

“PART OF THE FAMILY”: UNDERSTANDING THE PERCEPTIONS
AND EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS AND FACULTY IN A
CULTURALLY INCLUSIVE LEARNING COMMUNITY
LOCATED IN A TEXAS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

by

Amber L. Sarker, B.A., M.A.T.

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Committee Members:

Eric Paulson, Committee Chair

Sonya Armstrong

Emily Miller Payne

Emily Summers

Michael Boucher, Jr.

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DEDICATION

My journey to Texas, and eventual doctor status, would not have happened without the support of Jon Sarker. I dedicate this work, and the rest of my time circling the sun, to my partnership with you. Thanks for being my rock, sounding board, and best friend. You are my constant (yes, I fit a Lost reference in here).

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Description
CSP	Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy
DE	Developmental Education
NADE	National Association of Developmental Education
THECB	Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board
CRP	Culturally Relevant Pedagogy
INRW	Integrated Reading and Writing
HSI	Hispanic-Serving Institution
TSI	Texas Success Initiative
K-12	Kindergarten through 12 th grade
IRW	Integrated Reading and Writing
IRB	The Institutional Review Board
ER	Emergency Room
GPA	Grade Point Average
FAFSA	Free Application for Federal Student Aid
U.S.	United States

ABSTRACT

This instrumental case study is an attempt to better understand how students and faculty in a learning community perceived and experienced inclusive and representative curriculum through developmental literacy instruction. I used Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) as the theoretical framework for this instrumental case study because of its specific practices of honoring and valuing varied cultures and languages. I conducted five focus groups with fifteen students and interviewed five learning community faculty members. All participants were part of the same learning community situated in a southern Texas community college. I conducted focus groups, interviews, and observations so I could better understand the student and faculty perceptions of inclusivity and representation in the learning community. Specifically, my goal was to better understand how students and faculty perceived the representation of students' cultures and identities in developmental literacy courses.

I outlined the findings section using within-case analysis, followed by cross-case analysis. The cross-case analysis of findings from this instrumental case study highlighted similarities and differences between the values and experiences of participant groups. Students and faculty valued the learning community's program aspects, including the codes Validation, Culturally Relevant Aspects, and Familial Aspects. All participants also noted the codes Scaffolding and High Expectations. However, the two participant groups each foregrounded three unique codes in conversations. Students discussed the codes Valued Aspects of Learning Community, Meaningful Instruction,

and Future Goals. Although student participants mentioned program aspects they valued, their perceptions and experiences often focused on Meaningful Instruction. The faculty participants had conversations about the unique codes Auxiliary Actions, Growth of Program, and Changes Regarding Acceleration. These three combined faculty codes shared the story of “what happens behind the curtain” when facilitating the learning community’s curriculum and outside activities while simultaneously meeting the demands of the college. Students shared the Meaningful Instruction they connected with and faculty shared their instructional approaches and Potential Stressors they navigated.

This study contributes to the understanding of the perceptions and experiences of students and faculty in a learning community that used CSP. This study also explores the impact of instructional choices at a classroom level. Specifically, student participants outlined how Meaningful Instructional practices, Familial Aspects, and Culturally Relevant Aspects impacted their educational experiences. Faculty shared the labor that happened behind the scenes to create these positive educational experiences for students.

My instrumental case study was not a program evaluation. Rather, this study provides researchers and educators with the perceptions and experiences of students who identify as Hispanic, noting what these particular participants valued in their learning community. These student perceptions of program aspects and instructional choices can help guide future research on this growing population of college students. My instrumental case study is unique because it addresses how a learning community used CSP in DE literacy courses. Additionally, this study provides a window into the

instructional choices and possible stressors that learning community faculty navigate, which is a departure from studies focused on educational program implementation at a systemic level.

1. INTRODUCTION

The goal of my instrumental case study was to better understand how students and faculty in a learning community perceived and experienced inclusive and representative curriculum in developmental literacy instruction. This introduction begins with a brief overview of developmental education (DE), its prevalence in community colleges, and the student populations served in developmental education courses and community college settings. The introduction concludes with the purpose of my study, followed by the study's research questions.

Developmental Education

This instrumental case study examines a learning community, which includes a developmental literacy course. Therefore, it is crucial to note how I defined DE in the context of this study. DE is a continuum of courses and supports to promote educational opportunity for all people (National Association of Developmental Education [NADE], 2018). These courses and supports are appropriate to the students' needs, goals, and abilities in an effort to prepare students for credit-bearing coursework (NADE, 2018; Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board [THECB], 2008).

DE coursework can be a semester-long option or an accelerated approach like co-enrollment in a college-credit course with developmental support (THECB, 2017b). In addition to courses as DE supports, colleges also provide supports such as tutoring and advising (THECB, 2008). THECB expands on NADE's definition of DE, naming it a "continuum of undergraduate courses and services ranging from tutoring and advising to remedial coursework and other instruction to prepare students for college level (and

therefore work-ready) courses and continued academic success” (THECB, 2008). The next section describes students enrolled in DE coursework.

Students Enrolled in Developmental Education Courses

I structured this instrumental case study in a way that shared the experiences and perceptions of students before sharing the perceptions and experiences of faculty. This student-first approach requires an explanation of the students enrolled in DE. More than 50% of students in community college enroll in at least one developmental education course (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010), with some studies projecting up to 68% of students (Chen, 2016). Although the demographic makeup of students varies by institution, students who identify as minorities are disproportionately enrolled in DE coursework at a national level (Chen, 2016). For example, in public 2-year institutions, 75% of students who identified as Hispanic and 78% of students who identified as Black were enrolled in DE coursework, as compared to 64% of students who identified as White (Chen, 2016). Additionally, students who identified as Hispanic took an average of four developmental courses, which is higher than students who identified as Black (3.5) or White (2.4; Chen, 2016).

Problem Statement

The aforementioned overrepresentation of Hispanic students enrolled in DE coursework merits further investigation into inclusive elements that are representative of the students’ varied cultural backgrounds and language practices. As Stein (2005) noted over a decade ago, “we must train developmental educators in strategies that allow them to celebrate, endorse, respect, and internalize that which is specific to Latino populations” (p. 85). If students who identify as minorities are disproportionately enrolled in DE and

research shows that students benefit from curriculum that represents their lives, then successful instruction in DE literacy courses would reflect the experiences of the students who are enrolled in DE coursework (Doran, 2015; Doran and Singh, 2018; THECB, 2014).

Doran (2015) argued that research does not currently provide adequate information needed to determine if or how DE impacts postsecondary students who identify as Hispanic. Tatum (2009) also argued that providing relevant texts for African American students assists young men of color in processing engaging and relevant materials. Doran (2015) and Tatum's (2009) collective challenge should be met with research to examine the impact of a representative curriculum in DE. This challenge is crucial, as students who identify as racial minorities have been disproportionately enrolled in DE coursework (Chen, 2016.) Recently, Doran and Singh (2018) noted how continued research should focus on students who identify as Hispanic. Researchers have highlighted the impact of initiatives in postsecondary settings that are not DE specific, such as the academic success of students who identify as Hispanic and the representation of students and faculty who identify as Hispanic being visible on campus (Hagedorn, Winny, Cepeda, & McLain, 2007) or the need for students to have a curriculum that is representative of their lives (Acevedo-Gil, Solorzano, & Santos, 2015; Castellanos & Jones, 2003).

At this time, despite research on representative curriculum in DE (Doran, 2015; THECH 2014), there is little to no evidence of a widespread use of inclusive materials in DE literacy coursework. Therefore, there is a need to conduct research on how educators incorporate inclusive instruction and the representation of varied cultures and identities in

DE. This instrumental case study specifically focuses on a learning community in south Texas, noting the perceptions of inclusive and representative elements in a developmental literacy course.

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

The field of DE needs research on how educators incorporate inclusivity and representation into the developmental literacy component of learning communities. As hooks (1994) stated, in order to create a culturally diverse academy, we must “commit ourselves to the work of transforming the academy so that it will be a place where cultural diversity informs every aspect of learning” (p. 33). Recently, Hammond (2018) echoed this sentiment in a Ready for Rigor framework, connecting “new content to culturally relevant examples and metaphors from students’ community and everyday lives” (p. 41). Educators and researchers working in developmental literacy would provide beneficial instruction to students enrolled in DE coursework by better understanding the perceptions of inclusive curricular choices.

This project was not a program evaluation. Rather, the purpose of this instrumental case study (Crowe, Cresswell, Robertson, Huby, Avery, & Sheikh, 2011; Stake, 1995; 2005; 2010) was to better understand how students and faculty perceive the representation of students’ cultures and identities in their learning community’s developmental literacy courses. I used a particular case, one learning community in south Texas, to learn about how students and faculty perceive representative curriculum. My instrumental case study adds to the literature by providing an increased understanding of student and faculty perceptions of inclusive curricular choices in DE literacy courses.

This increased understanding was a result of analyzed data from student focus groups, faculty interviews, and observations of literacy courses and outside events.

By conducting this instrumental case study (Stake, 1995; 2005; 2010), my goal was to understand the perceptions of students and faculty regarding inclusivity and representation in their learning community's literacy course. To address this query, I composed the following research questions:

1) What are the perceptions and experiences of students enrolled in a community college learning community?

1A) Do students enrolled in a community college learning community perceive that their developmental literacy courses promote an inclusive culture? If so, how?

1B) Do students enrolled in a community college learning community perceive that there is a representation of their identities and language practices in their developmental literacy course? If so, how?

2) What are the perceptions and experiences of faculty in a community college learning community?

2A) Do faculty working in a community college learning community perceive their developmental literacy courses promote an inclusive culture? If so, how?

2B) Do faculty working in a community college learning community perceive that there is a representation of students' identities and language practices in their developmental literacy course? If so, how?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this instrumental case study is Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP). CSP is a pedagogical approach emphasizing a pluralistic view of education, focused on acknowledging and embracing varied cultures, languages, and communities, while resisting the White mono-cultural norms that can be present in education (Paris & Alim, 2017). Although the CSP approach can vary based on students and context, it centers on the notion that more than one culture, language, or experience is important and valued in the classroom. Key features of CSP are noted by Alim and Paris (2017) as “a critical centering on dynamic community languages, valued practices and knowledges, student and community agency and input, historicized content and instruction, a capacity to contend with internalized oppressions, and an ability to curricularize all of this in learning settings” (p. 14). This section begins with an understanding of how critical pedagogy influenced CSP. Next, I describe how CSP frames language practices and community practices. Then I share how CSP was informed by culturally relevant pedagogy, followed by an explanation regarding my positionality as a researcher. This section concludes with rationales for using CSP as a theoretical framework and using CSP as a lens with the study’s field site.

CSP and Critical Pedagogy

CSP honors a pluralistic society where education values the varied linguistic and cultural practices of students served (Paris, 2012). This pluralistic view is a departure from the colonial educational system that Giroux (2011) suggested critical educators work to emancipate students from. Therefore, recognizing CSP’s place in critical pedagogy is essential. Critical pedagogy examines the phenomenon of the hidden

curriculum in education (Bergenhengouwen, 1987; Case, 2017; Giroux, 2011; Kentli, 2009; McLaren, 2017) and encourages students to question the status quo using emancipatory education (Giroux, 2011). This emancipatory education ties to CSP because it supports varied cultures and language practices (Paris, 2012). Paris (2012) noted how:

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, then, has as its explicit goal supporting multilingualism and multiculturalism in practice and perspective for students and teachers. That is, culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to perpetuate and foster to sustain linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling. (p. 95)

In order to foster and sustain the varied cultural and language practices Paris (2012) discussed, educators need to use critical pedagogy to encourage students to question current power relations in education.

Language practices in CSP. CSP was chosen as my theoretical framework because of its emphasis on inclusion and representation of students' cultures, heritages, and language practices (Paris, 2012). In order to provide positive social transformation, CSP emphasizes linguistic and cultural pluralism and focuses on ensuring communities previously erased through schooling are sustained instead (Alim & Paris, 2017). Alim and Paris (2017) asserted that CSP "sees the outcome of learning as additive rather than subtractive, as remaining whole rather than framed as broken, as critically enriching strengths rather than replacing deficits" (p. 1). CSP, according to Alim and Paris (2017), must contribute to a shift in power given to communities of color, as opposed to the oppressive mandates that often negatively impact students who identify as minorities.

CSP and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. CSP's focus on appreciation for different cultures was informed by earlier work by Ladson-Billings (2005; 2014). Her pedagogical approach, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP), focused on helping "scholars and practitioners learn from and not merely about African American Students" (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 76), which ties to Giroux's (1988) assertion that in order to foster critical pedagogy, we cannot assume students' experiences are automatically constructed from of structural determinations.

Paris (2012) noted how CRP was a resource pedagogy, which resisted a deficit perspective and honored communities of color. This struggle toward education affords students and educators a chance to understand not only the current social order, but critique it as well (Paris, 2012). CRP was later broadened by Paris (2012) to include multiple identities and cultural representations. Paris deemed CSP "an integral part of this struggle toward an education that honors and extends the languages and literacies and practices of our students and communities in the project of social and cultural justice" (p. 96).

Ladson-Billings (2014) understood the need for CSP to be an extension of CRP. This extension provided an opportunity for varied identities and ethnicities to benefit from an inclusive model that focused on representation and student strengths. Ladson-Billings (2014) stated that Paris and Alim were able to expand on CRP because they focused on more than one ethnic group. Ladson-Billings (2014) stated, "It also points to the shifts of identity that now move us toward a hybridity, fluidity, and complexity never before considered in schools and classrooms" (p. 82). This collective reframing of CRP

allows CSP to reach more populations and underserved communities, noting a variety of settings and contexts.

Rationale for Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

I approached this instrumental case study with a participant-focused lens. CSP is a student-centered pedagogical approach, which aligned with the aims and design of my study. Through my study, I found answers to each of the research questions in my instrumental case study by using the lens of CSP. Question one, *what are the perceptions and experiences of students enrolled in a community college learning community*, was explored by looking at student participants' perceptions of inclusive culture and representation using a culturally sustaining curriculum. Irizarry (2017) noted how students often spent time learning discrete facts for tests that were not necessarily related to their personal experiences. Students in Irizarry's (2017) study selected content focused on marginalized populations, showing that students identifying as Hispanic wanted curriculum built on their experiences and cultural frames of reference. I aimed to understand how students in the field site's learning community perceived inclusive and representative curricular elements of DE literacy instruction.

Similarly, question two, *what are the perceptions and experiences of faculty in a community college learning community*, was explored by looking at faculty participants' perceptions of inclusive culture and representation using a culturally sustaining curriculum. Dominguez (2017) noted that in order for CSP to nurture varied identities and practices in youth culture, institutions need to produce decolonizing educators who allow CSP to be possible in the classroom. Dominguez (2017) reminded educators of Paris and Alim's (2014) hope that instead of comparing students of color to White

middle-class norms, educators learned from and with youth about exploring and honoring community practices and heritages. Thus, I used CSP as a lens that allowed me to better understand faculty perceptions regarding inclusivity and representation.

Positionality. As previously noted, CSP was a lens used to afford opportunities to better understand how students and faculty perceived inclusive and representative curriculum. As a white woman who grew up in the Midwest, I did not attend an HSI as a freshman in college or teach in an institution that primarily served students who identified as Hispanic. Due to a potential difference in experiences, it was important to remember the White middle-class norms Paris (2017) acknowledged and resisted:

This climate, and the policies and teaching practices resulting from it, has the quite explicit goal of creating a monocultural and monolingual society based on White, middle-class norms of language and cultural being. Such a climate has created the need for equally explicit resistances that embrace cultural pluralism and cultural equality. Without such resistances students will continue the age-old American saga of being asked to lose their heritage and community ways with language, literacy, and culture in order to achieve in U.S. schools. (pp. 95-96)

I worked to identify and resist these monocultural experiences noted by Paris (2017).

Rationale for Using Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy in Field Site

The field site's learning community programming worked to engage and retain students through "a rigorous, culturally-relevant curriculum across multiple courses/disciplines (learning communities)" (Catch the Next, 2017, PowerPoint slide 6). This fit with my interest in conducting an instrumental case study to understand the actions and perceptions of faculty creating an inclusive environment representative of

students' experiences and identities. The learning community focused on the empowerment of students who identify as Hispanic, as well as students who identify as members of other underrepresented populations (Catch the Next, 2018c). This focus on multiple racial and ethnic groups echoes what Ladson-Billings (2014) referred to when discussing how CSP builds on her earlier work. The majority of the participants in this instrumental case study identified as Hispanic, but other cultures were represented as well. CSP's lens affords an opportunity to examine how support and cultural values and experiences can be addressed in a pluralistic manner, embracing varied perspectives and experiences. Ascender's use of CSP mirrors what Yosso (2005) discussed as the expansion of the Critical Race Theory (CRT) tree, which now includes the experiences of women and varied ethnic groups. This stepping away from the Black and White binary affords educators and scholars an opportunity to understand the multiple struggles toward education that Paris (2012) acknowledged.

