differences between conducting my study as an ethnographic study and as a phenomenological study. I had previously identified this professor as a potential committee member and, based on my conversations with him on this night, he was still in contention. My third memorable encounter occurred when one of my then-current professors strolled by, stopped to look over my poster for a few minutes, and then bluntly stated, “I would like to be on your committee.” I shared an eyebrow-raising look of incredulity with a neighbor who had witnessed the exchange and agreed to send the professor my prospectus as soon as it was finished. (Meanwhile, my committee chair had been working with me to locate a committee member from the Creative Writing Department to serve as the methodologist, and that was shored up soon after.) The following weekend I hung the poster on the wall in my office and there it stayed until the eventual summer humidity soaked through the glue on the tape holding it in place and I rolled it up and stood it in the corner that it presently occupies. And I continued with the work of the moment, which was to complete my prospectus by mid-December, with the conclusion of *Dissertation II*.

A Different Perspective

Sadly, toward the end of November I received word that my mother had died. My mother, who had lived near my brother and sister in San Antonio, had long suffered from dementia and Alzheimer's disease and there was consensus among family members that she had not known who she was or who her children were for over ten years. She was a shut-in who had lived in several care facilities in South Texas and had had no outside contact for as long as anyone could remember. This was in contrast to my father, who had died several years before, and had been an outgoing and well-known pillar of the community. It was decided, therefore, that my mother would be cremated, there would be no *official* service, and my family and I would travel to San Antonio in early December for a reunion brunch to celebrate my mother's life. There was no good time to do this; with three busy families involved, finding a time that everyone was available was literally impossible. So we chose December 9 as the time when the most people could be there. Unfortunately my wife, who is closer to my family members than I am, had unchangeable plans, and my daughter was in the middle of finals so we insisted that she remain at college. And so it was my son and I who were left to represent our immediate family.

At the time, I was in the throes of completing *Dissertation II*. We flew down on Friday, I had a difficult assignment – frankly, all the assignments in this class were difficult for me – due on Monday, and the final assignment, the completed prospectus, was due the following Monday. (In hindsight, I know I could have worked something out with my professor but I didn't want to get behind as I had plans to make major revisions to my literature review over the upcoming Christmas break.) I continued my decades-long habit of getting up at 4 a.m. and working on the project *du jour* until becoming

distracted by people, or chores, or conscience, or sometimes a combination of these and other things. As we were staying with my brother and his wife, my stoicism did not go unnoticed, especially by my sister-in-law.

She was impressed when I told her I was working on a dissertation for a doctoral degree. Although two of her three daughters had graduated from four-year colleges, she did not go to college and my brother had earned an associate's degree from a junior college. She was amazed when I told her about my dissertation topic: undocumented Hispanic students and the postsecondary transition – Texas is one of the states that shares a border with Mexico and, as such, attitudes toward the population I was studying were much different there than attitudes were in the northeast. There is a racist connotation in which Mexicans are considered inferior and treated as second-class citizens, whether they are citizens or not. Although many Texans have evolved racially since I lived there in the 1970s and 1980s, there remains an undercurrent of proprietary racism rhetoric stemming from the word *wetback*, which derogatorily refers to an individual from Mexico who got wet while swimming across the Rio Grande River from Mexico to Texas and was in the U.S. illegally. The brunch was held on Sunday morning at a restaurant in nearby Gruene (pronounced *green*) and, although a good time was had by all, the most memorable event of the day for me was an item on the menu: “Gruene Eggs and Ham.” A happy group of siblings, nieces, nephews, cousins, children, and grandchildren had assembled and, as much as she was loved, little mention was made of the guest of honor. And, to me, this fit with her persona during the last 15 years of her life – she was visible yet invisible much like the participants in my dissertation study.

Write on

I finished the draft prospectus in mid-December, just in time to take advantage of an 11-day holiday hiatus and to attempt to transform what my dissertation chair had characterized as an unsynthesized “book report” literature review into a higher-order product, worthy of using most immediately in my prospectus and then in my upcoming proposal. I worked on this project for many hours every day during my time off from work and, in the end, came up with what I consider to be a masterpiece of story and synthesis. During this period, I attended a Christmas Eve party and was called upon briefly to discuss my dissertation. I found it interesting that educated people did not seem to understand what a small percentage of undocumented high school graduates continue on to higher education and that the primary reason is financial, i.e., the lack of financial aid available to them. That, of course, is one of the reasons I did the research.

In January of 2013 my dissertation chair inaugurated a monthly advisee meeting at Rowan and during the next two-plus years I would make the two-hour drive every month except one, when I was 5,000 miles away on vacation. We began with three other members of my cohort and one member of a different cohort. Coincidentally, at the same time, I began the final academic course in my doctorate program, *Advanced Leadership*, which was basically a large group project (some 20 people, i.e. my entire cohort) of the group’s choosing. As it is generally estimated that approximately half of all doctoral students do not make it through the dissertation phase of the program, the project we developed was a peer-to-peer program to support future Rowan doctoral students in their efforts to complete the program. In fact, by the time my own cohort transitioned from the academic to the dissertation phase of the program, approximately one-quarter of the

original members had already left the program. Should the estimates hold true, it is possible that several more members of my original cohort will not complete their dissertations. I, of course, did not want to be one of them and so I embraced the opportunity to join a group that would provide structure and feedback

Writing is a lonely endeavor and, even though I had been writing professionally for more than four decades – journalism, public relations, and fiction . . . countless articles, essays, brochures, a novel, novella, and numerous short stories – I took heed in the warning that my dissertation would be among the most challenging writing I will ever do. During the academic phase of the program I had written a number of research and reflective papers and answered dozens of discussion questions, but all that did not prepare me for the loss of structure that generally accompanies the dissertation phase of the program. Hence the group concept. The immediate goal of the group was for each member to develop and write a dissertation proposal – essentially the first three chapters of the dissertation – and to defend the proposal at a symposium of their dissertation committee before the end of summer. In hindsight, I believe that the group saved me by providing structure, deadlines, and a supportive scholarly environment.

We each were assigned a reviewer, to review the chapters as we wrote them and to use their feedback as well as the feedback of the chair in revising each chapter. My reviewer was a woman whom I respected and had worked with on many prior occasions; she had the ability both to point out weak writing and, as a feminist, to empathize with the marginalized population I was researching. Additionally, as a secondary school administrator, she was somewhat familiar with undocumented students and she took advantage of my developing expertise to glean information that would be of use to her

students. My reviewee was a highly intelligent gentleman who worked in higher education and whose first language is not English; I was able to help him primarily with word choice and sentence structure issues and he helped me to better understand what it was like for my study population to function in an English-speaking environment.