Support. One of the pillars of the learning community's first-year experience was "Students find continued support from a counselor/advisor and other staff in the college who, along with community mentors, build social and cultural capital and in gateway courses that strengthen first-year skills" (Catch the Next, 2017, PowerPoint Slide 8). This sense of community and emphasis away from the binary thinking of assisting either Black or White students allows students to feel connections with peers and mentors. A sense of community can help create a sense of belonging, or as the learning community calls it, "familia." The "familia" piece of the learning community focused on student identity and how that is situated in a broader context (Catch the Next, 2017).

Cultural values and experiences. In their qualitative study focused on 30 undergraduates at a selective university, Arellano and Padilla (1996) noted how studies tended to focus on factors that were associated with struggles in education for students who identified as Hispanic, overlooking students or programming that have been successful. In their overview of research on the persistence of students who identified as Hispanic, Crisp Taggart, and Nora (2015) recommended that “cultural values and experiences be further integrated within research designs and theoretical frameworks to explain Latina/o academic outcomes” (p. 264). I chose to incorporate CSP as a way to understand how the field site incorporates the cultural values and experiences of students and faculty.

Conclusion

I conducted my instrumental case study with the intent to better understand the perceptions of developmental literacy courses, asking students and faculty about their perceptions of the course’s inclusive elements and the representation of communities served. I selected one Ascender learning community to understand the broader phenomenon of how participants perceived inclusive and representative culture. CSP is appropriate for this instrumental case study because the framework’s focus on honoring cultures, heritages, and language practices aligned well with my research questions (Alim & Paris, 2017). Validating one’s culture is crucial to student success (Rendón, 1994) and I was interested in seeing how students and faculty perceived cultural inclusion at the field site. The review of literature that follows this chapter shows how CSP and critical literacy can positively impact student success in DE coursework.

Operational Definitions

I have noted the operational definitions used in my instrumental case study and provided succinct explanations of each concept. The purpose of this section is to provide an understanding of the concepts as they are used in the context of my study.

Ascender- The Ascender learning community is a program for first-year students and is programmed by Catch the Next (Catch the Next, 2018c). The learning community in this instrumental case study is officially an Ascender program, though some participants refer to it as Catch the Next or CTN in focus groups and interviews.

Catch the Next- A learning community program that was initially brought together with the Puente Project, THECB, and Public Broadcasting Service (Catch the Next, 2018c). The program “combines holistic student services and a comprehensive academic pathway that ensures student and institutional success” (Catch the Next, 2018c, p. 1).

Critical Literacy- Critical literacy uses the composition and examination of text to critically examine daily life and power dynamics (Bishop, 2014; Freire, 1970; Shor, 1999) and acknowledge varied perspectives (Tracey & Morrow, 2012). A common component of critical literacy is asking students to understand the ways power systems impact everyday life (Avila & Moore 2012).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP)- A pedagogical approach that focuses on the acknowledgement of students’ cultural practices. This approach was created to help “scholars and practitioners learn from and not merely about African American Students” (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 76).

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP)- A student-centered pedagogical philosophy emphasizing a pluralistic view of education, focused on acknowledging and embracing varied cultures, languages, and communities (Alim & Paris, 2017). This approach is varied based on pedagogical content and centered on the idea that more than one culture, language, or experience is important and valued.

Discourse- Ways of being, which are mediated by the integration of beliefs, social identities, acts, and attitudes (Gee, 1990). Discourses are also a way of seeing an experience through a particular perspective (Fairclough, 1993).

Developmental Education (DE)- DE has been defined as a continuum of courses and supports to promote educational opportunity for all individuals (National Association of Developmental Education, 2018). This support is appropriate to the students' needs, goals, and abilities in an effort to prepare students for credit-bearing coursework (National Association of Developmental Education, 2018; THECB, 2008).

Developmental Literacy- A specialized postsecondary literacy course or support that builds upon students' current literacy skills and background knowledge, focused on the learning strategies needed for the mastery of college-level material (Arendale, 2007).

Focus Group- A small group of participants who provide qualitative data through a focused discussion to help provide an understanding of a topic of interest (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Integrated Reading and Writing (INRW) - A curricular design that acknowledges the reciprocal understanding of reading and writing (Goen & Gillotte-Tropp, 2003). In Texas, two separate semester-long developmental reading and writing courses were combined into one course with the intent of making connections between reading and

writing (THECB, 2016). Recently, this was further accelerated when the THECB (2018) mandated that developmental literacy courses use a co-requisite model approach for the highest level of INRW courses.

Learning Community- A block schedule or co-registration format that affords students the opportunity to take courses together (Tinto, 2003). Three shared common characteristics of learning communities are knowledge, knowing, and responsibility.

Remedial Education- The term remedial education is sometimes used interchangeably with DE, which includes wording from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB, 2016). However, some stakeholders suggest that these words are not interchangeable. Saxon, Boylan, Stahl, and Arendale (2018) referred to it as “the provision of stand-alone courses delivered to provide pre-college content” (PowerPoint slide 8), as opposed to courses or support services with college-level instructional support.

Student-First language- I have chosen to use person-first language (American Psychological Association, 2010). Therefore, students’ identities precede their identifiers including ethnicity and course enrollment.

Students who Identify as Hispanic- Literature cited in the text uses terms including Hispanic, Latino, Latina, Latinx, and Mexican American. Those terms have been left in context when referencing direct quotes from others’ work out of respect for researchers’ intent. However, I am using the term Hispanic in my own writing because the field site’s community college is a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI). This choice was reaffirmed when the majority of participants self-identified as Hispanic on their demographic forms. The American Psychological Association (2010) suggests using

personal preference, which is why I left the demographics form open for students to define how they identified for gender and ethnicity.

Trustworthiness- I am electing to use trustworthiness instead of the term validity, using the four naturalistic terms Guba (1981) identified: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Summary of Introduction

Through this instrumental case study, I aimed to understand the perceptions of students and faculty regarding inclusive and representative curriculum. The learning community I studied was located at an Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI). As noted in Chen's (2016) research, students who identify as minorities are disproportionately enrolled in DE coursework. Therefore, learning more about the perceptions of students and faculty at this particular field site affords stakeholders an understanding of how participants view or value instruction that is representative of students' varied cultural backgrounds and language practices.

CSP is the theoretical lens I used to answer my research questions because the framework honors students' varied cultures and heritages (Alim & Paris, 2017) and examines the pluralistic identities that students can identify with. Additionally, faculty participants articulated a pluralistic view in interviews and observations that honored and extended their students' literacies and language practices (Paris, 2012).

Scholarly Significance of Study

This study was conducted to highlight the potential use of CSP in developmental literacy courses in Texas. The study's field site was an HSI, and the majority of participants identified as Hispanic. Because there is a disproportionate number of

students who identify as minorities enrolled in DE (Chen, 2016), instructors and researchers need to know more about the experiences of students and faculty who serve these populations. Furthermore, researchers have shown that students respond to a curriculum that represents their lives (Alim & Paris, 2017). Therefore, it is crucial that stakeholders and educators in DE literacy courses should better understand the impact of representative curriculum in DE coursework.

This study is significant because it shows the curricular choices made by faculty at a classroom level, which are in the context of student and faculty experiences. My findings also describe how social activities and inclusive academic environments are perceived by students who identify as minorities enrolled in developmental coursework. In addition, this instrumental case study provides researchers and educators with an understanding of how students and faculty perceived and experienced inclusive instruction in developmental literacy courses and learning communities.

Organization of the Dissertation

I have organized this instrumental case study in the traditional five-chapter format. The next chapter, Review of Literature, will provide context to this instrumental case study by covering studies on DE, critical literacy, community college settings, learning communities, HSIs, and the Ascender program. Chapter three, Method, will provide a rationale for using an instrumental case study format to answer my research questions. Additionally, I share information regarding the study's field site, setting, and participants. Next, I provide descriptions of the instrumentation used, data collection, and data analysis. The chapter concludes with sections discussing trustworthiness and my positionality. Chapter four, Findings, is divided into three sections: faculty

participants, student participants, and a cross-case analysis of similarities and differences between participant groups. Finally, in chapter five, Discussion and Implications, I outline the discussion and implications, as well as the limitations of my instrumental case study. I close this section by providing recommendations for future research.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This instrumental case study's field site is a learning community in south Texas that incorporates developmental literacy instruction. I used CSP as the theoretical framework for this study. Therefore, I noted inclusion, representation, cultural identity, critical literacy, and student identity throughout the review. This review of literature begins by exploring developmental education (DE) and DE in Community Colleges. I selected a field site that uses a learning community approach with a population that is primarily Hispanic (Catch the Next, 2018a). To provide context to my chosen field site, I included studies on learning communities with an emphasis on representation, identity, validation theory, and HSIs. Next, topics of critical pedagogy and critical literacy are discussed, emphasizing language as it relates to identity, power, and capital. Critical literacy in DE is covered, as well as the co-requisite model, which was recently mandated by the state of Texas. The review concludes with identifying key gaps in the literature, explaining how this instrumental case study helps fill them.

Developmental Education Overview

The purpose of this section is to describe developmental education (DE) in general, followed by relevant studies that pertain to my field site including DE in community colleges and DE studies focused on Hispanic populations. Critical concepts are woven throughout the DE section when appropriate, keeping in mind that CSP is the theoretical lens used in this instrumental case study.

In a quantitative study sampling over 6,000 students, Attewell, Lavin, Domina, and Levey (2006) presented evidence that common characteristics of DE included mandatory assessment, counseling, support services, and prepared faculty. These

suggestions were echoed and expanded upon by Bettinger, Boatman, and Long (2013), who discussed “promising areas of academic support commonly offered by colleges, including advising, tutoring, and mentoring programs, as well as supports that target the competing responsibilities of students, namely caring for dependents and balancing employment with schoolwork” (p. 93). These strategies are present throughout several studies at a large-scale level. Conversely, Cox (2018) brought up a point regarding reform in developmental education:

The most critical aspect of developmental education reforms is the extent to which they reshape classroom-level instructional practices in ways that improve students’ learning. From this perspective, assessing the effectiveness of large-scale redesigns requires keen attention to classroom-level instruction. And yet, to date, much of what has been written has emphasized the nature of the format and course content changes, rather than instructional practice. (p. 93)

This comment on classroom-level focus is interesting to stakeholders in DE because, as Cox (2018) noted, an emphasis is commonly placed on changes in content instead. Cox (2018) found that much of the current research focuses on large-scale reform, which can leave out the nuances of classroom-level instructional choices.

My instrumental case study includes observations of two sections of a developmental literacy course. I observed developmental literacy courses because I was interested in how students and faculty would perceive inclusive and representative materials in this setting. Developmental literacy is a specialized postsecondary literacy course or support that builds upon students’ current literacy skills and background knowledge, focused on the learning strategies needed for the mastery of college-level

material (Arendale, 2007). This instrumental case study was conducted to better understand the perceptions of classroom-level choices of a developmental literacy course in a community college setting. Additionally, I wanted to better understand the perceptions and experiences of students and faculty regarding the use of CSP and inclusive curriculum in developmental literacy courses.

Developmental Education in Community Colleges

NADE (2018) noted that “developmental education is a comprehensive process that focuses on the intellectual, social, and emotional growth and development of all students” (para 4). Some students are required to enroll in developmental coursework when transitioning to a community college (Chen, 2016). More than 50% of students in community colleges enroll in at least one developmental education course (Bailey, et al., 2010), some studies projecting up to 68% of students (Chen, 2016). Data was also presented that described how approximately one-third of students enrolled in community college place into developmental literacy courses at a national level (Bers, 2018). The data were similar to what Long (2005) reported years prior in a commentary on remediation: “Only one-third of students leave high school at least minimally prepared for college, and the proportion is much smaller for Black and Hispanic students” (p. 1). Chen (2016) reported that between 2001-2009, 74.9% of students who identified as Hispanic took a developmental course in a two-year program.

Students enrolled in community college have reported a lower perceived structure with sporadic feedback and high chances of variability when compared to high school experiences (Karp & Bork, 2014). Boylan, Calderwood, and Bonham (2017) explained that colleges working to meet the required increase of academic success among students

(especially students who identify as a minority, low socioeconomic status, or first generation) need to implement three strategies. First, instruction in community college classrooms must improve. Second, courses need to integrate with student support services. Boylan, et al.'s (2017) strategy ties to Higbee's (2001) assertion that special services and programs are essential to providing structures for both retention and satisfaction for students who identify as minorities. Additionally, in a summary of support services in DE, Bettinger et al. (2013) suggested mentoring, advising, and supports for student concerns like caring for family and balancing employment. In the third phase, Boylan et al. (2017) urged stakeholders to create community connections between colleges, community services, and public schools. These findings are relevant to my instrumental case study because the learning community I observed provided support services to students and also embraced community connections.

Texas community colleges. Community colleges in Texas place students in developmental coursework if they do not meet the benchmark requirement on the Texas Success Initiative (TSI) placement exam (THECB, 2017a). Data provided by THECB in 2016 showed that overall 77.8% of students met the benchmarks for writing and 75.8% of students met the benchmarks for reading (THECB, 2017a). These rates were lower for students who identified as Black (63.8% in writing and 61.1% in reading), as well as students who identified as Hispanic (73.8% in writing and 69.9% in reading). Another way to determine student placement in developmental coursework is ACT scores. ACT data for 2017 showed that the average composite score for all students taking at least the core curriculum was 68% (ACT, 2017). However, these averages were higher for students who identified as White (72%) and lower for students who identified as Black

(63%) and Hispanic (66%). The scores from ACT (2017) and the TSI (THECB, 2017a) were lower for students who identified as Black or Hispanic. Therefore, there is an urgent need for developmental courses with culturally representative curriculum to best serve populations whose test scores place them in DE coursework.

Persistence and Transfer of Students Enrolled in Developmental Coursework

Although some studies show success for students enrolled in developmental coursework, others do not find a significant impact on persistence or transfer to a four-year university (Bailey et al., 2010; Crisp & Delgado, 2014; Shields & O'Dwyer, 2016). Bettinger et al. (2013) stated, “The [developmental] courses appear to help or hinder students differently by state, institution, background, and academic preparedness” (p. 93). One certainty is a need for recognition of the strengths and stakeholders of the community developmental educators serve. In a commentary on promising practices in DE, Henry and Stahl (2017) implored that partnerships bringing stakeholders and community members together could help reflect the strengths of the community and provide a greater opportunity for students to achieve success in college and their careers.

DE has supports including assessment, counseling, support services, tutoring, mentoring, and special services (Attewell et al., 2006; Bettinger et al., 2013). However, these strategies were generally studied at a large-scale level. In a chapter focused on reform challenges in DE, Cox (2018) noted much of the current research on DE looked at large-scale reform, which could leave out the minutia of classroom-level instructional choices. This instrumental case study focused on the classroom-level experiences of instructors, as well as the perceptions and experiences of students.

Students who Identify as Hispanic and are Enrolled in Developmental Education

This section highlights research on the persistence and representation of students who identify as Hispanic enrolled in community colleges and developmental education coursework. The names of student populations vary, as “many studies of Latinos and education do not disaggregate by subgroup” (Gandara & Contreras, 2009, p. 9). The literature cited used terms Hispanic, Latino, Latina, Latinx, and Mexican American. I kept those terms if used in direct quotes from the literature that follows out of respect to the researchers’ choices regarding nomenclature. I chose to use the term *students who identify as Hispanic*, since the field site is designated as a Hispanic-Serving Institution. This nomenclature choice aligned with the majority of participants in this study, who identified as Hispanic on their demographic forms. Additionally, as noted in my operational definitions, I use student-first phrasing (American Psychological Association, 2010). In other words, I place the word *student* before attributes such as *Hispanic* or *DE enrollment*. This section will briefly cover the overrepresentation of students identifying as Hispanic in DE courses, the persistence and transfer of students who identify as Hispanic, and representations of identity.

Overrepresentation in DE courses. Brickman, Alfaro, Weimer, and Watt (2013) noted that the overrepresentation of Hispanic students in developmental education courses. Data from the PEW Hispanic Center also showed students who identify as Hispanic are also the largest minority group on four-year campuses, growing by 50% in five years (Fry & Lopez, 2012). However, despite enrolling 2.3 million students who identify as Hispanic in 2014, a PEW report noted the population of students who identify as Hispanic is still falling behind other subgroups when comparing students who have

obtained a four-year degree (Krogstad, 2016). There have been several studies on the persistence, identity, representation, and barriers to success for students who identify as Hispanic (Alva & Padilla, 1995; Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Cerna, Pérez, & Saenz, 2009; Nora & Crisp, 2012; Santiago, 2011; Santiago & Stettner, 2013). A salient theme is often searching for what works when serving the population of students who identify as Hispanic enrolled in higher education.

Persistence and transfer of students who identify as Hispanic. The persistence of students who identify as Hispanic has been the focus of several studies (Alva & Padilla, 1995; Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Cerna, et al., 2009; Nora & Crisp, 2012; Santiago, 2011; Santiago & Stettner, 2013), some of which focus on the factors that associate with students' struggles, as opposed to successes (Alva & Padilla, 1995). In their qualitative study of academic invulnerability where they interviewed 30 undergraduates from a selective university, Alva and Padilla (1995) stated "many Mexican American students can be described as academically invulnerable, sustaining high levels of achievement, despite conditions and events that place them at risk for academic failure" (p. 4). In a summary of literature, Nora and Crisp (2012) noted that students who identify as Hispanic enrolled in developmental coursework at community colleges are at a high risk of withdrawing before earning a degree or certificate. Additionally, students who identify as Hispanic do not always use the support services colleges offer (Treisman, 1992). Studies on persistence have determined salient "at risk" factors and characteristics that contribute to success.

Salient "at risk" factors. There have been several studies that sought to determine what factors help students who identify as Hispanic achieve despite conditions

that potentially put them at risk for failure. A quantitative study comparing thousands of students from 262 four-year institutions conducted by Cerna et al. (2009) focused on “the social, economic, cultural, and human capital exercised by Latina/o students to better understand the factors that lead to their bachelor’s degree attainment” (p. 131). Similarly, Crisp and Nora (2010) conducted a qualitative study on existing persistence data that showed how parental education acted as forms of social capital and economic issues like working while enrolled in college can negatively impact persistence. Furthermore, summaries of financial aid programming in HSIs showed how understanding financial aid options with institutional guidance could positively impact a student’s ability to persist through earning a degree (Santiago, 2011; Santiago & Stettner, 2013).

Characteristics that contribute to success. Recently, a review of research on the success of students who identified as Hispanic found that a combination of characteristics contribute to success, including sociocultural characteristics, academic self-confidence, identity, experiences in pre-college academics, college experiences, motivation, support, perceptions of campus climate, and institutional characteristics (Crisp et al., 2015). The study concluded with a suggestion that the cultural norms and values of students who identified as Hispanic should be represented in the classroom (Crisp et al., 2015). Additionally, Crisp et al. (2015) recommended future research to focus on “predicting academic outcomes to better understand the cultural value-based learning preferences and practices of Hispanic students, how those preferences align or conflict with postsecondary classroom pedagogies, and their relationships to academic success outcomes” (p. 264). This assertion is crucial for providing context to my study, which

focuses on what students who identify as Hispanic prefer and connect with in academic settings.

Representations of identity. A summary of research noted how representations of identity in educational settings are a factor that impacts retention for students who identify as Hispanic (Castellanos & Jones, 2003). Representation can also create a sense of validation (Rendón, 1994), including in-class supports that validate everyone's presence (hooks, 1994). Representation matters, as a quantitative study using a questionnaire given to 241 students in the Los Angeles Community College District showed a positive relationship between the academic success of students who identify as Hispanic and the representation of faculty and students who identify as Hispanic seen on campus (Hagedorn et al., 2007). Moreover, a review of the Emerging Scholars Program presented evidence that students who identify as racial minorities tended to find success working with faculty of the same race (Hsu, Murphy, & Treisman, 2008). Unfortunately, a report card on public universities in California noted that some campuses do not have a representation of faculty and administrators who identify as Hispanic to match the density of the undergraduate or general population of students who identify as Hispanic (Santos & Acevedo-Gil, 2013). This section explores identity in relation to community and faculty behaviors.

Community. Part of representation and validation is an understanding of one's identity in relation to his or her community (Nuñez, Murakami, & Cuero, 2010). In a qualitative study about three faculty members working in an HSI, Nuñez, et al. (2010) considered how their assumptions and understandings on systemic inequities impacted their pedagogical approaches toward equity. Their process included encouraging

students to not only think of how their communities relate to their education, but how they fit in certain social categories and which communities were potentially overlooked. In his article about building cultures in academia that promote success, Castillo (2019) argued:

Commuter colleges are institutions without dormitories or college-owned apartments. What sets them apart is that students have no opportunity to gather together, dine together, or live together while experiencing the rigors of college. Unfortunately, colleges that do not offer the typical on-campus social and academic experience lose the cultural momentum that institutions with a full “on campus” experience offer. (p. 2)

This difference in the college experience has prompted several studies to determine which factors help students enrolled in community colleges feel included. For example, a survey of 171 undergraduate students at a large public university in California showed a sense of belonging and classroom community had been deemed important to undergraduate students (Booker, 2008). In addition, a qualitative study of four community colleges found learning communities that were implemented for developmental coursework increased the interaction and interdependence between students (Washington, Pretlow, & Mitchell, 2010). Additionally, a study utilizing focus groups with 65 first-year college students showed how first-year college students taking developmental coursework valued relevant material, interaction with the instructor and students, and incentives to participate (Latham & Gross, 2013). Interest can impact self-regulation in developmental coursework as well. A quantitative study of 407 Hispanic freshman found that interest significantly improved the self-regulation for both students

enrolled in developmental courses and students who were not enrolled in developmental courses (Brickman et al., 2013).

Faculty behaviors. A recent quantitative study sampled over 10,000 students focused on the faculty behaviors that may predict the success of students who identify as Hispanic in community colleges (Lundberg, Kim, Andrade, & Bahner, 2018). Researchers found that predictors included high-quality interactions with professors, the availability of professors, and students' work to meet instructors' high expectations. These studies mirror the assertion of Boylan et al. (2017), who pointed out in their paper on efforts to improve student performance in community colleges, that colleges that seek to meet the required increase of academic success among students (especially students who identify as a minority, low socioeconomic status, or first generation) should implement three strategies. Boylan et al. (2017) suggested colleges improve instruction, integrate with support services, and provide community connections. Studies about inclusivity and representation on campuses for students who identify as Hispanic have shown the power of an affirming educational environment.

Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs)

HSIs have had an impact on student persistence and success (Cuellar, 2014; Newman, 2007; Nuñez et al., 2010). However, the organizational identity of HSIs has not been explicitly defined in research (Garcia, 2017). Students who identify as Hispanic are the largest minority group in both universities and four-year colleges, an enrollment that has steadily increased for decades (Cuellar, 2014). Research shows that HSIs can have factors that impact students who identify as Hispanic including taking courses with

Spanish-speaking instructors, noting salient understandings of student identities, and a sense of belonging on campus (Garcia, 2017).

The impact of HSIs is also dependent on the services provided; in composition courses, this can call for a perceptiveness of cultural and linguistic perspectives and practices (Newman, 2007). In her chapter on teaching composition at an HSI, Newman (2007) discussed how “when 25 percent to 90 percent of a composition classroom is made up of students whose backgrounds, academic preparation, and worldview are different from the hypothetical, typical college student, the classroom dynamics are significantly affected” (p. 18). Conversely, Nuñez et al.’s (2010) quantitative study suggested limiting assumptions about students served at HSIs while encouraging personal modes of expression and stories in inclusive environments. Although Newman (2007) and Nuñez et al. (2010) both focused on providing inclusive environments for students who identify as Hispanic attending HSIs, their approach to assumptions varied. Additionally, Nuñez et al. (2010) mentioned staff mentoring as a positive experience for students who identify as Hispanic, a factor that was also correlated with academic self-concept in Cuellar’s (2014) work. In a commentary, Nuñez (2017) later noted how research on HSI policy “indicates that ‘serving’ Latinx students cannot be reduced to a single metric of ‘graduation rates’ but must also include dimensions of organizational identity and behavior” (p. 137S). The Ascender learning community program’s mentoring component and focus on student identity addresses this need (Catch the Next, 2017). The next section reviews the literature on learning communities in general settings, DE settings, and settings that serve students who identify as Hispanic.

Learning Communities

The basic form of learning communities involves a block schedule or co-registration that affords students the opportunity to take courses together (Tinto, 2003). Three shared common characteristics of learning communities are shared knowledge, shared knowing, and shared responsibility (Tinto, 2003). Shared knowledge refers to the common courses and curricular experiences that students receive. Shared knowing is the process where students are able to create social connections with peers because of their learning community co-enrollment. Shared responsibility is the focus of working together and ensuring that all students participate (Tinto, 2003). The goal of a learning community is to provide “opportunities for deeper understanding and integration of the material they are learning, and more interaction with one another and their teachers as fellow participants in the learning enterprise” (Gabelnick, Macgregor, Matthews, & Smith, 1990, p. 19).

As learning communities gained traction, studies were conducted to better understand their utility. Cross (1998) found that students who spoke to professors often were “more satisfied with their educational experiences, are less likely to drop out, and perceive themselves to have learned more than students who have less faculty contact” (p. 7). Early evidence indicated that students who enrolled in a learning community setting tended to have greater persistence and grades when compared to students in conventional coursework (Grubb, 2001). A recent examination of the score of remediation in literature suggested that learning communities “also offer students the opportunity to form deeper ties with their peers and with faculty, thereby strengthening their support networks and institutional attachment” (Bettinger et al., 2013, p. 102).

Representation in learning communities has the potential to impact all students. A study that focused on 14 faculty in Dream Catchers learning communities noted diverse students from varied backgrounds, including veterans, parents, students older than 25, and students from Vietnam, Rwanda, and the Middle East (Doran & Singh, 2018). Instructors were mindful of this diversity when selecting materials and approached curriculum with varied cultures, even though 80% or more of the students served identified as Hispanic. The mindfulness of these instructors is reminiscent of CSP's inclusion of multiple identities and cultural representations (Paris, 2012). This mindful approach to diverse student populations was previously reflected in Treisman's (1992) mathematics workshops. In his study, Treisman (1992) shared how students who identified as minorities "were the majority and the White students the minority" which made it easier to form friendships with students with varied racial backgrounds (p. 368).

Learning Communities in Developmental Education

Learning communities can include a developmental education component. NADE defined learning communities as a "curricular approach enrolling a common cohort of students in a restructured learning environment that builds connections among students and curriculum" (Arendale, 2007, p. 23). Although there has been extensive research on learning communities in four-year universities over the years, a review of evidence on learning communities noted the efforts were not "primarily designed for developmental students" (Bailey, 2009b, p. 12). However, there have been longitudinal studies and specific studies of developmental education outcomes in learning communities in more recent years (Rutschow & Schneider, 2011; Schnee, 2014; Visher, Weiss, Weissman, Rudd, & Wathington, 2012; Washington et al., 2010; Weiss, Mayer, &

Cullinan, 2015a; Weiss, Visher, & Weissman, 2015b). This section briefly describes how learning communities impact student interactions, a need for DE, and data on learning communities in DE.

Student interaction. Learning communities implemented for developmental coursework have provided opportunities for increased interaction and interdependence between students (Washington et al., 2010; Schnee, 2014). Additionally, a study with focus groups comprised of 65 students showed how first-year college students taking developmental coursework valued relevant material and interaction with student peers (Latham & Gross, 2013). Students also moved through developmental literacy components quickly when part of a learning community (Bers 2018; Schnee, 2014). This moving through DE literacy components has been shown through a synthesis of lessons learned (Bers 2018) and qualitative interviews with 15 students over three years (Schnee, 2014).

Need for DE. The need for developmental coursework was noted in studies on learning communities with general education populations. One of the main findings regarding the implementation of learning communities in Weiss et al.'s (2015b) study of 7,000 students in a longitudinal data set was an improvement in developmental learning communities when scaling up. Weiss et al. (2015b) noted that “although all six colleges had conducted learning communities prior to the evaluation, every college (including those with the most prior experience) needed to scale up their developmental learning communities and offer more sections to participate in the study” (p. 535). My study meets that need because all students were enrolled in developmental literacy courses.

Data on learning communities in DE. Studies on learning communities in developmental literacy courses have yielded mixed results. One quantitative study of students in a learning community intervention showed no statistically significant difference when comparing students enrolled in a learning community to a control group (Massie-Burrell, 2010). In an urban community college setting, students enrolled in higher levels of developmental English benefitted from a learning community setting, a success not found in the lowest developmental English courses (Barnes & Piland, 2013).

A study on the interaction of college students enrolled in community colleges found a statistically significant difference in the level of peer and faculty interaction (Wilmer, 2009). Studies found that learning communities improved students' college experience, providing engagement and improved educational outcomes (Hill & Woodward, 2013; Scrivener, Bloom, & LeBlanc, 2008; Visher, et al., 2012). However, other studies have found modest results (Weiss, et al., 2015a; Weiss, et al., 2015b) or a lack of meaningful impacts on measured educational outcomes (Visher & Teres, 2011).

Several studies were conducted on learning communities. Some researchers have provided or reviewed evidence from other studies (Bailey, 2009b; Bers 2018; Bettinger et al., 2013; Rutschow & Schneider, 2011). Other researchers conducted studies on learning communities with larger sample sizes, ranging from 1,500 (Weiss, Mayer, & Cullinan, 2015a) to 7,000 (Visher, Weiss, Weissman, Rudd, & Wathington, 2012; Weiss, Visher, & Weissman, 2015b). There have also been quantitative studies that examined the success of learning communities on a smaller scale (Barnes & Piland, 2013; Massie-Burrell, 2010; Washington et al., 2010). My qualitative case study focuses on the perceptions of students and faculty in one community college setting. Although

qualitative research was conducted on students in learning communities (Latham & Gross, 2013; Schnee, 2014) and faculty in learning communities (Doran, 2015; Doran & Singh, 2018), my study examines the experiences and perceptions of students and faculty in one learning community. Therefore, my instrumental case study adds a unique perspective to current research on learning community settings.

Learning Communities Serving Populations who Identify as Hispanic

One study of over 80,000 randomly sampled students from 4-year colleges and universities found that “more students of color (35% Black, 30% Native American, 32% Asian, 33% Latino) than White students (24%) are involved in learning communities” (Zhao & Kuh, 2004, p. 120). The variance of student race in learning communities mirrors Paris’ (2012) pluralistic understanding of students’ cultural identities. There have been several studies specifically focused on how learning communities can impact perceived social support for students who identify as Hispanic (Bordes, Sand, Arrendondo, Kurplus, & Rayle, 2006; Huerta & Bray, 2013; Reyes, Schribner, & Schribner, 1999). Developmental learning communities for students who identify as Hispanic were reported since as early as 2001. For example, Grubb (2001) noted programs such as the Puente Program as learning communities specifically for students who identify as Hispanic in several colleges throughout California. Ascender’s program began with ties with the Puente Project (Catch the Next, 2018c).

Learning communities had a positive effect on GPA and aspects including collaborative learning benefitted students who identified as Hispanic (Huerta & Bray, 2013). After Huerta and Bray (2013) controlled survey results from 1,330 first-year students for pre-college traits, there was no statistically significant difference between

students who identified as White and students who identified as Hispanic in achievement or persistence. Bordes et al. (2006) also found social supports to be important to students who identified as Hispanic. In their qualitative study that examined the perceived family and friend support of over 700 students, Bordes et al. (2006) found that students who identified as Hispanic perceived more mentors on campus than non-Hispanic white freshmen. This difference may have been related to organizations provided on campus, as Bordes et al. (2006) stated:

One possible explanation for this finding is that on the campus where this study was conducted, programs and racially specific organizations are designed to offer support and advice to incoming ethnic and/or racial minority students. Perhaps the Latina/o students who participated in such a program (e.g., Hispanic Mother-Daughter Program, Hispanic Student Scholars) or organization (e.g., Hispanic Coalition, Hispanic Business Students Organization, Latina/o fraternities and sororities) and was part of the current study did, indeed, perceive that they had at least someone on campus who cared about them and their academic success. (p. 80)

Bordes et al. (2006) noted a possibility that support programs for students who identify as minorities may help with academic success and perceived support. This finding is important because the Ascender program's goals align with supporting the academic success of underrepresented students, which includes counseling and mentoring components (Catch the Next, 2017). Several studies mentioned in this section have focused on large numbers of student feedback in quantitative measures (Bordes, et al., 2006; Huerta & Bray, 2013; Zhao & Kuh, 2004) and my instrumental case study focuses

on the perceptions of students and faculty at one Ascender learning community. The next section describes the Ascender program.

The Ascender program. Catch the Next has implemented the Ascender program as a learning community in colleges across the state of Texas (Catch the Next, 2018b). Studies have previously documented the success of Catch the Next programming (Doran, 2015; Doran & Singh, 2018; THECB, 2014). In the first year of Catch the Next’s programming, 86% of students passed INRW with a C or better, 85% of students persisted to English 1301, and 91% of students passed English 1301 with a C or better (Catch the Next, 2018d). There are participating colleges in the major cities of Texas, including Austin, Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, and El Paso, among others (Catch the Next, 2018d). The Ascender program has three major components: a developmental writing course component, a counseling component, and a mentoring component (Catch the Next, 2017). This section succinctly covers the history of Ascender, as well as the curricular elements reminiscent of CSP.

History of Ascender. Catch the Next founded the Dream Catchers learning community program, which was inspired by the Puente Project, in 2012 (Doran & Singh, 2018). In 2012 Catch the Next “brought together three key stakeholders: the Puente Project in California, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, and the Public Broadcasting Service” (Catch the Next, 2018c). The Dream Catchers program was unique because of the tailored curriculum to students throughout Texas (Doran & Singh, 2018). For example, while colleges in South Texas focused primarily on Latinx studies, Dallas and Houston learning communities also studied African American or Asian literature (Doran & Singh, 2018).