Although I slid somewhat easily through Chapters 1 and 2, my chair's caution that Chapter 3, the methodology, would be the hardest one to write was eerily prophetic. It would be the crux of my research study and, as it were, I was developing it on the fly and being forced to lay down to plans and procedures that I was not 100% sure about. Chapter 3 went through several painful revisions, during which I seriously began to question my ability to complete the chapter, let alone the research study and the rest of the dissertation. I had begun writing it in April and didn't receive approval until almost mid-July.

Aloha also Means Goodbye

It had been a very rough school year. In addition to my four outed undocumented students I also had four fifth-year seniors and a pregnant girl who was scheduled for delivery right around graduation day. Jacob ended up applying to almost a dozen colleges by January 1, which was the deadline for many of the colleges he applied to. Maria, Leala, and Karisa also applied to a handful of four-year colleges, after January 1, even though they were aware that there would be no opportunity for financial aid. As stated elsewhere in this dissertation, Leala's pride kept her from embracing the community college pathway and her parents had agreed to pay her tuition at William Paterson University. And Maria knew all along that she would be going to community college but

she wanted to prove to herself – and her friends – that she was capable of getting into a four-year college.

There were application glitches galore. Based on information we received from innumerable sources – college advisors, relatives, the literature – we determined that honesty was the best policy and went out of our way to advertise Jacob’s undocumented situation. We highlighted it in some letters and in certain applications and, with his permission, I contacted a number of admission directors on his behalf and told his story to whoever would listen. In the case of Leala and Maria, the applications were confusing in terms of immigration status (or I should say citizenship status) and, regarding the William Paterson applications, both checked off the box that stated they were international students, thus triggering a request for forms and actions that nobody had ever heard of before. So, also with their permission, I contacted our representative there and, following a discussion regarding their status, both students were accepted to William Paterson University. Additionally, whenever an admission representative would visit our school I would make it a point to discuss the policy of the college regarding undocumented students, in which in most cases there was none.

In speaking with dozens of college representatives a potential opportunity presented itself at a nearby community college: if a student were able to get into the honors college – and both Jacob and Leala – appeared to meet the qualifications there was the opportunity to be selected for an international honor society, which could lead to a part-time job, scholarships, and other advantages. Unfortunately, neither student pursued this avenue because it didn’t fit into their plans; this points to my finding that the

debilitating feelings of fear and over lack of control have been replaced by a feeling of annoyance at not being entitled to the perks of my participants' peers.

Meanwhile (as discussed in Chapter 1), on February 12, 2013, newly elected second-term President Barack Obama gave his State of the Union address in which, among many other points, he challenged Congress by announcing that if they brought him a comprehensive immigration reform bill in the next few months he would sign it immediately. And that is exactly what the U.S. Senate did. On June 27, 2013 the Senate (with a Democrat majority) passed a comprehensive immigration law, which included a Dream Act tailored to help children of undocumented immigrants, and they sent it immediately to the U.S. House of Representatives (with a Republican majority). And there it sat. Members of the House were generally unhappy with the comprehensive nature of the bill they received from the Senate and did not want to consider it in its present form.

In June I said goodbye to the Class of 2013. It had been a busy year and an especially busy winter and spring as this class took advantage of the Common Application and offers for free applications to many private colleges that were struggling financially, and applied to more colleges than any class had before them. Of course, readers of my dissertation know a great deal about the undocumented graduates of the MHS Class of 2013 through the stories of my study participants and the findings presented in Chapter 4. Leala, Maria, and Karisa took the traditional postsecondary education path of undocumented students – community college. Jacob was able to attend a four-year college, but only because his estranged father could afford to pay tuition at Rutgers and because his mother's recent permanent residency status made him eligible

for the resident tuition rate. As incredible a student as he is, Jacob was not accepted into any of the highly competitive colleges he applied to that would have been in a position to give him institutional financial aid. My final official act of the 2012-2013 school year was to ask my proposed participants if they would be interested in participating in my proposed research study in the fall; I discussed it with each student individually and they were all interested. We exchanged contact information and said goodbye.

All of the above contributed to a busy and stressful end of the school year and an unhappy result – difficulty in focusing on completing Chapter 3 and my proposal. So, when the school year ended immediately following graduation, I took advantage of the sudden injection of free time into my life and dove into the middle of Chapter 3. I shored up my research questions, beefed up my assumptions and rationale for a qualitative methodology, and revamped my narrative inquiry strategy by bringing the concept of creative nonfiction to the mix. Additionally, I looked harder at the section on rigor and decided to incorporate member checking as a means of collaboration and ultimately establishing trustworthiness. And after completing an online course in human subject ethics, through which I came to a more concrete understanding of the vulnerability of my participants, I expanded my section on ethics to encompass both situational and relational vulnerability. Although I had a good handle on how I was going to conduct the study I still was floundering on how I would analyze the data. I knew that I was going to use some aspect of narrative coding in my analysis and that vignettes somehow would fit in, but that was all I knew. It must have been enough because on July 10, after reviewing my most recent draft of Chapter 3, my dissertation chair sent me the following email:

“BEAUTIFUL! Go forth!” That is chair speak for *it was time to send my proposal to the rest of my committee members and set up a symposium date to defend it.*

My proposal defense went well. It was summer and, as such, I had a bit of difficulty aligning the schedules of four people on July 25, but when one of my committee members agreed to a phone conference it was set. Prior to this I had presented a mock proposal defense to my group and had incorporated their comments into the real thing. My son was attending band camp at Rutgers during the week and rather than drop him off and drive back home I camped out at one of the libraries on campus and whipped my presentation into shape. And on Thursday, July 25, I spent the morning in the library practicing and then made the 45-minute drive for my 1 p.m. presentation at the university.

I don't recall being nervous, as it was almost the same presentation I had made six weeks earlier in the same conference room, except that I was considerably more practiced and, by the time of my defense presentation, I had completed the first three chapters. The major changes and revisions recommended by my committee were rather innocuous: more about me than about policy and law, more clarity regarding the data analysis process, and more about student voice. My proposal was approved and on the same day I submitted my application to conduct the research study to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and soon headed to Hawaii for a well-earned vacation. Then on September 8, one day after the beginning of the new school year, I received an email stating that my application was approved and wishing me luck with my research. As it turned out, I would need more than luck both to make it through the upcoming school year and to complete my research project and dissertation in a timely manner, if at all.