In 2014, the THECB reported that Catch the Next “and its partner institutions work closely with Hispanics and other underserved students in community colleges who have been placed in developmental education. Counseling and mentoring provide support, engagement, and empowerment for students” (THECB, 2014). The goal of the Catch the Next program was to implement a learning community in Texas community colleges focused on persistence, graduation, and college transfer (Catch the Next, 2018b). THECB (2014) noted the success of learning communities in 2014, specifically noting how the Catch the Next initiative helped students who identified as Hispanic with the persistence and completion of developmental and gateway courses.

Early on in Catch The Next’s history, the THECB reported how the program was succeeding in a national journal for developmental education. THECB (2014) stated:

Texas data analysis results indicate this program is very successful. Eighty-three percent of students in its Integrated Reading and Writing (IRW) successfully completed remedial study and enrolled in college-credit bearing courses; ninety-one percent of students who enrolled in entry level English course successfully completed the course. In Texas, where more than 80% of Hispanics who enroll in community college do not obtain a degree, these outcomes demonstrate that this model provides an opportunity to counter the high drop-out rate in community colleges. Programs such as the ones described previously are clearly making significant strides toward increased persistence, not only in developmental education, but also in college credit-bearing coursework leading to completions.

(p. 34)

This finding is important because it shows the early success of Catch the Next, whose programming influenced the current Ascender model.

CSP in Ascender. As an act of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000), Catch the Next provides a list of culturally relevant texts on their website (Catch the Next, 2018b). In her qualitative study of the Puente Project, where she interviewed faculty and read student narratives, Rendón (1994) noted the importance of validating students who identify as culturally diverse. Teachers can validate students through solidarity, reciprocity, and support (Wilde, 2007). As noted in my Theoretical Framework, Ascender's use of CSP steps away from the Black and White binary, giving educators the opportunity to highlight what Paris (2012) acknowledged as the multiple struggles toward education.

Validation in Ascender. One instructional piece Ascender includes in their programming is the validation of students. Rendón (1994) noted that validation could occur in class, out of class, or with interpersonal interactions with friends, parents, and siblings. Although validation is most effective in the first year of college, it should continue. Rendón (1994) noted "validation is an enabling, confirming and supportive process initiated by in-and out-of-class agents that fosters academic and interpersonal development" (p.16). Part of this process is valuing everyone's presence, or as hooks (1994) stated, "any radical pedagogy must insist that everyone's presence is acknowledged" (p. 8). As Acevedo-Gil, et al. (2015) noted in their research, validation included caring interaction, high expectations, relating to social identity, peers relating to social identity, and improving skill sets. In contrast, students noted invalidation regarding their placement in DE, as well as experiencing deficit or demeaning pedagogy.

Deficit and demeaning pedagogy were types of academic invalidation noted by Acevedo-Gil, et al. (2015). A deficit or demeaning pedagogy is reminiscent of what Rose (1989) stated decades ago:

Through all of my experiences with people struggling to learn, the one thing that strikes me the most is the ease with which we misperceive failed performance and the degree to which this misconception both reflects and reinforces the social order. (p. 205)

Rose (1989) reminds educators of the cyclical nature of misconceiving students' performances as failures, which reinforces previous misconceptions. One way to reduce misconceptions may be to see the representation of one's own experiences on campus.

Rendón (2002) noted how the Puente Project model used culturally responsive curriculum and had instructors who affirmed students' voices, reached out to students who needed academic assistance, honored and validated students' subjective knowledge, and affirmed students' cultures and personal experiences. Catch the Next has been in place in Texas since 2012 when they initially mirrored the Puente Project (Catch the Next, 2018c). Recently in 2018, the Ascender program was unveiled. Investigating the curricular choices of this specific learning community design and sharing lessons learned would benefit other DE literacy stakeholders in Texas because a primary goal of Ascender is persistence (Catch the Next, 2018c). This goal of persistence was achieved in tandem with the goal of a "rigorous, culturally-relevant curriculum across multiple courses/disciplines (learning communities)" (Catch the Next, 2017, PowerPoint Slide 6). Ascender's focus on culturally relevant materials ties to the following section, which focuses on critical pedagogy.

Critical Pedagogy

My theoretical framework, CSP, highlights the need for educators to incorporate the critical examination of agency and language practices valued in learning settings (Alim & Paris, 2017). Therefore, works from several critical pedagogy theorists are also used to inform this study. I elected to focus on work that included the common themes of varied identities, hope, and using a critical lens to understand power relations involved with language norms and expectations because these themes acknowledge the varied experiences of students. Educators' acknowledgment of the varied cultural and language experiences students bring to the classroom is rooted in Dewey's (1963) assertion that the participation of the learner should help inform the learning process. Critical pedagogy often focuses on how individuals and collectives relate to both cultural and economic structures (Blake & Masschelein, 2003). Giroux (2011) noted how critical theory is a "self-conscious critique" which focuses on revealing imperfections through dialogue. This section navigates how critical pedagogy informs CSP.

Critical pedagogy focuses on the asymmetrical power structures evident in education (Dubois, 1901; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1978; Greene, 1988; hooks, 1994; Irizarry, 2017; Shor, 1996). For example, Greene referred to critical pedagogy as an "underlying and explicit intent and commitment to the unwavering liberation of oppressed populations" (Blake & Masschelein, 2003, p. 10). Critical pedagogy also explores how the hidden curriculum impacts students' educational experiences (Bergenhengouwen, 1987; Case, 2017; Giroux, 2011; Kentli, 2009; McLaren, 2017). Giroux (1978) shared:

What students learn in school is more determined by the hidden curriculum than from the official curriculum. The hidden curriculum here refers to those unstated norms, values, and beliefs transmitted to students through the underlying structure of schooling, as opposed to the formally recognized and sanctioned dimensions of the schooling experience. In other words, the hidden curriculum refers to those norms and values usually not talked about in teachers' statements of objectives or goals, even though such norms and values are implicitly and effectively taught in their classrooms (p. 148).

It is crucial to talk about hidden curriculum in relation to students entering postsecondary because students enrolled in community college have reported a lower perceived structure when compared to their high school settings, along with infrequent feedback and variability (Karp & Bork, 2014). This section also notes the impact of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986; 1991; Giroux, 1981; 1988; McLaren; 2017) and emancipatory aspects (Dewey, 1963; Dubois, 1901; Freire, 1970) in education. I begin this section by situating how a critical lens can benefit students enrolled in DE coursework.

Critical Lens in DE

If DE is intended to foster both social and emotional growth alongside educational attainment (NADE, 2018), then providing a critical lens to instruction will help students better understand how to use a critical lens in and outside of the DE classroom. Critical pedagogy challenges educators and researchers to acknowledge barriers to educational access, classism, or other hidden curricula that may create impediments to success (Bergenhengouwen, 1987; Case, 2017; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2011; hooks, 1994; Kentli, 2009; McLaren, 2017; Shor, 1996) and these barriers could be

subtle and ingrained in colleges, which makes them challenging to identify. McLaren (2017) viewed the hidden curriculum of postsecondary courses as a way to promote representations in curricular choices that benefit the dominant group and exclude the subordinate groups. Additionally, oppressions can vary from gender and race to more nuanced factors including gender identity, ability, sexuality, or even immigrant status (Case, 2017). It is crucial that educators not only value individual voices but also focus on inclusion (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994).

Power in DE. Shor's (1996) account of using a Dewey-Freire inspired pedagogy focused on power relations showed classrooms as areas of traditionally unequal power. Shor focused on shifting power relations in the classroom and noted, "students are creative, intelligent beings, not plants or blank slates, or pegboards for teacherly hammering" (1996, p. 12). Shor's shift in power relations focuses on disrupting the banking system of education (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1997; hooks, 2003). Freire (1970) noted that this banking system aims to force oppressed communities to integrate into the aspirations and definitions of the dominant class. hooks (2003) referred to this as "a microcosm of dominator culture," where educators treat their classrooms like a mini-country and share knowledge in whatever way the educator sees fit (p. 85). Instead of filling students with the narration of the dominant class, educators should focus on what students bring to the classroom, allowing students to teach and be taught, which mirrors Shor's (1996) redistribution of power. This aspect of critical pedagogy ties to Irizarry's (2017) recent study on CSP, which noted how students chose materials related to marginalized groups, showing how students that identified as Hispanic wanted curriculum tied to their experiences.

Several scholars noted asymmetrical power relations (Avila & Moore, 2012; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; DuBois, 1901; Janks, 2018; Lewison, Flint, & Sluys, 2002). For example, Bowles and Gintis (1976) noted how asymmetrical power is a result of parental class and socioeconomic status, a disconnect between education and the workforce, and an educational focus on service. This asymmetry is not new. For example, DuBois (1901) noted that, while public schools were beneficial, one out of every five dollars was spent on African American students' education. The next section notes how critical pedagogy informs critical literacy.

Critical Literacy

Educators have an opportunity to present readings and discussions about power and hidden curriculum, pedagogical choices that would impact students systemically disadvantaged due to inequitable resources. Critical literacy affords an opportunity for “disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints, focusing on sociopolitical issues, and taking action and promoting social justice” (Lewison, et al., 2002, p. 382). Disrupting the commonplace asks students to look at language and texts using new lenses and disrupting the status quo (Lewison et al., 2002; Shor, 1999). Interrogating multiple viewpoints offers students the opportunities to look at contradictory perspectives, dominant discourses, and looking for voices that have been silenced or missing. Focusing on sociopolitical issues affords students the opportunity to examine and challenge power systems and use literacy in a way that informs cultural citizenship and the politics of daily life. Finally, taking action and promoting social justice occurs when students challenge privilege or injustice, focused on how language can maintain or disrupt systems of domination (Lewison, et al., 2002). Informed by

Freire (1970), critical literacy fights against a pedagogy of oppression by liberating learners to actively question power relationships related to language use. For example, Brauer (2018) noted, “students need to ask not only who tells the story but also who gets to tell the story, access the story, or own the story” (p. 635). These questions would afford students and educators an opportunity to question the power relationships of authors, stories, and access. The following sections note the legitimacy of identity, the understanding of power and privilege, sociolinguistic perspectives, and cultural capital.

Legitimacy of identity. Literacy instruction has the potential to not only enrich students' lives but also provide legitimacy to their identities and background knowledge (Comber, 2015). This instruction can vary based on students served. For example, Kazembe (2017) noted, “an important, practical component of adult literacy instruction involves linking course learning outcomes to broader academic outcomes and the real world” (p. 210). Therefore, by providing texts that connect with students’ experiences and background knowledge, learning outcomes can be grounded in students’ experiential understanding. These texts, as Irizarry (2017) previously noted, can be culturally sustaining when built on the cultural experiences of students.

Power and privilege. Janks (2018) noted how educators could use critical literacy as a way to examine power and privilege. Avila and Moore (2012) noted that, although there are a variety of ways educators use critical literacy, a common component is asking students how to “examine and question the practices of how rule systems are organized and the systems affecting the social fields of everyday life” (p. 28). Quality literacy instruction involves an understanding of the discourses, values, and viewpoints of a particular group or community, which can create language patterns resistant to outside

criticism (Gee, 2005; Rueda, 2011). Differentiation in literacy instruction can include aspects such as cultural and linguistic diversity, motivation, literacy proficiency, or even technological literacies (Jang, Henretty, & Waymouth, 2018). Therefore, quality literacy instruction also involves understanding the spectrum of experiences and understandings students bring to the literacy classroom.

Fairclough (1993) defined discourse as the spoken and written use of language, as well as other modes including non-verbal communication and gestures. To examine these critically, Fairclough (1993) argued that we must look at how social and cultural structures and practices are impacted and informed by both power relations and power struggles. Similarly, Bishop (2014), who referred to critical literacy as a political battleground, stated:

Critical literacy uses texts and print skills in ways that enable students to examine the politics of daily life within contemporary society with a view to understanding what it means to locate and actively seek out contradictions within modes of life, theories, and substantive intellectual positions. (p. 52)

Bishop's (2014) exploration of contradictions affords students an opportunity to examine the lens, worldview, and stance authors and writers take when composing texts (Bishop, 2014).

Sociolinguistic perspectives. Critical literacy theory connects to work done in social learning perspectives including sociolinguistic approaches to literacy (Tracey & Morrow, 2012). Social learning perspectives focus on how behavior occurs, in part, due to social learning (Bandura & Walters, 1963). To best understand how critical literacy theory applies to developmental literacy courses, it is necessary to understand how

research noted sociolinguistic perspectives in literacy. After noting Giroux's (1988) views on the generation of knowledge, this section briefly covers cultural capital and discourse.

Sociolinguistic perspectives focus on the shared generation of knowledge. Giroux (1988) stated:

Equally significant would be an analysis of how dominant modes of discourse in educational practice are constructed, sustained, and circulated outside of schools. For instance, critical educators need to do more than identify the language and values of corporate ideologies as they are manifested in school curricula; they also need to deconstruct the processes through which they are produced and circulated. (p. 103)

Cultural capital. Giroux's (1988) focus on understanding the outside language practices that impact students ties to Freire's (1970) problem-posing pedagogy, which acknowledges the importance of communication and discourse when co-creating knowledge. Giroux (1981; 1988) argued that cultural capital exists in education at an institutional level, which can impact the social relations of the community. Bourdieu's (1991) assertion noted that leaders and change-makers gain a position of power based on their access to capital. Educators can promote students' feelings of empowerment by promoting and recognizing social and cultural capital. As Bourdieu (1986) stated, "the profits which accrue from membership in a group are the basis of the solidarity which makes them possible" (p. 22). Educators can reinforce this membership by embracing and acknowledging the cultural capital that students already have, as opposed to just acknowledging their institution's social capital (Giroux, 1981; 1988), an

acknowledgement and empowerment of cultural capital that aligns with CSP (Alim & Paris, 2017). Greene (1988) stated:

Education in a free society to empower students regarding what they are doing, being mindful, conceptualize and share meanings, and make varied sense of their lived worlds. It is through education that preferences may be released, languages learned, intelligences developed, perspectives opened, possibilities disclosed. (p. 12)

Greene shared the transformative aspects of education and the capital it provides students, as they make sense of their worlds.

Language and identity. Giroux (1997) noted that critical pedagogy is an approach that enables students to use knowledge and skills to reclaim their identities. This reclamation includes acknowledging varied discourses, knowledge production, and knowledge acquisition (Giroux, 1997). Discourse and identity are interconnected. Gee (1990) stated that discourses “are ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, beliefs, attitudes, social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes” (p. 142). Janks (2010) stated that we acquire discourses by taking on the ways of being in a particular community and entering new communities can be met with a feeling of dissonance. As a result, language is not neutral because it constructs realities and subjectivities. This section succinctly notes how identity interacts with discourse communities, as well as community membership.

Discourse. Rules of discourse, including habits of speech and social norms, are acquired when learners are young and make a significant impact on their future (Tracey & Morrow, 2012). Language has the power to give someone information, and it has the

potential to share a perspective based on one's own experience (Gee, 2013). Heath's (1990) work with family literacy practices emphasized the nature of socialization in families and its impact on literacies. Her work noted sociocultural groups in a way that was not considered deficient, but varied (Heath, 1990). Stating that there was no "single black experience," Heath (1990) sought to understand the varied experiences of three communities, resulting in a spectrum of experiences and patterns that mirrored how parents and family members were previously socialized (p. 188). Identity is socially constructed and influenced by cultural narratives, traditions, or context (Reason & Davis, 2005). Instructors can avoid deficit-oriented assumptions by changing patterns of conversations with students, promoting varied interpretations based on lived experiences (Hull & Rose, 1990), a pluralistic view of experiences that mirrors the goals of CSP (Alim & Paris, 2017).

Identity and discourse communities. Janks (2010) explained how "discourses speak us" when we are interacting with members of the same discourse community (p. 65). This communication occurs because our understandings of the world do not need editing in that particular context. Bourdieu (1991) refers to this exchange of information as an economic exchange, or linguistic market, where varieties of the same language are valued differently based on context. Language communities have carried cultural discourse norms for interaction (Janks, 2010). CSP honors multiple language practices (Alim & Paris, 2017), which echoes Janks' (2010) assertion that there should be an argument against monolingualism, noting how identity and discourse are related.

Identity and community membership. Identity is not static, but a dynamic process informed by a membership to different communities (Janks, 2010). Paris (2012)

noted how CSP honors and extends the language and literacy practices of students. Embracing the hybridity and fluidity of identity involves not assigning someone to a particular community but accommodating the language practices and identities of students (Janks, 2010). Dialogue is imperative to developing relationships in both school and society (Freire, 1970) and discussing the fluidity of identity has the potential to incorporate students' experiences and cultural practices into classroom discussions and assignments. Identity and the representation of one's identity is an important factor for students who identify as Hispanic (Acevedo-Gil et al., 2015; Hagedorn et al., 2007; Nuñez et al., 2010; Rendón, 1994; Santos & Acevedo-Gil, 2013). Part of this representation and validation is a student's understanding of his or her identity in relation to the community (Nuñez et al., 2010). Embracing the identity of students and noting the fluidity and hybridity of identity would encourage the acknowledgement of varied language and cultural practices (Janks, 2010).