Part III: 2013-2014

There is something about a new school year that is magical and even a bit mystical. It is a time of beginning (for freshmen), middling (for sophomores and juniors) and ending (for seniors), and for teachers as well. Renewal and change are in the air and everyone, students and staff alike, is drinking from the same spring of hope. It is time to forget the sins of the past and to make a new start – emotionally, intellectually, and physically. The hallways buzz with energy and anticipation as freshly scrubbed, dressed, and pierced students dance to the music of the new year. I was like a junior in terms of both my career and my dissertation; I had completed the first half and was embarking on the second half. I was engaged in a process that was about to become more challenging. Just like junior year, the research phase of my study is the most important and critical element of the whole: Everything before presents it and everything after explains it.

Fall is the busiest time for a college counselor, as students – many of whom have given insufficient thought to their college plans in spite of prodigious amounts of coaxing from counselors, teachers, and parents – flock to the Guidance department to confirm (hopefully) that it is not too late to get into their dream college. On its own and done well, college counseling is a time consuming, all-encompassing endeavor, which leaves little time or energy for other tasks. This year, however, in addition to all else, came the rollout of the new teacher/educational services specialist evaluation system complete with student growth objectives, service surveys, and electronic portfolios touting our efforts regarding such measures as professional knowledge; program planning, management, and delivery; assessment; professionalism; and communication and collaboration. My supervisor said that, of all my colleagues, he thought I would probably have the easiest

time adapting to the concept due to the bent on reflection and accountability in my doctorate program. Coincidentally, I also had done a paper and presentation on teacher portfolios for my *Changing Organizations* class so I was familiar with the concept.

Additionally, the Common Application, which over the past several years has become the favored college application vehicle for more students than ever, went through a major re-design over the summer and was experiencing technical glitches at a level that made the just prior Obamacare rollout seem like a walk in the park. There were access problems, uploading difficulties, essay instruction confusion, payments were not being accepted, and the submit button did not work properly. It was such a mess that many colleges rolled back their early decision deadlines to accommodate the affected applicants. Absolutely nothing worked and everything took three times as long to do.

Also, to the best of my knowledge, three seniors fell into the undocumented student category. One was a bright young man, who had spent most of his school years in the Midville school system and was singularly interested in attending community college; although he never identified himself as an undocumented student, he asked me to assist him with the gathering of official documents for a program his parents wanted him to apply to. Another young man had transferred from Ecuador junior year. He barely spoke English and had serious health problems that affected him academically. The third student – an extremely intelligent young woman who had transferred from a nearby school district junior year – had self-identified to me junior year and I was hoping to help her overcome the obstacles of financial aid by getting accepted to a competitive college that did not have to rely on government financial aid.

Suffice to say that due to the copious amount of time required to deal with the new evaluation system and common application glitches, as well as other beginning of the year issues – a new principal and assistant principal, several new teachers, and a barrage of new students who were not prepared academically and/or linguistically – there was precious little time to spend working with my students. And, if that were not enough, I also had to make more time for what had become a part-time job – my dissertation – and begin the data collection phase of the study. I knew from past experience that I would not be able to focus on my dissertation until I got a leg up on the new school year, which usually doesn't happen until mid-October at the earliest, so I took a deep breath and set about in earnest to gain control of the situation.

The most critical item on my list of things to do was, as it always is, to meet with every senior and help get as many as I am able into a college application frame of mind/set, and to identify students who are planning to take advantage of early decision and early action programs that start as soon as the middle of October. These meetings help me to prioritize the process by breaking it down by timeline into several waves (described in Part II). The wave system is useful in that in addition to allowing me to work intensely with a smaller group at a time it spreads out the timeline for the 50ish recommendation letters I write every year. (I don't write form letters; each letter is an original rendering of the student's essence from my viewpoint as a guidance counselor and collaborator. A letter generally take between two and four hours to write and many require more time – a recent letter that I wrote for a blind student, for example, took me 10 days from start to finish.)

Upon finishing the senior conferences I launched immediately into junior conferences. My purpose was to get to know the juniors better, to get them thinking more about college and careers, and to assist them in developing an SAT strategy while there was still plenty of time. Junior conferences always take longer to complete because there are interminable interruptions from seniors who are applying to colleges during this time period as well as from myriad other sources. My goal is to speak with all the perceived college bound juniors prior to the registration deadline for January SAT, which is usually the first week in December.

Reconnecting

October of 2013 was a big month on many levels: My wife had left her job of more than 20 years and was serving as an at-home mom to our sophomore son, while deciding what her next steps would be, and for the first time in decades, I was delighted to come home every day to a clean house, a home-cooked meal, and a report on the goings-on of the neighborhood; a new group of advisees, fondly to be referred to as “newbies” for the next year, joined our dissertation group and each of us was assigned to be a mentor to one of them; and a third senior would self-identify as an undocumented student under extremely unusual circumstances. By the middle of the month, when I had met with all the seniors and helped them get started on their college application paths, I could once again take some deep, satisfying, and (temporarily) relaxing breaths and begin the data collection phase of my dissertation study.

The beginning of the school year is all consuming and I hadn't had the opportunity to think very much about my study or my participants since returning from vacation and receiving notification from the Rowan IRB that my application had been

approved. My study participants, who were all freshmen in college now, also were at the beginning of a transitional phase so it was good that I gave them some time before reaching out to them. I began the reach-out in mid October with an email to the effect of, “Hope all is well, how’s everything going, remember the research study we discussed?” I didn’t start hearing back for almost a week – teenagers are notorious for not checking and responding to their email – and then the emails started coming in. They talked about how different college was and how lonely they were. They all were interested in hearing more about the study and, so, we had several more email exchanges during which we set up meetings to discuss the study and the time and schedule that would be required for participation.

I met individually with Jacob, Maria, Leala, and Karisa at the beginning of November for an explanatory meeting and to sign informed consent forms, and they were all excited about participating in the study. I put a big emphasis on student voice and the active part they would play in the project and asked them to come up with pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality. Confidentiality was especially critical to Leala’s participation in the study; the others were aware of each other’s immigration status and situations, but Leala said she had not confided the information to anyone at the school but me. Interestingly, I had been considering assembling a focus group after the conclusion of the interviews but this would have been difficult due to Leala’s insistence on confidentiality within the group. Also, unfortunately, during this period I lost Karisa as a participant; she had been very slow in responding and seemed to be uncomfortable with the time commitment and scheduling aspects of the study. (And other aspects as well, I suspected.) I held out as long as I could, but after I began the second round of interviews

with the other participants it was clear that Karisa would not be participating. I still am sad that she didn't participate as she was an interesting young woman and I believe she would have added great context to the study. But research is messy. One has to adjust constantly to glitches and changing conditions and keep things moving in a forward direction, which I did.

The interviews were conducted over a three-week period in mid-November and early December. Against the advice of my chair, I met with the participants at the high school, on weekends and after school when the building was essentially vacant. My chair's concern was that the power balance from the high school relationship might affect the integrity of the interviews. As it turned out, none of the participants felt this would be an issue – they all had warm and fuzzy memories of high school and of me as their helping guide – and the convenience of having a safe and quiet place for the interviews far outweighed the inconvenience of having to find other places to conduct nine lengthy interviews. As a concession to my chair, none of the interviews were conducted in my office. I truly enjoyed re-connecting with my former students and, based on their demeanor, they felt the same way.

Interestingly, I had been adamant about transcribing all the interviews myself – had, in fact, included a treatise on the advantages of self-transcription in my proposal – but I was so busy at work and so exhausted when I got home that I decided to have all the interviews transcribed by a transcription service recommended by one of my dissertation group members. It was expensive (about \$700) but I realized, in hindsight, that my sanity would have been at risk by transcribing what turned out to be some 300 pages of single-spaced interview transcripts. The crucial thing, I justified and rationalized, was that I

personally conducted all the interviews and that they all were transcribed in full. As an added precaution, after I received the transcripts I listened to each interview carefully and made corrections and notes to the corresponding transcripts.

The interviews proceeded with many a hitch. While I tried to remain faithful to the format of the three-interview series, which I describe in detail in Chapters 3 and 4, I was not able to go for the entire 90 minutes on some of the interviews. This, I discovered, is a common adjustment when interviewing younger people. Additionally, due to Thanksgiving holiday scheduling issues, I had to wait more than a week between conducting the second and third interviews. Part as a function of the wait and part as an opportunity to involve the participants in a collaboration, I gave them each transcripts of their first two interviews so they could read them in preparation for the third interview – the interview focusing on meaning.

The first two interviews were remarkable: up to three hours of each participant waxing realistic on their life history and lived experience with respect to my topic, undocumented Hispanic students and the postsecondary transition. As the interviews progressed, I began to notice vestiges of similarities regarding their stories. For example, the students I work with seem to be getting worse in terms of stepping up to rigorous coursework, except for my undocumented students, and I believe that it has a lot to do with their families and cultures. Also, during the interviews, I detected both subservience and arrogance in attitudes; I tempered it with the notation that some of it could be cultural and some of it could just be part of being a teenager trying to fit into a complex situation. I began, also, to notice a trend toward the participants not being well informed or even interested in immigration issues in general and that the terror of being caught and

deported has been replaced by the irritation/annoyance of being inconvenienced (by not having a driver's license, or the ability to travel, or qualifying for financial aid for college). Like many American teenagers, they seem to have little interest in what is going on around them.

I took a day off to enjoy Thanksgiving with my family, which included a nice meal and hanging out during the day. I was thankful that things seemed to be going well for us: My daughter was set to graduate from college in May and my son was doing well-ish in high school. My wife had been unemployed for barely a week before landing a better job than her old one; how it would work out remained to be seen. And me? I was resisting making the push I needed to make to finish my dissertation – which included the final interviews of three, analyzing the data (I still wasn't sure exactly how I was going to do this), writing the participants' stories, and developing and writing a nonfiction novella, which was the plan at this point in time.

The third and final interviews, through which the participants were to assign meaning to the first two interviews, were the most difficult to conduct because meaning can be elusive and difficult to ascertain at any age, but particularly when one is just 18 years old. Ultimately, I believe the experience of talking about this issue was cathartic for all involved – especially myself. Allowing the participants to read the transcripts of the first two interviews was my own innovation – I had not come across the practice in any of the literature I had perused – and it came about primarily due to my own concerns about dealing with the concept of *meaning*. I had stressed endlessly over developing the meaning questions as I worked on my proposal and more, in therapy, prior to conducting the interviews. I kept telling myself I wanted this part to be over so that I could hole up

with the data and write. And the lesson here, of course, is that one must be careful of what one wishes for.

No Rest for the Weary

The demands of my job were not letting up and with Christmas holidays on the horizon and I was looking forward to making progress on Chapter 4, as I had during the previous holiday season with my literature review and prospectus. I was very tired; it had been a brutal beginning of the school year/end of the calendar year and I was way behind. I hadn't even finished doing junior conferences, which is something that I usually accomplish by early December. Of course, as some of my colleagues are fond of saying, "It will all still be there when we get back."

And then it happened. A senior, who had transferred from Guatemala at the beginning of his junior year, identified himself as an undocumented student under extremely unusual conditions. His name was Steven, he was taking two ELL classes (due to his poor English language skills), and I had begun to receive complaints from his teachers regarding the quality of his work in their classes. In past conferences and conversations with Steven, through a translator, he was undecided about what his postsecondary plans would be.

During the prior year, Steven, who barely spoke English, had given the impression that he was uncommunicative and lazy. A year later, his English had improved somewhat and, in a halting conversation with him, I discovered the problem was that he could barely see – even things that were right in front of him. The family was poor; Steven, in fact, received a free lunch based on federal family income guidelines. Additionally, the family did not have medical insurance and, after an initial consultation

with an ophthalmologist in which Steven was diagnosed as having an eye disease called keratoconus, they could not afford to pay out-of-pocket for medical help required. The nurse provided me with several pamphlets detailing free and low-cost health programs for the indigent and I discussed them with Steven.

In an attempt to ascertain Steven's eligibility for a county program, I pointed to the pamphlet and asked, "Are you a United States citizen?"

Steven shook his head no.

Hmm, I thought. "Or do you have a green card?"

Steven hesitated for a few seconds before saying, "No." He then looked downward as if he were embarrassed.

And here I was again, at the crossroads, only this time it was not about driving, working, and/or paying for college, it was about a young man's health . . . his ability to see at least well enough to pass his classes and graduate at the end of the school year.

"Don't worry Steven," I said. "This conversation is confidential. I'm not required to tell anyone about this."

But at the moment Steven's immigration status was, literally, the very least of his problems. I told him I would look into his problem and let him know what I found out.

After further discussing the situation with the school nurse and reaching out to Steven's teachers to let them know that his academic problems were, at least partially, being caused by an eye disease and to request them to do whatever they could to help him in the classroom, I then contacted an old friend who was an ophthalmologist presently working in Ghana and asked for help. Following several emails back and forth my friend was able to locate an amenable colleague and a gratis examination was arranged. Over

the course of the next several months, Steven had surgery on both corneas – he missed a minimum of school by virtue of being able to arrange the procedures in conjunction with school holidays such as winter and spring breaks – and he went on to graduate with his class in June. Observations regarding this particular situation: The situation warranted the student to be forthcoming about his immigration status – under normal conditions I would not bluntly ask him questions about his status at the risk of scaring him off; Steven’s indecision about his postsecondary plans fits with my findings in the sense that, unlike my participants, Steven had only arrived in the U.S. two years prior to graduation from High School and his English language skills were poor, whereas, my participants had arrived in the U.S. at an early age and all spoke English extremely well. When compared with Maria’s low-functioning co-worker (discussed in Chapter 4) this becomes even more compelling.