Language as power. The mastery of language holds power in educational settings. Alexie (1998) once discussed how he grew up on the Spokane Indian Reservation, where his family survived on irregular paychecks and food from government surplus. Reflecting on his experiences as an avid young reader, Alexie referred to himself as arrogant and lucky, explaining that his love for reading stemmed from one purpose: "I was trying to save my own life" (p. 3). There can be an imbalance of literacy resources in the United States that results in what McLaren (2017) refers to as domination. This domination exists "when relations of power established at the institutional level are systematically asymmetrical" (p. 64). We can adjust this asymmetry by providing equitable resources to communities. Additionally, noting the

power of languages, not just Standard English, affords students the opportunities CSP provides, which can honor their cultural heritage and language practices (Alim & Paris, 2017).

Varied language practices. There is also power in acknowledging varied language practices. Freire (1970) noted how students and educators have a joint responsibility to co-create knowledge. By acknowledging varied student language practices, educators can help co-create this knowledge. Co-creation allows practitioners to do what Ladson-Billings (2014) implored: we should be learning from and not merely about students.

Language as capital. Educators need to encourage their peers to acknowledge and honor a variety of language practices (Alim and Paris 2017; Freire, 1970; Janks, 2010). Research also shows that in order for students to be able to participate equitably in our global society, practice with language and communication skills is imperative (Anyon, 2005; Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; Shipka, 2005). These skills provide educational capital that allows students to interact with others using a variety of discourses and digital modes, increasing the chances of economic prosperity. Cope and Kalantzis (2009) reminded educators that, “whether the rhetoric is based on notions of equity or equality, education continues to fail to meet these promises” (p. 109). However, providing access to literacy skills and demands that can improve educational opportunity and experiences is a step in the right direction. As Shipka (2005) noted, “composition courses present students with the opportunity to begin structuring the occasions for, as well as the reception and delivery of, the work they produce” (p. 278). Therefore, literacy courses

are an opportunity to use access to literacy skills and demands in a way that will provide transferable skills for a variety of communication settings.

Critical Literacy in Developmental Education

Studies have been conducted examining the positive impact of critical literacy in the developmental education classroom (Lesley, 2001; Lesley, 1997; Hull & Rose, 1990). However, Stein (2005) later discussed the lack of evidence of research in developmental education. Stein (2005) noted, “and it would seem that any developmental education theory for use in classrooms where the students are predominantly Latino would need to draw from the strengths of a variety of theoretical approaches that have already been created in different fields” (p. 85). My instrumental case study adds to the literature because it shares educational theories used by educators serving a population that primarily identifies as Hispanic using the lens of CSP. This section notes research on redesigning instruction to meet the needs of students, teaching transferable skills, and a need for continued research.

Redesign to meet the needs of students. hooks (2003) argued that educators who do the best work are consistently willing to serve their students’ needs. Lesley (2001) worked as a coordinator of a developmental literacy course, where she moved from isolated skills to restructuring the curriculum to be more constructivist and critical in nature. Lesley’s redesign focused on metacognitive skills including reflection, awareness of the reading process, and reconstructing identities as both writers and readers. Similarly, Shipka (2011) noted how educators could guide students through questioning and sharing various composing tools to better understand the appropriate context and sociocultural setting for certain composition projects. A metacognitive

approach of knowing how, when, and what rhetorical tools to employ could help students enrolled in developmental coursework navigate future credit-bearing courses as well.

Transferable skills. DE literacy courses are an opportunity to use access to literacy skills and demands in a way that will provide transferable skills. As Shipka (2005) explained, “composition courses present students with the opportunity to begin structuring the occasions for, as well as the reception and delivery of, the work they produce” (p. 278). By providing opportunities for students to produce work with an audience in mind or examine stances taken by authors or perceived authority figures critically, this instruction affords students the opportunity to dismantle what Rose (1989) referred to as the social order. NADE (2018) stated that DE should aim to “facilitate partnerships between educators, employers, and the community at large” (p. 1). I argue that using a critical lens in developmental literacy coursework affords students the opportunity to situate the skills and knowledge they possess as assets to employers and their communities.

A need for continued research. Although several studies have been conducted incorporating a critical lens in DE literacy, there is still a need for continued research on the curricular choices of DE stakeholders, specifically on the inclusion and representation of populations served. Cox (2018) noted, “much of the current research on large-scale developmental education reform leaves the details of classroom-level instructional practice unexamined” (p. 94). This study helps to fill that gap in the literature by providing data explaining classroom-level instructional choices that foster inclusivity and representation. Moreover, it adds to the literature by explaining these instructional choices, as well as the perceptions of students and faculty, using a CSP lens.

Integrated Reading and Writing

Teaching reading and writing together is not necessarily a new concept. Tierney and Pearson (1983) noted that both reading and writing are acts of composing, which include: planning, drafting, aligning, revising, and monitoring. This section briefly covers integrated reading and writing (INRW), its focus on reciprocity, and current trends regarding developmental literacy and INRW in Texas.

Reciprocity

A reciprocal approach affords instructors the opportunity to compare acts of composing as readers and writers. Other theorists discussed the need for both readers and writers to make meaning. Bartholomae and Petrosky (1986) summed this up by stating the following:

The overriding pedagogical problem with the concept of a single, identifiable main idea that all readers can agree upon is that it denies readers their own transaction with a text, and it denies them the understanding that reading is such a transaction rather than an attempt to guess at a meaning that belongs to someone else. (p. 12)

Bartholomae and Petrosky's (1986) assertion provides students the opportunity to examine the relationship between a reader and a text, understanding that readers construct or reconstruct meaning as they read. This approach builds from Rosenblatt's (1994) Transactional Theory of Reading and Writing. Rosenblatt's (1994) approach highlighted how "human activities and relationships are seen as transactions in which the individual and social elements fuse with cultural and natural elements" (p. 924). Rosenblatt (1994)

and Iser (1972) also noted that meaning does not inherently exist in the text. Instead, readers make meaning in the transaction between the reader and the text.

A reciprocal understanding of reading and writing is part of the foundation of INRW (Goen & Gillotte-Tropp, 2003). San Francisco State University piloted one of the noted models of INRW. The course used self-reflective activities to focus on how reading and writing intersect, breaking down the potential barrier between the reception and production of texts (Goen-Salter, 2008).

Texas INRW. Texas has its own approach to INRW instruction. THECB stated that INRW courses are “a developmental education model that combines two separate semester-long remedial courses into one, shortening the timeframe to developmental education completion and helping students make connections between the skills taught in both classes” (THECB, 2016, p. 6). As part of Texas’ 60 x 30 model, INRW courses are considered an Intensive College Readiness Model that was recommended to scale in 2016 (THECB, 2016).

Accelerated approach. THECB has also mandated using an accelerated approach by merging the two highest level courses (DE reading and DE writing) into one course (Gerber, Miller, Ngo, Shaw, & Daughtery, 2017). The INRW mandate both shortens the sequence of coursework for students enrolled in DE literacy courses and structurally integrates the two reading and writing courses (Gerber, et al., 2017). THECB’s requirement echoes studies that advocate for accelerating students through remedial coursework (Bailey, 2009a; Edgecombe, Jaggars, Xu, & Barragan, 2014; Edgecombe, Jaggars, Baker, & Bailey, 2013).

Reactions to acceleration. There are mixed reactions from stakeholders regarding acceleration and concern is often regarding the reduction in class time (Bickerstaff & Raufman, 2017; Paulson & Holschuh, 2018; Paulson, Van Overschelde, Sarker, Reynolds, & Cottman, 2018; Saxon, Martirosyan, & Vick, 2016). In an article of best practices and challenges in INRW, Saxon et al. (2016) found that balancing the focus of instruction was a top concern. Respondents found it challenging to balance time on the two subjects, address students with asymmetrical needs, and fully integrate reading and writing. Paulson and Holschuh (2018) noted that a primary reason INRW is beneficial is because it focuses on the interrelatedness of pedagogy and shared language practices, not because literacy experiences are “artificially truncated due to time” (p. 36). Staff in Virginia and North Carolina expressed concerns regarding the inclusion of all materials, activities, and assignments previously covered when six hours of developmental literacy became four (Bickerstaff & Raufman, 2017). Similarly, Schnee and Shakoor’s (2016) interviews with students enrolled in developmental education advocated for additional time in developmental coursework, calling remediation a “time to fail and learn from that failure in a supportive environment” (p. 107). Although studies have shown that accelerated models of developmental instruction get students through courses in a shorter timeframe, there have been concerns about students’ performance when completing college-level assignments (Hodara & Jaggars, 2014).

House bill 2223. In Texas, recent mandates magnified this acceleration of DE literacy. Recently, the THECB (2018) mandated that developmental literacy courses use a co-requisite model approach. House Bill 2223 requires that:

A certain percentage of underprepared students enrolled in developmental education be reported as enrolled in a corequisite model, which allows the student to enroll in the entry-level college course but requires co-enrollment in a developmental education course/intervention designed to support the student's successful completion of the college-level course. (THECB, 2018, p. 1)

One example of coursework changes from this mandate could be students enrolled concurrently to receive DE support while taking a credit-bearing course. Concurrent support likely increases the need for coordination among faculty, as Bers (2018) reported in a chapter on developmental English, that even traditional “integrated courses require collaboration among faculty and require eliminating the silos of reading and writing as separate faculty” (p.14). Currently, the field site for this study uses a corequisite model in their learning community, which places students in an English 1301+ course, with an additional lab component. The English 1301+ course focuses primarily on non-fiction pieces.

INRW courses serving populations that identify as minorities. Although several studies have examined INRW from a national or state level, less have focused on students from minority populations. Research does show that combining reading and writing coursework has a positive effect on the persistence students who identify as English as a Second Language (Hodara, 2012). Doran (2015) argued that research does not currently provide the information needed to determine if developmental education impacts students who identify as Hispanic, therefore stakeholders should focus on what issues are salient to students who identify as Hispanic. Moreover, using a lens of CSP

provides context for acknowledging the varied language practices of students (Alim & Paris, 2017).

Conclusion

There are currently gaps in the research on inclusive instruction in developmental education. Studies that focus on the persistence of students who identify as Hispanic are prevalent, but there are not many studies focused on curricular choices in developmental literacy courses with students who identify as Hispanic. Moreover, as noted in this review of literature, some qualitative studies have been conducted on developmental literacy instruction for students who identify as Hispanic (Alva & Padilla, 1995; Arellano & Padilla; Rendón, 1994; Nuñez, et al., 2010; Washington, et al., 2010), but these studies focused on faculty or interviewed students at selective universities. Doran (2015) and Doran and Singh (2018) focused on community college instruction, but interviewed faculty and administrators. My instrumental case study focuses on both students and faculty in one community college.

Although previous research has focused on learning communities, INRW, and students who identify as Hispanic independently, my instrumental case study looks at the intersection of these three factors. Furthermore, as previously noted, DE reform often focuses on large-scale changes, as opposed to what happens in the classroom (Cox, 2018). This study provides a window into perceptions of classroom-level instructional practices, giving an opportunity to learn from others in developmental literacy coursework. Additionally, learning from students through focus groups is a departure from previous studies on Catch the Next programming (Doran, 2015; Doran and Singh, 2018; THECB, 2014) or the Puente Project (Rendón, 1994). As noted by Crisp et al.

(2015), research must be conducted to better understand the success of students who identify as Hispanic because “findings reveal a need for clarity regarding the role of participation in various types and forms of academic and social activities in supporting or hindering academic outcomes” (p. 264). This study affords educators and researchers an understanding of how students and faculty perceive and experience the support of the Ascender learning community.

There is also a need for studies conducted in DE courses that have a focus on critical literacy. Duncan-Andrade (2009) noted how quality instruction is the most significant material resource an educator can provide to students, using the voices of students and educators. Specifically, he mentioned how teaching and discussing relevant material could provide resources students need to navigate the forces that impact their daily lives. In this study, I aimed to understand how students and faculty perceived and experienced inclusive and representative curriculum. This study adds to that body of research by providing a platform for the voices of students and faculty in one Ascender learning community.

By conducting my instrumental case study, I helped fill the aforementioned gaps in the literature in three crucial ways. First, my instrumental case study specifically looked at curricular choices at a classroom level, asking the perceptions and experiences of both students and faculty. These experiences and perceptions provided insight into what was valued by both students and faculty in the learning community. Second, this study was designed to help stakeholders working in and studying DE understand how participating in social activities and inclusive academic environments are perceived by students who identify as minorities enrolled in developmental coursework. The

experiences shared regarding cultural events, outside activities, and inclusive environments inform stakeholders about perceptions regarding strategies currently in place. There was also a need to fill the gap in research regarding the intersection of learning communities, INRW, and students who identify as Hispanic. Therefore, the third gap filled by this instrumental case study is an understanding of the student and faculty perceptions and experiences of inclusive instruction in developmental literacy courses, as well as learning communities, using the lens of CSP.

In the next chapter, Method, I outline my rationale for using an instrumental case study approach, as well as my field site, participants, instrumentation, data collection, and data analyses. I also noted my positionality as a researcher, intentionally placed before I shared raw data from focus groups and interviews in the Findings chapter.

3. METHOD

I begin this method section with the theoretical work that guided my methodological process. I then discuss the rationale for using a qualitative approach, as well as an explanation of my positionality as a researcher. Next, I outline the rationale for selecting an instrumental case study and provided descriptions of the field site, participants, instrumentation, data collection, data analyses, and trustworthiness. I conclude this chapter with a summary of my methodological choices.

Rationale for Qualitative Study

I used a qualitative study because qualitative research relies on the perception and understanding of a case or phenomenon (Stake, 2010). My instrumental case study was focused on the perceptions of participants in a learning community. I chose Stake's work to guide me through this instrumental case study because of his work's focus on expanding "experiential knowledge" through organization and word choice (p. 3). Stake's (2010) texts provided procedural overviews and examples of qualitative approaches that aligned well with my method. Additionally, my goals as a researcher aligned with Stake's (2010) explicit focus on advocacy and ethics. He noted, "all research is advocative" (Stake, 2010, p. 200).

This instrumental case study was guided by the following research questions:

1) What are the perceptions and experiences of students enrolled in a community college learning community?

1A) Do students enrolled in a community college learning community perceive that their developmental literacy courses promote an inclusive culture? If so, how?

1B) Do students enrolled in a community college learning community perceive that there is a representation of their identities and language practices in their developmental literacy course? If so, how?

2) What are the perceptions and experiences of faculty in a community college learning community?

2A) Do faculty working in a community college learning community perceive their developmental literacy courses promote an inclusive culture? If so, how?

2B) Do faculty working in a community college learning community perceive that there is a representation of students' identities and language practices in their developmental literacy course? If so, how?

Denzin's (2001) approach to interpretive research was reminiscent of Brinkmann and Kvale's (2014) comparison of researchers being miners or travelers. Researchers acting as miners unearth information, whereas researchers acting as travelers are on a journey and are open to ideas and themes that were not necessarily on the researcher's mind when creating a study. I kept in mind an openness to varied perspectives and experiences while speaking with participants, observing, and analyzing data.

Lather (2017) called her work an "approach to the generation and legitimation of knowledge about the world" (p. 223), noting there is not one best way to approach qualitative inquiry. This ties with the pluralistic nature of CSP, my theoretical framework (Alim & Paris, 2017). One purpose of this instrumental case study was to generate knowledge focused on student and faculty perceptions regarding an inclusive curriculum. I approached this instrumental case study from a naturalistic stance, open to

emergent themes that developed over time. Although I began with a theoretical framework to focus on, my goal was to be open to what emerged from the data collected.

I used a critical lens when approaching questions and observations, often reminding myself of possible biases or expectations. This approach included stepping back to observe the case I studied to understand where my subjectivity could play a part in my interpretation. Hernandez (2001) noted how objectivity is not necessarily the social truth because everyone experiences moments subjectively. Additionally, qualitative research can take a critical lens when focusing on critical inquiry, which “takes into account how our lives are mediated by systems of inequity such as classism, racism, and sexism” (Lather, 2017, p. 223). I kept Lather’s (2017) note of these mediating factors in my mind as I collected and analyzed data. Hernandez (2001) shared the crucial need for researchers to be “more cognizant of the politics of representation” (p. 83). Throughout this instrumental case study I worked to share what I learned from participants, as opposed to what I learned about them. This tied to Ladson-Billings’ (2014) previous work with CRP, which learned from African American students instead of about them. I have addressed and outlined my positionality to anchor an understanding of my experiences before the Findings chapter.

Positionality

I created my research questions in an effort to conduct a study that examined the participants’ views on inclusive curriculum in literacy courses. As much as I worked to be subjective, my experiences were a part of my analyses, observations, and understandings. I am a White heterosexual female who grew up in a middle-class neighborhood twenty minutes south of Detroit, Michigan. My marriage to a man who

identifies as an immigrant from Bangladesh provided me an opportunity to learn from and about cultural experiences I did not have as a child. However, I do not identify as Hispanic and chose to explicitly state this positionality before providing raw data in the findings chapter. This transparency and self-awareness was intended to provide readers an understanding of my potential biases and subsequent work to acknowledge them.

When approaching this instrumental case study, my aim was to find a developmental literacy course that used representative curriculum. Ascender provided these requirements while also affording me an opportunity to learn from students and faculty who identified as Hispanic. When I realized the Ascender learning community's programming aligned with CSP and my research questions, I was eager to be given an opportunity to observe and interact with participants. While initially designing my study, I was not aware I would be conducting my study at an HSI. I understood that this field site would provide perceptions from students and faculty who would primarily identify as Hispanic and was enthusiastic about learning from participants' perceptions and experiences. The tension of reporting raw data to allow readers to interpret themselves, as opposed to a colonialist stance of speaking for participants (Lather, 2017), was in the foreground of my work throughout the collection, analyses, and reporting processes. As Bourke (2014) stated, "just as the participants' experiences are framed in social-cultural contexts, so too are those of the researcher" (p. 2). I had to be mindful of my beliefs, cultural background, and understandings of factors including gender, socioeconomic status, and race when making observations and reflecting on my fieldnotes (Bourke, 2014).

Noting the field site's HSI status, it was my responsibility as a researcher to be aware of social forces, including race, gender, and class, and how these factors are either maintained or challenged in the participants' daily lives (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, 2011). This process had what Lather (2017) referred to as "a knowledge that recognizes the inevitable blind spots of our knowing" (p. 170). I used triangulation by consulting field notes, member checking with participants, and asking people who were not part of my study to look at what I had collected and interpreted to ensure I eliminated or corrected any "blind spots of knowing" (Lather, 2017, p. 170) when presenting or analyzing data. I have placed my positionality at the beginning of my Method chapter to anchor my positionality with the literature. Additionally, placing this information before presenting my findings provides readers the opportunity to understand how my experiences and unintended biases may be present, as well as the steps I took to remove bias. The intent of the findings chapter is to show events and conversations through incontestable description (Stake, 1995), rather than inferences.

Research Design: Instrumental Case Study

I conducted an instrumental case study to answer my research questions. Stake (1995) recommended an instrumental case study for inquiries that seek understanding of a question by studying a particular case. An instrumental case study uses one case to better understand a larger issue (Crowe, et al., 2011). For this instrumental case study, the case being studied was Catch the Next's Ascender program at one specific field site. The larger issue I wanted to better understand was the perceptions of inclusive curriculum in developmental literacy courses. Crowe, et al. (2011) suggested that an instrumental case study often looks at one typical case. I was able to better understand

how students and faculty perceived inclusive and representative curriculum by looking at a typical case- one learning community in one community college in south Texas.

Stake (1995) stated that a bounded system is an integrated system with moving parts. Stake (1995) noted how a bounded system's moving parts do not have to be rational or even working, but simply a part of a larger system. Stake (1995) also offered that people and systems are generally prospective cases, as opposed to events or processes. The case for this instrumental case study was one particular Ascender learning community in one community college in south Texas. The bounded system for this study was Ascender program as a whole, since curricular decisions made by the program had the potential to impact the case I selected to study.

I designed this instrumental case study approach, which was primarily informed by the work of Stake (1995; 2005; 2010). Stake (1995) explained that "a case study is expected to catch the complexity of a single case" (p. xi), which involves understanding both the complexity and the particularity of the case within specific circumstances. Stake (2010) showed how instrumental case studies focus on a smaller number of people but look deeply to understand participants' experiences. These events are simultaneously unique and common (Stake, 2010). As previously noted, Stake (1995) explained that an instrumental case study approach affords an opportunity to learn more about these perceptions through one typical case. The purpose of this case study was, in part, to better understand participants' unique perceptions of common experiences at one specific learning community.

Field Site

The field site for this instrumental case study was a learning community program housed in a community college in southern Texas. The community college described in this study was part of a larger system of several campuses located across the city. As previously noted, the rationale for using this specific campus was to observe a learning community with a programming description that suggested inclusive instruction may already be in place. The learning community was part of the Ascender program, which was created by Catch the Next (Catch the Next, 2018c). The community college the program was housed in has been designated an HSI by the U.S. Department of Education and the population served at the time of my study was over 75% Hispanic. Programs at the field site focused on areas including STEM, behavioral sciences, education, and the arts.

Participants

The participants who volunteered to take part in my instrumental case study included fifteen students and five faculty in the Ascender program at the field site. My goal was to learn from both faculty and student participants, hoping they would provide a variety of rich perspectives, experiences, and lessons learned. The participants in my study were what Stake (2010) referred to as key informants because they were already part of the field site before observations or interviews. By having conversations with stakeholders in the learning community, I was provided with perceptions and experiences related to Ascender as well as inclusive curriculum. The following names used for student and faculty participants are pseudonyms, as stated in the consent forms signed by all participants.

Student participants. I interviewed 15 students in a total of five focus groups. Four participants identified as male and 11 participants identified as female. Ages ranged from 18 years old to 21 years old. All of the student participants were in their first year of college and reported that this was their first learning community experience. Eight students identified as Hispanic, two identified as Latina/o, one identified as White and Hispanic, one identified as White, one identified as Mexican, and two participants elected to leave that space on their demographic form blank.

Recruitment of student participants. I announced the opportunity for focus groups in the fall and spring semester for one section of courses for both Mr. Lopez and Ms. Ramos. I originally planned to observe classes before announcing my study to the students. Due to scheduling issues, this was not possible for Mr. Lopez's course in the fall semester. The only day I was present in his course in fall semester was the day I announced my study. I brought flyers to class to pass out to students, which included information about the study, after scheduling a time with Mr. Lopez and Ms. Ramos to address their classes. Additionally, I told students about the focus groups at a holiday party in December. In the spring semester I conducted one more focus group of students, after bringing flyers to the classrooms of Mr. Lopez and Ms. Ramos. The following table outlines the participants who volunteered to participate for each of the five focus groups. I also included students' reported future majors, which was discussed in four of the five focus groups. This additional information is intended to help introduce the participants in a way that is more detailed than just demographic information. Pseudonyms are used for all participants in this study.

Table 1

Self-Reported Demographics for Student Participants

Focus Group	Participant	Ethnicity Given	Gender	Age	Reported Future Major
1	Antonella	Hispanic	Female	19	
1	Alejandro	Hispanic	Male	19	
1	Alessandra		Female	19	
2	Mia	Hispanic	Female	18	Nursing
2	Jazmin	Latina/o	Female	18	Biomedical Engineer
2	Josefina	Hispanic	Female	19	Teacher
2	Camila	White and Hispanic	Female	18	Nurse Practitioner
2	Isabel	Hispanic	Female	19	Journalism and Mass Communication
2	Carlos		Male	18	Petroleum Engineering
3	Tomas	Mexican	Male	19	Media and Digital Arts
4	Victoria	White	Female	20	Zoology
4	Joaquin	Hispanic	Male	21	Cybersecurity
4	Isabella	Hispanic	Female	18	Criminal Justice
5	Rebeca	Latino	Female	19	Criminal Justice
5	Juliana	Hispanic	Female	19	Registered Nurse

Notes: participant names were replaced with pseudonyms. Focus Group 1 did not discuss future career goals.

Faculty participants. I interviewed five faculty members. Two identified as male and three identified as female and the participants' ages ranged from 38-66 years old. All five participants had been part of a learning community before this year, with a range of teaching experience from seven to 33 years. Three participants identified as Hispanic and two identified as Latina/o.

Recruitment of faculty participants. I recruited all of the faculty participants via email. Initially, I contacted the literacy faculty who were part of Ascender: Ms. Ramos, Mr. Lopez, and Dr. Hernandez. All three of the faculty members volunteered to be in the study. The field site used to teach a traditional INRW course as part of the Ascender

learning community. Due to a state mandate, the course recently changed to an English 1301+ course, which was a freshman composition course with an extra lab component. Ms. Ramos and Mr. Lopez taught this new format. Conversations with Dr. Hernandez, who was not teaching in the Ascender program at the time of our conversation, focused on the traditional INRW model he used to teach.

The field site’s Ascender program paired this English 1301+ course with a Learning Frameworks course, which focused on study skills and time management. Once I spoke with the literacy faculty, I learned about the paired learning frameworks course, which also had both representative and literacy elements. Once I understood this connection, I also sent recruitment emails to the four faculty teaching Ascender’s learning frameworks courses. Two of the four faculty emailed me back and volunteered to participate. In Table 2, the participant demographics are outlined. These were self-reported demographics that faculty completed on their own. Additionally, I included the course taught in Fall 2018 to provide context in the Findings section. Dr. Hernandez, as previously noted, was not teaching in Ascender when I interviewed him.

Table 2

Self-Reported Demographics for Faculty Participants

Participant	Class Taught in Ascender in Fall 2018	Ethnicity Given	Gender	Age	Teaching Experience
Ms. Flores	Learning Frameworks	Latina	Female	54	20 years
Dr. Garcia	Learning Frameworks	Hispanic	Female	61	27 years
Dr. Hernandez	Previously INRW (did not teach in Ascender for Fall 2018)	Hispanic	Male	66	33 years
Mr. Lopez	English 1301+	Latino	Male	54	7 years
Ms. Ramos	English 1301+	Hispanic	Female	38	11 years

Ms. Flores. She taught three sections of learning frameworks for Ascender, which were all paired with Ms. Ramos. Ms. Flores was invested in the mentorship piece of Ascender, as she used to help pair students with mentors and also wrote a book about the experiences of mentors in the program. She identified as Latina and female.

Dr. Garcia. Previously, Catch the Next had a program called Dream Catchers, which was inspired by California's Puente Program (Doran & Singh, 2018). Dr. Garcia was the faculty member from this community college who initially went to California to see the Puente model. Dr. Garcia was teaching the learning frameworks course for Ascender at the time of the study. She was one of three learning frameworks instructors paired with Mr. Lopez and identified as a Hispanic female.

Dr. Hernandez. He used to teach the INRW sections of Ascender, but recently cycled out. Since he taught the INRW course before the transition to English 1301+, my discussion with Dr. Hernandez involved several novels that were no longer being used. His teaching experiences of Integrated Reading and Writing (INRW) occurred before the co-requisite model, which provided an opportunity to understand how the course had evolved over time due to state mandates. He identified as a Hispanic male and discussed several past initiatives and events that Catch the Next had provided to students.

Mr. Lopez. He was one of two INRW instructors who were working for Ascender at the time of this study. Mr. Lopez previously worked at the writing center and shared his previous experiences as a writer and dancer in the ballet with students in his course. He identified as a Latino male.

Ms. Ramos. She was one of two INRW instructors currently working for Ascender. Ms. Ramos identified as a Hispanic female and had been teaching for the past

11 years. She also taught an honors section of English 1302, a college-level composition course, in the Spring semester. During member check sessions in January I learned that at least one student participant was enrolled in this honors course.

Instrumentation

I implemented three main forms of instrumentation in my instrumental case study: a focus group protocol for students (Appendix A), an interview protocol for faculty (Appendix B), and a semi-structured field notebook for observations. I used a focus group protocol with students. The focus group protocol was similar to the interview protocol that was previously piloted. However, the questioning route, moderating techniques, and analysis were informed by the work of Krueger and Casey (2015).

I initially collected data from faculty using an interview protocol (Appendix B) as a way to meet with participants and get an understanding about their perceptions of the field site's literacy course. I asked intentionally open-ended questions to provide participants the chance to respond in a way that was not predetermined by my assumptions or biases. I followed the procedures of Krueger and Casey (2015) when creating my questioning route, as seen in Appendix C, Table C4. As previously noted, I intentionally phrased questions as open-ended to provide participants the chance to respond in a way that would not be tied to my potential assumptions or biases. The interview protocol's general format was created and tested in my pilot study (Appendix F). However, the content of the questions changed based on data collected. Although the initial protocol was focused on allyship, the protocol for this instrumental case study was focused on representative curriculum.

I used my field notebook during the general observation component, looking at the organization and context of the space (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). This step was important, as Cox (2018) noted that developmental education research needs a better understanding of classroom-level instructional practices. I carried this field notebook with me for interviews, observations, and reflections. My field notebook was also used to write memos in after interviews (Stake, 1995; 2005; 2010) and focus groups (Krueger & Casey, 2015). I used the field notebook to record observational notes, theoretical notes, and memo at end of site visits when applicable (Stake, 1995; 2005; 2010). I also elected to use my laptop to write up thick description of the field site and to reflect on what I observed in my notebook. I separated the memos by participant and I had a separate document for thick description for both the campus and surrounding area.

Emerson, et al. (2011) outlined how to jot notes in real time during observations, then refine these notes by composing narrative descriptions. Emerson et al. (2011) stated “In sitting down to compose fieldnotes in a fluid, ‘get it down quickly’ fashion, the fieldworker seeks to recall in as much detail as possible what he observed and experiences earlier that day” (p. 51). Therefore, I emphasized the importance of recording fieldnotes from my observation as soon as possible, often near the research site. I located several locations near the research site where I wore my noise-cancelling headphones and replayed and reconstructed the day’s events while they were still fresh in my mind. This included listening to audio I had just recorded to ensure that I captured the experience as I remembered it.

The process of listening to audio as soon as possible became helpful after my second faculty interview. For example, while interviewing Mr. Lopez, I asked a question

that prompted him to turn around and begin looking at files in his computer. This process distracted me, resulting in my question being met with silence and redirection. By immediately leaving the field site and listening to the audio while I recorded notes in my field notebook, I was able to reconstruct this scene on paper when it was fresh in my mind. This moment was significant because I may have misinterpreted the silence for something else when listening to audio days or weeks later.

Data Collection and Analysis Timeline

This section outlines the four phases of my data collection and analysis. This is intended to be an overview of the process, which is followed by detailed sections on both data collection and data analysis. Data collection and analysis was organized into four phases. Phase one, the introductory phase, lasted longer than I initially expected. It took nearly two months to get approval from the field site, which delayed my data collection process. I did not interview the current literacy instructors until early November. Classroom observations took place after our initial interviews, which meant I was able to observe Ms. Ramos two times and Mr. Lopez one time. This did not align with the intended number of three to five observations per instructor I outlined in my proposal. However, I learned that the students enrolled in the learning community were also expected to enroll in English 1302 with their learning community instructors. I asked the two literacy instructors if I could observe the beginning of the Spring 2019 semester, which afforded me more time to observe, confirm and disconfirm findings, and see how the learning community interacted with each other in the beginning of a new semester. By the end of data collection, I observed Ms. Ramos four times and Mr. Lopez five times.

I planned to collect data in three ways. First, I conducted five focus groups with students. Second, I interviewed DE literacy faculty and learning community faculty using the interview protocol. Third, I observed two of the learning community's DE literacy classrooms using field notebook for observational and theoretical notes. I also observed the campus of the field site to begin writing my thick description using field notebook for observational and theoretical notes. Thick description was recorded of the campus, classrooms, and surrounding community. I also memoed after each interview and observation. Phase one's analysis had two primary goals. First, I began thinking of holistic codes that I was observing or recording. Next, I looked through interview notes and memos for additional information regarding both salient themes and a thick description of the field site.

During phase two I focused on the perceptions of additional key informants. This phase began in late October when I began interviewing faculty and ended in the end of January with my last focus group. Data collection was focused on four main objectives, some of which were accomplished on the same day if I observed the same day as a focus group or interview. First, I conducted five student focus groups using the focus group protocol. Second, I interviewed three additional learning community faculty using an interview protocol. Third, I observed DE literacy classroom several times using field notebook for observational and theoretical notes. Fourth, I continued to observe campus of field site using field notebook for observational and theoretical notes. I memoed after each interview and observation. Data analyses began by looking through interview transcripts, focus group transcripts, and field notes for a priori and emergent codes. Next,

I examined my interview notes, focus group notes, and memos for additional information regarding both salient themes and a thick description of the field site.

During phase three I was focused on member checks and accurate representation. This phase took place during the fall semester in 2018 and in the beginning of Spring semester in 2019. Data collection was two steps. First, I conducted member checks with students from focus groups and faculty from interviews for any remaining questions or ambiguity remaining reading transcriptions. Next, I conducted additional observations in January 2019 to attempt to disconfirm findings in an effort to provide what I perceive to be accurate representation. Data analyses included coding field notes for a priori and emergent codes. I also looked through memos for additional information regarding both salient themes and a thick description of the field site. This phase concluded with a peer debrief for trustworthiness purposes.

Phase four, final analysis and reporting, occurred over two months, beginning in January and was completed in early March. While conducting data analyses, I organized the report, including vignettes and thick description. Next, I stepped away from the findings section so I could look at it with fresh eyes. This step was followed by additional edits, looking for thick description. I also met with my chair and my committee's methodologist during the analysis and reporting phases, discussing my plan and making sure I was following the appropriate procedures when reporting my findings. Finally, I edited the document based on the peer debrief, and feedback from my committee's chair and methodologist. Next, I submitted the completed document with the dissertation committee for feedback. The next section outlines my data collection process for this instrumental case study.