Analyze This

My plan for the Christmas holiday break was to relax, recharge, and enjoy time with my family . . . and to analyze the data from my recently completed participant interviews. I did a lot of relaxing, recharging, and enjoying over the break, but very little data analysis. Part of it was because I was exhausted from a hard year. But the rest of it was from focusing difficulties – I could not get my head around my massive mound of data. Even though I would go to my basement office and sit at my desk every day – except for Christmas day, which I took off and vegged out in front of the television all day watching a real estate show called *Hawaiian Life* – I accomplished very little. Thankfully, during this time, I was able to visualize my concept for analysis, which was to break down the interviews into sections, or subplots, and then move across the subplots

horizontally to develop themes among the participants. (This process is explained in detail in Chapter 4.) But I was not able to garner enough focusing ability to immerse myself in the data sufficiently to write the participant stories and the year ended on a frustrating note.

On December 29, while perusing the Review section of the *New York Times*, I came upon a half-page photograph that spoke volumes to me. It was a photo of several Guatemalan children being detained in the floodlit darkness in Texas by U.S. Border Patrol agents. The children looked frightened and small and the agents looked large and terrifying, with their uniforms and flashlights and guns, all positioned around what appeared to be some sort of rugged military-style vehicle. Although I didn't know it at the time, the photo was a harbinger of things to come. (In the spring the news would be focused on children who were walking to the Mexico-Texas border from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras – more than 1,300 miles, alone, to escape the gang and drug violence in their countries – because they had heard rumors that they would be immediately and automatically accepted into the United States. The rumors, it turned out, were based on a misperception of the DACA program.) This photo also served to cement Leala's sentiment that perhaps if she (and by extension the other participants) had experienced such a horrific experience their attitudes toward their undocumented experiences might have been more fearful and less entitled.

Meanwhile, winter had begun and it had the makings of a memorably hard one. There was a lot of snow, which resulted in a numerous school closings and schedule changes that included a pushed back graduation date. On the home front, my wife began her new job on January 1 and my son, who had become used to having the luxury of an

at-home mom during the fall, began to experience academic difficulties. My wife's new job was highly challenging, required long hours away from home (including travel in and out of the U.S.), and rendered it impossible for her to deal with such luxuries as meal preparation and housekeeping and, so, that all fell to me – in addition to my full-time job and my dissertation. Another of the responsibilities that I inherited was that of ensuring that my son completed his homework and school projects and was prepared for life mentally, emotionally, and hygienically.

There is a maxim that goes, something to the effect of, “that which doesn't kill you will make you stronger,” and this is what comes to mind when I think about the winter and spring of 2014. Simply getting around was a major chore due to the foul weather that lasted into March. At work, six of my seniors were in danger of not graduating due to class failures and absences. My son was having a sophomore year meltdown and I was having to deal with several teachers and his guidance counselor on his behalf. The U.S. House of Representatives still was sitting on the immigration bill passed by the Senate and sent to them the previous summer. I was experiencing dental problems that required such remedies as root canals and implant surgery and copious amounts of Vicodin to make life bearable. And my data analysis project literally had ground to a halt; I felt as if I were at the ground floor of a skyscraper and I needed to get to the top, but the door was locked and I didn't have the key.

Fortunately, I had the opportunity to present on my data analysis process during the March 2 dissertation advisee meeting and, so, I was forced to figure out exactly how I would analyze my malingering mound of data. And it was at this point that I developed the framework for analysis described at the beginning of Chapter 4 and identified the

emergent themes that I discuss in depth at the end of the chapter. The presentation was well received by my chair and group members and I was encouraged that I was moving in the right direction. Unfortunately, however, due to the continuing preponderance of distractions in my life and a fear of the gargantuan writing task at hand, I spent until the end of May floundering, second guessing my choices and decisions, and getting very little writing done.

The end of the school year was closing in like midnight on execution day. The college application process was over; the students going to four-year colleges had committed by May 1 and most of the students going to community college had applied and were either finished or completing the requirements for testing and advising prior to entry. I had completed the lion's share of my evaluation portfolio. My son had finally leveled off and, although the year had been difficult, it did not end in disaster. And most of my at-work energy was devoted to facilitating the graduations of my six at-risk seniors several of whom it took until the day before graduation to find out whether they would be graduating. (This is one of a parent's worst nightmares.) In the end all but one student was able to graduate, and that student would receive his diploma upon passing a summer school course in Chemistry.

At long last, stimulated both by being completely disgusted with myself and by a June 22 deadline to complete a self-imposed 10,000-word draft of Chapter 4, I was able to start writing again. (As a horoscope I came across during this period states: "Work begins when the terror of doing nothing at all finally trumps the fear of doing it badly.") I began to write every day – sometimes as little as 200 words, but often 500 or more words a day – and by the middle of June I had accumulated some 6,000 words, which included

Jacob's complete story, and two-thirds of Maria's story. That left the remainder of Maria's story and all of Leala's story, which I was able to complete and turn in on June 21. Although the writing was not at the level I had hoped for, I was making progress and settled in for a long and productive summer.

Summer of 2014 was the time for catching up. I spent the month of July revising the participant stories and writing up the findings. During this time, my son attended several different day camps, which had university libraries in close proximity, and I took advantage of having a quiet place to hole up in during the day. Additionally, I had the pleasure of meeting once again with my participants so that they could read the stories I had written about them and have a voice in the final product. As stated in Chapter 4, the participants were delighted with the stories and the revisions were minimal. I submitted Chapter 4 to my chair on August 2 and it was approved almost immediately. And I began Chapter 5, the discussion, during a three-week vacation in Hawaii. Every morning I rose at 4 a.m. (just like at home) and I wrote until about 8 a.m. and then spent the rest of the day surfing, hiking, visiting, and generally partaking of the aloha spirit. It was then that I finally decided on the format for this, the final chapter – an interpretive memoir.

Epilogue

I've never been very good at writing endings. That may be the result, in part, of a deep-seated distaste for, and avoidance of, saying goodbye, which is exactly what I must do at this juncture – say goodbye to my participants, my professors, my colleagues in research, and the lifestyle I developed and lived for more than two years so that I could successfully complete my dissertation. As I overheard recently on one of the dozens of detective and spy television shows that drone on as so much background noise in my

house, “When the job is done, walk away.” Before walking away, however, I will discuss some of the more salient implications of my study, especially as they apply to me since this is a memoir.