Data Collection

I used data collected in this study to answer the research questions on student and faculty perceptions and experiences in the learning community. Appendix C includes tables that illustrate how each research question and sub-question are answered using an aforementioned research instrument. Additional information on data collection can be found in Appendix C.

Focus group data collection. I created a similar overall procedure for focus groups, understanding that question generation and moderation techniques are unique to focus groups (Krueger & Casey, 2015). First, I went over the Institutional Review Board (IRB) consent form and collected signed consent forms and demographic information sheets. These were paper-clipped together to ensure the participant's corresponding demographic information was accurate. Additionally, because these participants were college students, I confirmed participants were 18 years old before beginning the focus group. I used the focus group protocol (Appendix A). Before the focus group started, there was time for students to eat pizza and talk with each other, or ask for clarification regarding my study before we began. I made sure to make small talk with the participants when we were eating or waiting to begin so students were comfortable interacting with me and had opportunities to ask questions.

I used the following steps, which were informed by the work of Krueger and Casey (2015). I started each focus group by welcoming participants, providing an overview of the study and general ground rules for conversation. The first question I asked provided students with an opportunity to share their experiences with the developmental literacy course. I made the first question a low-stakes question that

participants can answer in an effort to help students feel comfortable continuing to share information. I was also present in several of the students' classes for several times prior to the focus group in an effort to help students feel comfortable sharing.

The focus groups were digitally recorded and I used field notes to guide the interview and refer back to something a participant said earlier when appropriate. I also member checked during the interview by asking for clarification when needed (Stake, 1995; 2005; 2010). The focus groups closed with an oral summary of the conversation, as suggested by Krueger and Casey (2015). During this summary I asked for verification and made sure I did not miss any major points before concluding. The goal of these focus groups was not centered around an approach where all students would unanimously agree, but instead looking for how perceptions both vary by student and noting moments in the conversation where student perceptions are verified by peers.

After the focus groups were complete, I debriefed using my field notebook and memo formally afterward. During this time I would also note if there were students I wanted to have follow-up conversations with. I also member checked after transcribing the focus group data when there were remaining questions or ambiguity. Although the member checking in December happened within days of focus groups, some member checking occurred in January when classes resumed. In those instances, I listened to the audio of the focus groups while driving to the field site to remind myself of the conversation and reacquaint myself with the notes before meeting with students. I conducted five total focus groups with 15 student participants and member checked four students to learn more about their perceptions of Ascender.

Interview data collection. I conducted an initial interview with faculty participants to discuss their perceptions of their developmental literacy courses, noting discussions regarding inclusive and representative curriculum in their courses (Stake, 1995; 2005; 2010). Before the interview took place, participants filled out a demographics pre-interview form (Appendix D). The pre-interview form and recruitment email asked participants to bring any materials they feel best describe or represent their developmental literacy courses.

The following procedure outlines the interview process. First, I went over the IRB consent form and read it aloud. Next, I collected the signed consent form and the demographic pre-interview form to place in the participant's file folder. Occasionally faculty printed out the forms and filled them out before I arrived and I made sure to check that participants filled out the form. Next, I digitally recorded faculty interviews using a small recording device and cell phone for back up. I used interview protocol (Appendix B), which began with a welcome, overview of the study, and general information about how the interview will be conducted. Member checking occurred during the interview when I sensed any confusion or ambiguity. I wrote down notes during the interview on the interview protocol in an effort to stay engaged in the conversations, working to discover emergent themes while simultaneously working to encourage the participant to guide our conversation. I ended the interview with a debrief, making sure there was a perceived mutual understanding and that the participant had covered all of the information intended.

Immediately after each interview, I wrote reflections on the interview and conversations with the participant. This included writing any pressing notes when I

arrived in my car, followed by a longer note-taking process in a nearby coffee shop with noise cancelling headphones so I could listen to the audio. After making my initial notes, I sent the digital files to be transcribed at an IRB-approved service, who signed a non-disclosure agreement and promised to delete files after transcribing. Finally, I contacted participants, if needed, to member check remaining questions or any ambiguity after receiving a verbatim transcription of our conversation. I conducted interviews with five faculty members and conducted three member checks.

Observation data collection. I did not observe instruction in the literacy classrooms until after I conducted an initial interview with faculty, as noted in the interview data collection section. I shared my intent to have three to five observations for the two participants teaching literacy courses. While observing, I collected observation data by writing notes, illustrations, and questions in my field notebook. Before observing, the faculty and I discussed how this was not a program evaluation or a teaching evaluation. Instead, these observations were to provide context to what we discussed and allow students to know who I was before potentially volunteering for focus groups.

During the first observation, as guided by Dyson and Genishi (2005), my goal was to learn about the literacy course, inform the project design, and refine the data collection. My first observation focused on the structure and placement of the classroom, and other general observations about space, time, and people in the learning community's literacy course (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). After my first observation I used my field notebook to organize my thoughts and observations. After observations I often memored my experience formally in a coffee shop nearby.

A primary goal of the initial observation was to better understand the context of the study and the case. I wrote thick description, noting what Geertz (2008) referred to as “concrete social events and occasions, the public world of common life” and organized it so readers could discern descriptive interpretations (p. 38). Geertz (2008) described how writing thick descriptions was, in part, constructing other people’s constructions. Although providing a completely naturalistic description of the field site was improbable, I was mindful to remove the bias and unintentional interpretations when noted. Geertz (2008) referred to data collection as:

A multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which he must conceive to somehow to first grasp and then to render. (p. 34).

The process that Geertz (2008) called grasping and rendering took time and reflection. This often occurred when I was reflecting on the day and I would keep notes in my phone to transfer to my field notebook.

I intended to observe faculty participants teach their developmental literacy courses three to five times. However, the actual number of observations in the fall semester was fewer than I had initially planned for. Ms. Ramos was out of town for two conferences and also had a week of student meetings, so I was able to observe her three times in Fall 2018. Mr. Lopez and I met in November for an interview. After the interview, he wanted to check with his supervisor, as well as his students, before inviting me into his classroom. I was in his classroom once in the fall semester to introduce myself and explain the study. I also observed a holiday party at the end of the semester,

which was for all of the learning community. At this event I was able to recruit more students for focus groups and also confirmed that I would observe both of the literacy instructors as they transitioned the learning community from English 1301+ to 1302. I observed Mr. Lopez four additional times and Ms. Ramos two additional times. Because these occurred in mid-January, I used these observations to confirm and disconfirm any coding or look for any themes that emerged while coding my transcripts. The additional observations also afforded me an opportunity to observe each instructor three to five times.

I triangulated data by using multiple data sources (Lather, 2017). Additionally, I also asked a peer and two dissertation committee members look at the findings in an effort to provide data that was accurate and worked to lessen potential bias. I also observed the campus and literacy courses on several occasions to provide this thick description, as well as look for the use of inclusive or representative instruction. As Dyson and Genishi (2005) stated, “It takes literal time, as well as methodological work, to understand how such sites are rendered meaningful places by the people who live there” (p. 436). The tone of my thick description was also informed by Shor (1996), whose writings of field sites are what I aspire to create. The next section details how I analyzed the data I collected from focus groups, interviews, and observations.

Data Analyses

Data collected throughout interviews, focus groups, and observations were analyzed through the lens of CRP while also keeping in mind the core of my research questions: the perceptions of the case’s inclusivity and representation in developmental literacy. This was an investigation into the perceptions and experiences of students and

faculty. I conducted data analyses for the three forms of data collection: interviews, focus groups, and observations. Additional information on data analysis purposes and procedures can be found in Appendix C.

Coding process. My instrumental case study was primarily informed by Stake (1995; 2005; 2010). However, I used Saldaña's (2016) coding manual to guide me through the coding process. I used this text to refine my categorization of themes and coding processes. I briefly outlined the procedure for determining my study's themes and corresponding codes in this section and they are expounded upon in the findings chapter.

The coding process for focus groups, interviews and observations had two cycles and resulted in a refined understanding using a codebook (Appendix E). The codebook featured in vivo codes, emotions codes, values codes, and concept codes (Saldaña, 2016). Saldaña (2016) noted, "coding is the transitional process between data collection and more extensive data analysis" (p. 5). I found this to be true as I refined my codes before completing the second cycle of coding. Additionally, Saldaña (2016) urged readers to:

Not let those one or two codes that do not quite seem to fit anywhere frustrate you or stall your analytic work. Use these fragments as stimuli for deep reflection on the reason for their existence- if not their purpose- in the larger social scheme of things (p. 7).

This guidance helped me as I began to find unique codes unrelated to my research sub-questions. This process resulted in four themes, which each contained three to four corresponding codes. Saldaña (2016) noted that themes are not coded themselves, but "an outcome of coding, categorization, or analytic reflection" (p. 15). Although Saldaña (2016) was the primary source used to code and create my codebook, I also consulted

Krueger and Casey (2015) when navigating the subtle differences found in focus group analyses.

Focus group data analyses. I structured the general analysis process for focus groups to be similar to the analysis of interviews. I transcribed the focus group data, noting any themes or questions I had in my field notebook (Stake, 1995; 2005; 2010). Next, I wrote a short summary of each focus group, looking at potential areas where I needed more information (Krueger & Casey, 2015). This information was used to guide how I structured and moderated future focus groups (Krueger & Casey, 2015). For example, I found that the first focus group discussed future goals and noted this for future conversations. As a result, I asked students about their future goals when transferring to universities came up in conversation during later focus groups. Krueger and Casey (2015) provided strategies on prioritizing themes for focus groups, including frequency, extensiveness, specificity, intensity, participant perceptions of importance, and internal consistency (as a group and as individual participants). Krueger and Casey (2015) also focused on subtle differences in focus groups, including the time participants have to prepare when answering questions. The faculty had to respond quickly to my questions, but students in focus groups could have had time to think of answers and revise or edit their responses based on what their peers stated (Krueger & Casey, 2015). This was because, unlike interviews, students had time to process responses as others spoke. Faculty interviewees did not have that extra time to process.

I used Saldaña's (2016) coding manual when creating my codebook, specifically looking at the codebook structure and the operational definitions of coding categories. However, my goal when creating the codebook was to ensure I also kept the subtle

differences Krueger and Casey (2015) discussed in the forefront. I memoed these pieces before holistic coding and referred back to them before my cycle two coding took place.

I took a break between cycle one and cycle two coding, much like the interview coding process, to make sure I was approaching the coding from a fresh perspective. The focus group coding process overlapped with the final observations I scheduled. This was not planned, but I welcomed the opportunity to disconfirm or reaffirm codes in the focus groups. I also had one final focus group in the end of January, which had two participants. I waited until that was transcribed before moving on to cycle two coding.

Cycle two coding afforded me an opportunity to see the differences in the clusters of codes between students and faculty. This was not initially a cross-case analysis, but it became clear that the values each group attributed to Ascender were weighted differently. Although Krueger and Casey (2015) had several ways to prioritize focus group themes, the salient factors when coding my five focus groups were frequency, extensiveness, specificity, intensity, and participant perceptions of importance.

I then created a 98-page Word document that outlined all of the quotes from focus groups I coded, which were organized by code. These quotes were longer than the faculty codes because I left them nested in full conversations for context. I printed these quotes, cut them up, and placed quotes in the following categories: Promoting an Inclusive Culture, Representation of Students' Identities and Language Practices, Meaningful Instruction, Future Goals, High Expectations, and Student Stressors. The categories were then organized by codes present in order of frequency. During the findings draft process I took each category out one by one and made headings based on

the codes present in order of frequency. Next, I went one category at a time, one code at a time, and looked for commonalities in the quotes when structuring each section.

Interview data analyses. I began the analysis stage by coding interviews, and making notes in my field notebook when going through the transcription process. I coded transcribed documents, highlighted important statements, created clusters of meaning, and aggregated categorical data (Stake, 1995; 2005; 2010). I wrote a short summary of each interview, going question by question, to determine if there was additional information needed (Krueger & Casey, 2015). One noted addition was brought up in the first faculty interview, where Ms. Ramos talked about the experiences the student population had in what she referred to as “feeder schools.” I made sure to find a way to ask the other participants about this during the interview. Often, feeder schools were mentioned in relation to conversations regarding preparedness of students in the literacy courses.

I elected to member check with participants after reading the transcribed documents (Stake, 1995; 2005; 2010). When member checking was needed, I emailed participants, asking if they could briefly meet to discuss any questions I had regarding our previous conversation. After discussing the previously signed IRB form with the participant and answering any questions, I discussed items I wanted to learn more about or clarify, then recorded and took notes about our discussion. I met in person for member checking, with the exception of Dr. Hernandez, who requested that I member checked via email.

Once I conducted all of the interviews, I prioritized analytic themes, looking for frequency, specificity, intensity, participant perceptions of importance, and consistency

of answers. I also looked for emergent codes and evidence of a priori codes. I focused on what Stake (1995) referred to as emergent correspondence and patterns, working to ensure understandings are guided by conversations with participants and refined as observations and conversations transpire. When coding these multiple realities, Stake (1995) discussed analyzing to understand. Analyses included aggregating categorical data and looking for disconfirming or corroborating incidents using a sense of consistency.

Initially, my goal was to look at coding from a holistic perspective (Saldaña, 2016). I used the same documents for each round of coding, using Saldaña's (2016) coding manual as my guide for codes. My process began by coding individual transcripts and writing notes about the process in my notebook. The coding categories from Saldaña's (2016) text used in cycle one were in vivo codes, emotions codes, values codes, and concept codes. These codes related to my study because emotions and values align with an understanding of perceptions and experiences. In vivo codes were taken directly from text and concept codes were used to describe big picture items.

I created a codebook (Saldaña, 2016), which included the categories and prompts suggested to refine my understanding of what a code is, and what criteria would exclude something from being coded. This process included going to literature to back up my coding choices. I used this refined understanding to conduct cycle two of coding.

Next, I created a 70-page Word document that contained all of the quotes from faculty I coded. I organized these quotes by code and participant. I printed these quotes and cut them up. Next, I placed quotes in the following categories: Promoting an Inclusive Culture, Representation of Students' Identities and Language Practices,

Epistemological Choices, and Potential Stressors. These categories were then organized by codes present in order of frequency. During the findings draft process I took each category out one by one and made headings based on the codes present in order of frequency. Next, I went one category at a time, one code at a time, and looked for commonalities in the quotes when structuring each section.

I took several steps to foster naturalistic generalization (Stake, 1995). First, I provided adequate raw data before my analyses to encourage alternative interpretations (Stake, 1995). Second, I grounded my positionality as an educator and researcher with readers before data were provided in an effort to inform readers about possible bias (Stake, 1995). The third choice, intended to foster naturalistic generalization, was member checking to increase the trustworthiness of assertions and triangulation of data (Stake, 1995). Following each interview with staff or students, I transcribed and analyzed the data. This early analysis helped inform my observations as I watched the instructors interact with students.

Observation data analyses. The purpose of observations at the field site was to better understand the case. The purpose of my analyses of my fieldnotes from these observations was to determine salient themes, being mindful of collecting ample data before providing findings and conclusions. Additionally, themes from transcribed interview and focus group data helped drive what I looked for in observations.

My analyses had several steps. First, I reviewed the data collected in my field notebook and determined if they were provided in a naturalistic way. By examining the fieldnote data, I was able to identify and develop both insights and concepts derived from reflecting on my fieldnotes (Emerson, et al., 2011). Additionally, I wrote code memos

based on the fieldnote examination, searching for thematic ties throughout my observations and experiences. Next, I coded a priori themes, sometimes noting potential codes in the margins. Additionally, the themes and questions that emerged from this process were emergent as my goal was to understand the experiences from the participants' lenses. As Agee (2007) stated, "the ongoing process of questioning is an integral part of understanding the unfolding lives and perspectives of others" (p. 432). To better understand these unfolding lives, I also observed the field site and asked relevant questions in interviews and focus groups. I selected vignettes and illustrations of both the campus and classrooms to provide an accurate representation of the field site and case. My last step before reporting was looking through data in January and observing to deliberately try to disconfirm findings when applicable. This step was done to make sure the data were representative of the case.

Trustworthiness

This study's research design was informed by Stake's (1995; 2005; 2010) approach to case studies. One notable departure from Stake's work was my decision to use the term trustworthiness as opposed to validity. I was mindful of trustworthiness using the four naturalistic terms Guba (1981) identified: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Guba and Lincoln (1989) used the term credibility when describing constructed realities in a study, suggesting the following techniques: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, progressive subjectivity, member checks, transferability, and dependability. These techniques were utilized when conducting my observations and interviews, as well as analyzing and reporting data.

Lather (2017) discussed how qualitative research's primary criterion is its credibility. Lather (2017) defined credibility as "the extent to which the data, data analysis, and conclusions are believable and trustworthy as based on a set of standard practices" (p. 65). I used the standard practices of prolonged engagement, persistent observations using my field notebook, peer debriefing, triangulating data sources, and member checking as trustworthiness measures. Guba (1981) suggested prolonged engagement at a field site to overcome distortions from researchers' presence, checking perceptions, and taking notes about the site and the case. I was not focused on transferability to larger populations and much as I was with thick description when describing the field site. Guba and Lincoln (1989) argued that transferability in a study is passing on judgments of salient themes that other researchers may choose to apply in their future studies. I used peer debriefing to test formative insights and get a fresh perspective, mindful of how my values played a role in my inquiries.