As a result of this project, I have become an authority and resource on both the subject of undocumented students and the process of developing a dissertation. Based on my research experience, I have been able to help a colleague potentially understand why the number of students passing remedial community college classes was lower in the spring semester than in the fall (less motivated students). Another colleague said that my framework for data analysis provided him with ideas for writing that he had not been able to comprehend before my presentation. And yet another colleague said that member checking (i.e., participant feedback) had been an abstract concept to her prior to hearing how I worked it into my study. As a member of a helping profession, I was pleased to know that I was being helpful at this level too.

Following a presentation on my then-developing Chapter 5 to my dissertation group, my chair asked me this question: “How have you changed since beginning your doctoral studies and dissertation?” And I may have stammered initially but I recall saying something about having become a better writer and researcher and that I wanted next to write a novel, which I believed would benefit from the powerful skills I developed during my doctoral program. But that was just the short answer. And although I am a big believer in the validity of first impressions and reactions in the sense that my initial answer reflected my true feelings, further reflection has enabled me to consider the question across a larger canvas and in the context of implications.

Implications

The implications of my dissertation study are enormous. I have discussed the significance of my study regarding practice, policy, and further research at the end of Chapter 1, but as this is memoir, I shall use the forum to personalize the implications for my participants and for myself. Said implications stem from the major findings of my study, which show that successful postsecondary transitions by undocumented Hispanic students are facilitated strongly by a structure of support, an ability to assimilate, and the empowerment of voice. Additionally, a central factor in all three findings is the important part family plays in the process.

For my participants – Jacob, Leala, and Maria – the study provided an opportunity to continue to take advantage of a supportive structure by extending the relationship with their high school guidance counselor through their first year of college. In addition to the research tasks of scheduling, interviewing, and member checking, there was ample time to discuss personal, education, and career issues, and for me to encourage them to continue to develop supportive structures in their current situations. The reasoning was that such a structure had enabled them to be successful in their prior transitions, despite overwhelming odds against success, and a continued structure of support would be helpful in the attainment of the next levels of transition – i.e., transferring to a four-year college, choosing a major, and transitioning to the work force. And while they continue to assimilate into their new situations, as they have done since they were children, my participants have steadily increased the magnitude and amplitude of their voices and continue to strive toward making an impact, a theme that is evident throughout the findings.

The above enabled me to better understand my former students and to consider how the findings concerning them also related to me, especially since I, too, was going through an educational transition regarding becoming a doctor of education. My supportive structure during the academic phase was the program and my cohort and the professors who modeled scholarly behavior for us; during the dissertation phase I was able to garner immense support from the camaraderie and structure of my chair's monthly advisee meetings. Initially, I was forced to assimilate into a culture that was higher functioning – leadership – than the one I was coming from – counseling – and I was compelled not to show my deficits in the process; like my participants, I found it useful to subjugate my original culture while embracing my new culture. I also was able to find my doctoral voice and develop it in the context of being resilient and influencing others. Finally, like my participants (as can be seen throughout my memoir), my family was highly involved in all aspects of my development. For myself, the implications regarding change are quite dramatic conceptually, professionally, and artistically.

My conceptual framework, which guided me through my research, has evolved throughout the process. For example, I began my dissertation as a social constructivist – i.e., a seeker of understanding – and during the development of my proposal, I added advocacy to my worldview because just understanding did not go far enough for me. I also introduced creative nonfiction techniques to my narrative inquiry strategy so that I would have the capacity of storytelling to make the writing more compelling and interesting. Additionally, my experiential knowledge improved in all three areas – as a counselor, a writer, and a researcher – as my study progressed and I am presently at the top of my game experientially. I am poised not only to work in the area of undocumented

students, but also on new and more complex issues, most immediately the overreliance on technology on the human psyche.

Artistically, I have become a dramatically better writer and researcher. (I include research in this assessment because of the critical part that rigorous research plays in my writing process.) Although the first three chapters of my dissertation are typical, the last two chapters, consisting of participant stories and an interpretive memoir, are not. While the participant stories are not an original concept – they are an occasionally used form of data presentation by researchers studying the issue of immigration – my framework for organizing, writing, and analyzing the stories is my own, as reported in Chapter 4. That said, the idea of using an interpretive memoir to discuss my findings in this chapter is, to the best of my knowledge, entirely my own. Particularly, it is the emphasis on characterization in my participant stories and memoir that has best prepared me for future creative writing endeavors.

Professionally, my counseling practice has improved significantly in terms of identifying, counseling, and advocating for undocumented students and for students in general. As a result, my students will benefit from a level of understanding and empathy that they would be hard-pressed to find anywhere else. And counselors (and others, such as teachers and administrators) who read my dissertation will benefit from the knowledge imparted through my own lived experience regarding the issue. There is, especially, very little in the literature about identifying undocumented students, which is inarguably a crucial part of developing a relationship. It is very difficult to counsel a student when the counselor is not aware of the student's background and circumstances.

Additionally, there are implications beyond those discussed above, in which the results of my study could be applied to students who are not undocumented, but are at risk academically, culturally, and/or emotionally. Such students may experience difficulty with the postsecondary transition due to the lack of structural support, assimilative ability, or voice. While, in my study, I focused on the central role that guidance counselors play in the process of working with undocumented students, another possibility would be to consider the role of administrators. As school leaders, administrators have access to many avenues through which to provide support to students from all backgrounds. And they often have the resources to develop academic and social programs to help struggling students: This includes study skills, as well as both adult and peer mentoring programs; professional development to enable teachers and other staff members to contribute and develop expertise in the resolution of problems; and the ability to initiate and effect policy that will enable change to endure.

Answers

As a result of my dissertation study, and in answer to my research questions, I know what it is like to be an undocumented Hispanic student engaged in the postsecondary transition. And such knowledge will be invaluable when it comes to working not only with affected students, but also with all students in the future

What emotional challenges are associated with the postsecondary transition for undocumented Hispanic students? When it comes to undocumented students, the emotional spectrum is vast. Emotions fill their lives at a level and intensity that is much greater than that of a typical teenager: There always is the fear of being found out, the harboring of a great secret that few others know; the anger brought on by the staggering

sense of inequality with one's peers; and the pain of being forced into a situation (college and career-wise) that is below that which they were made for. However, there also is the reciprocal love of and from family, friends, and others that allows these young people to transcend the depths of despair and to succeed in virtually everything that they do. The challenge lies in overcoming the frustration of being dealt a bad hand and trumping an incredibly difficult situation through persistence, resilience, and consistently moving forward.

What is my role as a school counselor in the postsecondary transition of undocumented Hispanic students? School counselors have the capacity to serve as the hub around which the rest of an undocumented student's supportive structure revolves. The counselor, therefore, is in a unique position to advise the student in the intricacies of many aspects of life, which include education, socialization, and development. An effective counselor is in a position to guide a student through the process while maintaining a vision of the big picture. A school counselor has the potential to act in many roles during the postsecondary transition of undocumented students: advisor, leader, teacher, coach, advocate, benefactor, and surrogate parent. Most importantly, however, is the counselor's role as an investor. As such, he or she is concerned not only with what the student will bring to the table, but also with how the table will benefit from the student's contribution.

How do the stories of undocumented Hispanic students foreshadow their postsecondary paths? The stories of undocumented students – replete with life history, lived experience, and participant meaning – provide a roadmap to the future for them. The critical item is whether or not there is a destination. With my participants, for

example, the destination has always been higher education and the success that generally accompanies such an endeavor. Many of the undocumented students I have worked with since then have not had the same sense of destination and direction as my study participants: one student's overriding goal is to improve his health; another student devotes his energies and enthusiasm to being reunited with his parents; yet another student has been distracted from her path by personal demons. That said, however, other students have pursued the same paths as my study participants and although I did not get to know them as well I know as my participants I know enough about them – through personal knowledge and the knowledge of my participants, as a result of my research study – to suggest that by the time of their postsecondary transition, they will have had the supportive, assimilative, and vocal structure necessary to attend and likely finish college.

What is it like to be an undocumented Hispanic student engaged in the postsecondary transition? Being an undocumented Hispanic student engaged in the postsecondary transition is like nothing I could even have begun to imagine prior to conducting my research study and writing this dissertation. As I state in Chapter 1, this is not a story of complex legal and policy issues . . . it is a story of people; it is about people who are struggling to move forward every minute of every day as an arcane law slowly meanders toward change. It is about finding and using support structures provided by people who care – counselors, teachers, friends, and family – and taking advantage of any and all resources that are available. It is about developing a chameleonic ability to blend in, despite a constant awareness of how different one is. It is about having the strength and resilience that has been modeled by one's parents and grandparents to plod on and

not give up when the obstacles seem to be insurmountable. Above all, it is about developing and using one's voice to empower oneself and others to make an impact, for without impact there can be no change.

Concluding Thoughts

During the course of my dissertation I constantly worried that the issue of undocumented students and the postsecondary transition would be resolved before I finished and that my work would be rendered useless. I have considered this eventuality benevolently (the sooner the issue is resolved, the sooner it will improve the life of my students and others), malevolently (I hope the issue is not resolved until after I am finished with my study), and practically (my study will be relevant whether the issue is resolved or not). As it has turned out, other than the two non-permanent presidential executive actions and politicized partisan attempts at resolution discussed in Chapter 1, very little has changed regarding immigration policy in the United States. And while it is heartbreaking to think about the hardships undocumented students will continue to endure as they engage in the postsecondary transition it is gratifying to know that there are internal and external structures in place to help make the transition process smoother, if not yet smooth.

There is an argument that some research studies regarding the undocumented are rife with high functioning students, similar to my participants, and the suggestion is that the results may be skewed (Gonzales, 2010). I make no apologies for my study sample, as they were the only ones who met the criteria at the time I was scheduled to do the fieldwork, i.e., undocumented Hispanic members of the Midville High School class of 2013 who were engaged in the postsecondary transition. If I had conducted the study a

year earlier or a year later, the results would have been different because the circumstances of the participants would have been different. The inherent value of this study is that now there is a benchmark understanding of what has made my participants successful in the postsecondary transition process and, in the future, this understanding can be used to identify, counsel, and advocate for undocumented students.

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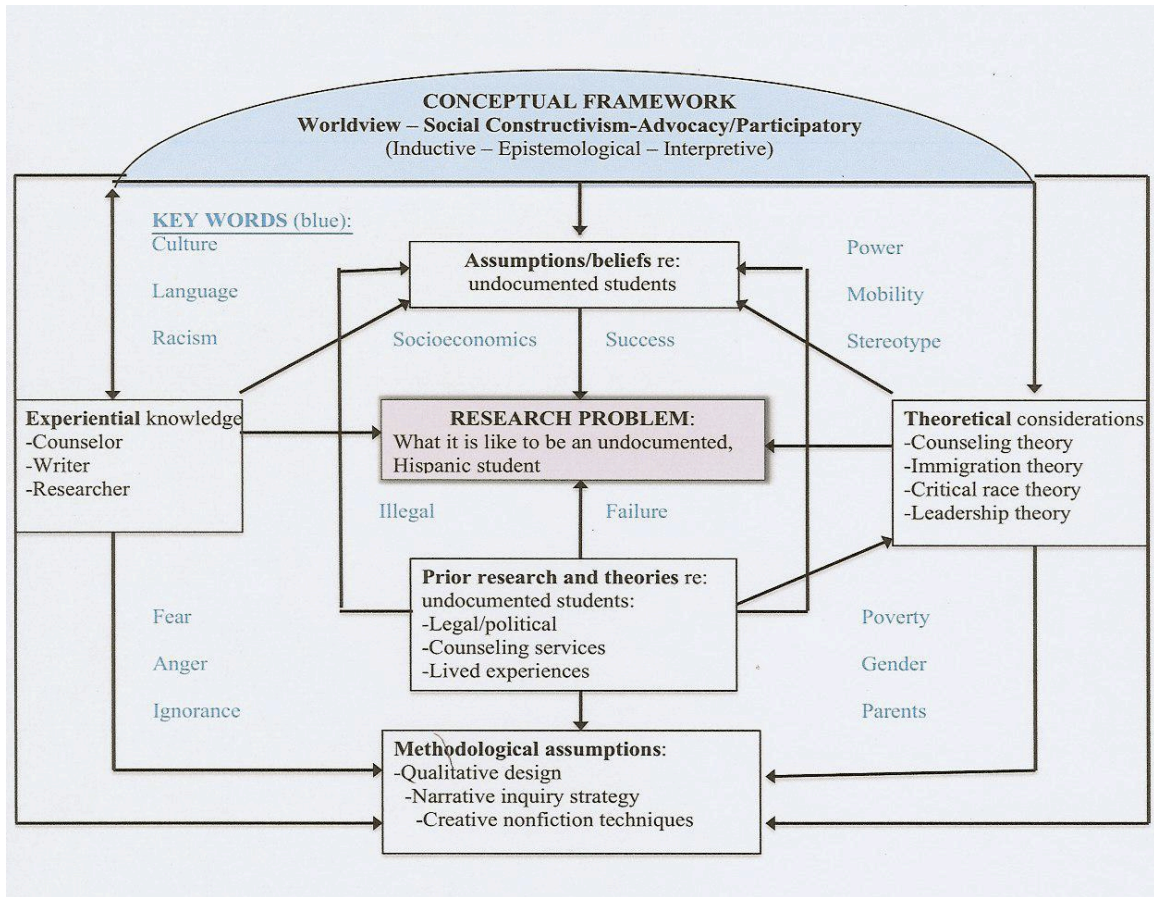
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APPENDIX A: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



APPENDIX B: SUPERINTENDENT PERMISSION LETTER

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Mr. Pio Pennisi
Superintendent of Schools
[REDACTED]

Mr. Vincent J. Olivo
School Business Administrator/
Board Secretary
[REDACTED]

January 31, 2013

Mr. Al Trafford, Guidance Counselor
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Dear Al:

After reviewing your description of your dissertation topic and guidelines you sent to me, as well as, Board Policy 3245, I am happy to inform you that I am granting your request to conduct your research project at [REDACTED]. I am confident that any data that you collect will be helpful in strengthening our guidance department. I wish you the best of luck with this project, and your doctoral candidacy.

Sincerely,



Pio Pennisi

Cc: Gene Mosley
Personnel File

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

I am conducting this research study to gain an understanding of what it is like to be an undocumented Hispanic student engaged in the postsecondary transition. Please read the consent form and sign it if you agree to participate. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Interview One – Life History

- What is your first memory?
- What do you remember about your former country?
- When did you move to the United States? What was that like?
- How did leaving affect your family? Did everyone go or did some family members stay? Who?
- What was it like being a stranger in a strange land?
- How were you treated by your neighbors? Your classmates?
- To what extent did you understand English? What was it like learning English?
- How would you describe your parents? Your family?
- How would you describe your friends?
- How would you describe yourself?
- How would your friends describe you?
- What makes you happy? What was the happiest moment in your life?
- What makes you sad? What was the saddest moment in your life?
- What do you do for fun?
- How do you embrace your bi-cultural heritage?

- Have you returned to your first country since you left? If so, what was it like? If not, how do you feel about that?
- What kind of student are you? What are the subjects you like best and least?
- What are your postsecondary plans?
- What are your parents' occupations and levels of education?
- How do your parents support your postsecondary aspirations?

Interview Two – Details of the Undocumented Experience

- When and how did you discover your undocumented status?
- How did you feel when you learned you were undocumented?
- What knowledge do you have of immigration issues? The DREAM Act? Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals? Immigration reform?
- How do the above programs affect you?
- How do you deal with issues of trust regarding the undocumented experience?
- What relationships do you have with other undocumented students?
- What challenges have you faced regarding your undocumented status?
- How have you changed since you learned about your undocumented status?
- How does your undocumented status affect your postsecondary plans?
- How do you react when the subject of undocumented students comes up?
- How would your life be different if you could change your undocumented status?
- How do school staff members fit into your undocumented context? Teachers? Guidance counselors? Others?
- In what ways were your needs met and/or not met regarding navigating your experience?

Interview Three – Reflections on the Meaning of Undocumented Status

- What does it mean to you to be an undocumented student engaged in the postsecondary transition?
- What is the meaning of your postsecondary path relative to your history and experience?
- How do your feelings about yourself and your undocumented status reflect your history and experience?
- What understanding have you gained from the emotional challenges and obstacles presented during your postsecondary transition?
- What meaning does your relationship with your guidance counselor bring to bear on your postsecondary transition as an undocumented student?
- In hindsight what would you have done differently or the same regarding your undocumented experience?

APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I agree to participate in a research study entitled “Undocumented Hispanic Students and the Post-secondary Transition: A Narrative Perspective,” which is being conducted by Al Trafford, a doctoral student at Rowan University. This research project is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Ane Turner Johnson, Assistant Professor, as part of a doctoral dissertation in educational leadership. The purpose of this study is to explore the phenomenon of undocumented Hispanic students engaged in the post-secondary transition in order to gain a better understanding of the process.

I understand that I will be asked to participate in three separate interviews, each of 90-minutes duration. The interviews will be audiotaped for data analysis purposes only. If I am under the age of 18, I understand that my parent or guardian also will be required to sign an informed consent form on my behalf.

Confidentiality: I understand that my responses and all data gathered will be confidential. I agree that information obtained from me for this study may be used for publication provided I am in no way identified and my name is not used.

Risks: I understand that there are no physical or psychological risks involved in this study, that participation is entirely voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time without consequences. If I have any questions or problems concerning my participation in this study, I may contact the principal investigator, Al Trafford, at [REDACTED] or Dr. Ane Turner Johnson at (856) 256-4500 ext. 3818.

Benefits: I understand that the information I provide will contribute to the building of knowledge related to the navigation of the postsecondary transition by undocumented students. I recognize that my time and consideration are greatly appreciated

I understand that I will not be affected favorably or unfavorably by agreeing or not agreeing to participate in the study and that my participation does not imply employment with the state of New Jersey, Rowan University, the [REDACTED] School District, or the principal investigator.

Participant Name (Please print)

I agree to be audiotaped: _____
(Signature of Participant)

(Date)

(Signature of Participant)

(Date)

(Signature of Investigator)

(Date)

APPENDIX E: IRB APPROVAL



September 23, 2013

Al Trafford
97 Oakview Terrace
Short Hills, NJ 07078

Dear Al Trafford:

In accordance with the University's IRB policies and 45 CFR 46, the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to inform you that the Rowan University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved your project through its expedited review process.

IRB application number: 2014-018

Project Title: Undocumented Hispanic Students and the Postsecondary Transition: A Narrative Perspective

In accordance with federal law, this approval is effective for **one calendar year** from the date of this letter. If your research project extends beyond that date or if you need to make significant modifications to your study, you must notify the IRB immediately. Please reference the above-cited IRB application number in any future communications with our office regarding this research.

Please retain copies of consent forms for this research for three years after completion of the research.

If, during your research, you encounter any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects, you must report this immediately to Dr. Harriet Hartman (hartman@rowan.edu or call 856-256-4500, ext. 3787) or contact Dr. Shreekanth Mandayam, Associate Provost for Research (shreek@rowan.edu or call 856-256-5150).

If you have any administrative questions, please contact Karen Heiser (heiser@rowan.edu or 856-256-5150).

Sincerely,

Harriet Hartman, Ph.D.
Chair, Rowan University IRB

c: Ane Turner Johnson, Educational Leadership, James Hall

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