Stake (1995) explained that researchers respect validity by conducting triangulation. Data source triangulation looks to see if the case is consistent in various times, spaces, or interactions (Stake, 1995). Guba (1981) suggested that researchers triangulate data sources by using a variety of data collection methods. I used focus group transcripts, interview transcripts, field notes, and memos for trustworthiness. My goal was to make sure larger themes were consistent before reporting findings.

I also conducted member checks for trustworthiness purposes. Stake (1995) noted that a participant is asked to review material for accuracy and palatability, often using written up data. I provided examples of what participants previously discussed when member checking. Guba (1981) suggested member checking to look for structural

corroboration and coherence, being mindful of potential conflicts or contradictions. Guba and Lincoln (1989) discussed how researchers need progressive subjectivity, where they monitor their construction. I monitored by recording an a priori construction, followed by progressive updates of my developing construction. I was mindful of new information and themes that come to light from participants and observations (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Summary of Method

I conducted this instrumental case study (Stake, 1995; 2005; 2010) to learn more about the perceptions and experiences of students and faculty regarding representative curriculum. I framed this study using Alim and Paris' (2017) CSP as the study's theoretical framework. To answer my research questions, I collected data from five interviews, five focus groups, nine classroom observations, two learning community events, and campus observations. Although my instrumental case study structure and process was primarily guided by the work of Stake (1995; 2005; 2010), I used additional texts from Saldaña (2016) and Krueger and Casey (2015). Saldaña (2016) was used for my codebook and coding process, while the Krueger and Casey (2015) text helped inform the facilitation and analyses of focus groups.

Focus group data were collected from fifteen students. These conversations occurred over five focus groups and four member checking sessions. These focus groups were guided by a protocol, which was informed by Krueger and Casey (2015). Data from focus groups and member checks were coded in two cycles, which were guided by the work of Saldaña (2016) and Krueger and Casey (2015).

I conducted interviews with five faculty members who were involved with Ascender. The participants taught literacy courses or learning frameworks courses. Four of the five participants were currently working as part of Ascender. I conducted interviews using an interview protocol. Data from these interviews and member checks were coded in two cycles. Saldaña (2016) was used to guide the creating and refining of my codebook.

The findings from my coding process are outlined in the following chapter, which is organized by research question. I was focused on being aware of my progressive subjectivity (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) while going through the coding cycles, and noted when the themes I discovered were not what I was initially expecting. To prevent bias, I have provided readers with adequate raw data and grounded my positionality before my analysis to encourage alternative interpretations (Stake, 1995).

4. FINDINGS

I conducted this instrumental case study to answer two research questions and their corresponding sub-questions:

1) What are the perceptions and experiences of students enrolled in a community college learning community?

1A) Do students enrolled in a community college learning community perceive that their developmental literacy courses promote an inclusive culture? If so, how?

1B) Do students enrolled in a community college learning community perceive that there is a representation of their identities and language practices in their developmental literacy course? If so, how?

2) What are the perceptions and experiences of faculty in a community college learning community?

2A) Do faculty working in a community college learning community perceive their developmental literacy courses promote an inclusive culture? If so, how?

2B) Do faculty working in a community college learning community perceive that there is a representation of students' identities and language practices in their developmental literacy course? If so, how?

These questions were answered through focus groups, interviews, member checks, and observations. While conducting focus groups with students and interviews with faculty, I was able to better understand the perceptions and experiences of participants.

Additionally, I conducted observations and requested member checks to provide context

and confirm or disconfirm findings from conversations with participants. I have organized this section to show readers the codes and themes that were foregrounded by participants, which were not always the same for students and faculty. As a result of these varied perspectives and experiences, I have outlined this section as a cross-case analysis.

I begin this chapter by outlining my coding process for my instrumental case study's findings, followed by notes on data collection. Next, I walk readers through the narrative told through my data analysis, followed by sections for student participants and faculty participants. Both sections begin with the data related to my research questions and conclude with additional themes that emerged. Finally, this chapter concludes with a cross-case analysis of the two participant groups, noting similarities and unique differences found in the data.

Coding Process for Findings

I used Saldaña's (2016) coding manual as a guide when working on the coding process, including the creation of my codebook (Appendix E). Following Saldaña's (2016) codebook format afforded me an opportunity to refine my codes by naming specific inclusion criteria, exclusion criteria, and examples from transcripts. Additionally, Saldaña's (2016) descriptions of first and second cycle coding were used as I navigated my coding rounds.

Coding Methods

This section briefly notes the coding processes used in this study, including elemental coding methods, affective coding methods, and simultaneous coding. I used Saldaña's (2016) coding manual for these processes. In addition, using Saldaña's (2016)

text afforded me the opportunity to determine not only the coding themes, but also the processes used to identify my codes in my coding rounds. I defined the themes in the following table to provide context to readers when navigating the corresponding codes.

Table 3 outlines the themes, codes, and coding processes:

Table 3
Themes, Codes, and Coding Processes

Themes	Codes	Coding Processes
Valued Program Aspects: Valued aspects that directly related to the Ascender program	Validation	In Vivo
	Culturally Relevant Aspects	In Vivo
	Familial Aspects	Concept Code
	Future Goals	Concept Code
Epistemological Choices: Instructional choices made by faculty	High Expectations	In Vivo
	Changes Regarding Acceleration	Concept Code
	Scaffolding	In Vivo
Potential Stressors: Outside factors that could potentially add stress to participants	Auxiliary Actions	Emotion Code
	Student Stressors	Emotion Code
	Growth of Program	Concept Code
Valued Experiences: Experiences regarding learning community as a whole, not specifically representation, identity, or language practices	Valued Experiences of Learning Community	Value Code
	Meaningful Instruction	Value Code

Codes are defined in Table 4. Coding processes are from Saldaña (2016).

Elemental coding methods. I used elemental coding for in vivo codes, and concept codes (Saldaña, 2016). Saldaña defines elemental coding as “primary approaches to qualitative analysis” (p. 97). In vivo codes use the language of participants when naming codes (Saldaña, 2016). My in vivo codes included the Valued Program Aspect codes Validation and Culturally Relevant Aspects (participants used the phrase “culturally relevant”). The Valued Program Aspects theme and subsequent codes were prevalent through discussions. These items were also part of the Ascender curriculum, as mentioned in interviews with faculty participants. Other in vivo codes included Scaffolding and High Expectations. The second elemental coding category I used was concept codes, which were used to label ideas considered “big picture” items (Saldaña,

2016, p. 97). Concept codes included Familial Aspects, Future Goals, Changes Regarding Acceleration, and Growth of Program.

Affective coding methods. In addition to elemental coding, I also used affective methods for emotion coding and values coding (Saldaña, 2016). Affective coding methods “investigate subjective qualities of the human experience” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 124). Emotion codes are labeled emotions (Saldaña, 2016). The emotion codes in my study were Auxiliary Actions and Student Stressors. I also used values coding, which Saldaña (2016) described as codes that “reflect a participant’s values, attitudes, and beliefs” (p. 131). Student participants were the only participants to mention the final theme, Valued Experiences. Value codes included Valued Aspects of Learning Community and Meaningful Instruction. These codes share student participants’ Valued Experiences related to their perceptions and experiences of Ascender.

Simultaneous coding methods. There were also simultaneous codes found throughout the transcripts. Saldaña (2016) referred to simultaneous codes as the result of two or more overlapped codes on “a single qualitative datum” (p. 94). The most notable overlapping codes were part of the Valued Program Aspects theme: Validation, Culturally Relevant Aspects, and Familial Aspects. Due to this overlap, data were placed where I perceived them to be most relevant to the discussion. However, the interconnectedness of these three codes is highlighted throughout this chapter, as well as my discussion, which follows.

Coding cycles. My first cycle of coding for both interviews and focus groups was a holistic approach. My second cycle of coding took place after I used Saldaña’s (2016) text to refine my operational definitions, descriptions, criteria, and exemplars for

each code. I also used Krueger and Casey (2015) to note the subtle differences that can appear in focus groups. For example, Krueger and Casey (2015) discussed the difference in preparation time between interviews and focus groups: when the faculty members heard a question, they responded quickly without thinking or revising their response. In contrast, focus group participants had time to think when others answered a question and had time to revise or add based on what they heard others say (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

The process of using several texts during the analysis phase of my instrumental case study afforded me an opportunity to refine my procedures and keep unique aspects of coding in mind. Stake (1995; 2005; 2010) was used as the primary source for my instrumental case study approach. However, Saldaña’s (2016) coding manual and Krueger and Casey’s (2015) focus group text were used to refine my process. After consulting Saldaña’s (2016) text, I used the following operational definitions:

Table 4
Operational Definitions of Codes

Themes	Codes	Operational Definition	F	S
Valued Program Aspects	Validation	Support from external people, including faculty, family, and friends (Rendón, 1994). This recognizes the experiential knowledge of students (Padilla, 1999; Perez & Ceja, 2010).	X	X
	Culturally Relevant Aspects	Culturally Relevant Aspects include activities, assignments, events, and epistemological choices. These are not directly tied to Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP), which is an educational approach, which acknowledges students’ cultural practices (Ladson-Billings, 2014). My theoretical framework is CSP. However, I used in vivo wording, Culturally Relevant, which was used by participants.	X	X
	Familial Aspects	Familial aspects include providing a level of comfort, which can be found when students learn in an environment with students and staff who share cultural identities or when students find their life experiences as part of the curriculum (Solorzano & Yosso, 2000).	X	X

	Future Goals	When students specifically talk about goals beyond their current semester. One of Ascender's goals is for students to transfer to a 4-year institution (Catch the Next, 2019).	X
Epistemological Choices	High Expectations	When faculty provided high expectations and pushed students to accomplish goals that potentially seemed unobtainable.	X X
	Changes Regarding Acceleration	When faculty mentioned adjustments made due to the THECB mandate (2018), which changed the curriculum from an INRW course to a 1301 course with extra support.	X
	Scaffolding	Instruction that provides students with a process, knowing shared goals, where students are gradually given responsibility before completing the task on their own (Brownfield & Wilkinson, 2018).	X X
Potential Stressors	Auxiliary Actions	Faculty actions and conversations that indicate a decision to go above and beyond expectations for students.	X
	Student Stressors	Student stressors include outside aspects, like work and family, as well as the academic task of navigating college life.	X X
	Growth of Program	Discussions of how Ascender has grown over the years, which has resulted in changes in faculty, mentoring, academic structuring, and events.	X
Valued Experiences	Valued Aspects of Learning Community	When students mentioned specific aspects of the learning community that they valued, which were not directly tied to representative curriculum.	X
	Meaningful Instruction	When students described how instruction in their learning community courses was meaningful to them.	X

F represents faculty participants and S represents student participants

Notes on Data Collection

I used my interview protocol for interviews with the five faculty participants. However, the two faculty participants I observed also had side conversations with me that were not digitally recorded. Instead, I made a note of these exchanges in my field notebook. I also had the opportunity to speak with faculty participants at the holiday party and mentor panel that I attended. I initially intended to answer the question *what are the perceptions and experiences of students and faculty in a community college learning community's developmental literacy course?* When answering this question, I

also learned from the experiences and perceptions of two of Ascender's learning frameworks instructors. These two participants also discussed literacy components and gave context to outside events and the growth of the program. I conducted member check sessions with the three literacy instructors: Ms. Ramos, Mr. Lopez, and Dr. Hernandez. These brief member check sessions were to refine my understanding of Epistemological Choices and Potential Stressors.

Most conversations with students were in the context of a focus group setting. However, there were times when memoing about focus groups when I knew I wanted to speak with certain participants again. For example, Alejandro talked about how much he appreciated the learning community while packing up his things to go home. I did not record his conversation about this because my recorder was already put away. My goal while member checking with Alejandro was to learn more about his experiences, especially since he had shared them after I was no longer recording. Additionally, Joaquin and Victoria discussed experiences outside of class that I wanted to follow-up on after cycle one of my coding. These member check sessions were also to provide privacy regarding the personal nature of what they shared, topics I did not want to press with follow-up questions in a focus group setting.

The Data Narrative

I have presented findings in a narrative that begins with the perceptions and experiences of students, followed by the perceptions and experiences of faculty. Finally, the narrative will conclude with a cross-case analysis focused on similarities and unique differences. The codes for participants are organized, starting with the participant group's research question and followed with the two corresponding sub-questions.

Additional themes or codes are shared after if applicable. I have included a brief synopsis of the narrative to guide the reader throughout the findings that follow.

Brief Synopsis

Student participants discussed how they valued instruction and validation in our conversations about the Ascender program. These values were foregrounded in focus groups when compared to curricular representation when discussing aspects of Ascender. Students also discussed how much they valued instructional choices related to the writing process and motivation. When I spoke with Ascender faculty, they shared with me “what happens behind the curtain” when balancing the learning community’s curriculum and outside activities while simultaneously meeting the demands of the college. In other words, I began to learn about the reasons behind the instructional choices students valued, as well as other instructional choices students did not mention. Mr. Lopez and Ms. Ramos taught English 1301+, which was a freshman composition course with an additional lab component. Dr. Garcia and Ms. Flores taught a learning frameworks course, which focused on study skills and motivation. Dr. Hernandez gave context to the previous INRW course format. These collective experiences provided context to focus group discussions. When I used a cross-case analysis, I was able to determine salient program aspects that were mutually valued by students and faculty. I also noted the unique stressors and valued components of Ascender for each participant group. This narrative begins with the exploration of findings from focus groups.

Student Participants: Valued Instruction and Validation

My instrumental case study was guided by one overall research question in regard to student participants: *what are the perceptions and experiences of students enrolled in a*

community college learning community? I also wanted to learn more about students' perceptions and experiences by answering the following two sub-questions:

1A) Do students enrolled in a community college learning community perceive that their developmental literacy courses promote an inclusive culture? If so, how?

1B) Do students enrolled in a community college learning community perceive that there is a representation of their identities and language practices in their developmental literacy course? If so, how?

The protocol used in focus groups was intentionally open-ended to provide chances for participants to share themes or events I did not initially account for. For example, I learned about the stressors students navigated throughout conversations with focus groups and member checking sessions with student participants. I was also aware of which pieces of Ascender were foregrounded in the collective experiences of student participants. In the following section, I provide a brief overview of the data, accompanied by a table that shows the themes and corresponding codes woven throughout conversations with student participants.

Overview of Focus Group Findings

Through the conversations I had with students in focus groups and member checking sessions, I learned that students foregrounded meaningful instruction and validation over the representative elements of Ascender. The following table outlines the narrative told through student data, outlined by themes and their corresponding codes. The operational definitions for codes in Table 5 can be found in Table 4 on page 97.

Table 5
Themes and Codes in Student Findings

Themes	Codes
Valued Experiences: Experiences regarding learning community as a whole, not specifically representation, identity, or language practices	Meaningful Instruction Valued Aspects of Learning Community
Valued Program Aspects: Valued aspects that directly related to the Ascender program	Validation Culturally Relevant Aspects Familial Aspects Future Goals
Potential Stressors: Outside factors that could potentially add stress to participants	Student Stressors
Epistemological Choices: Instructional choices made by faculty	High Expectations

I begin the student narrative by using data from focus groups to answer the question “*what are the perceptions and experiences of students enrolled in a community college learning community?*” I provide data that describe students’ Valued Experiences in the Ascender program. Next, I provide data where students discuss the themes Valued Program Aspects, Potential Stressors and Epistemological Choices in relation to the study’s two corresponding sub-questions. Codes are present in more than one research question or theme, as the codes discovered were woven throughout focus group discussions. Although students were not asked to provide a narrative explaining their personal experiences, they were asked to complete a form with demographic information. The following section briefly outlines the student participants’ self-reported demographic information.

Student Demographics

Students were asked to share demographic information on a sheet before the focus group began. As previously noted, there were four participants who identified as male and 11 participants who identified as female. Participants’ ages ranged from 18-21 years old. Eight students identified as Hispanic, two students identified as Latina/o, one

student identified as both White and Hispanic, one student identified as White, one student identified as Mexican, and two students left that space on their demographic form blank. Each participant shared that it was their first year attending the community college and that they had not previously been part of a learning community. Table 1 on page 69 shares participants' provided demographic information.

The Big Picture: Experiences and Perceptions of Students

The overall purpose of focus group conversations was to learn: *what are the perceptions and experiences of students enrolled in a community college learning community's developmental literacy course?* In other words, I wanted to use a focus group protocol with open-ended questions to determine what bubbled to the surface when discussing experiences with the Ascender learning community. Throughout conversations with students, I learned that they specifically valued the codes Meaningful Instruction and Valued Aspects of Learning Community. These two codes were categorized into a theme unique to student participants: Valued Experiences.

Additionally, the codes High Expectations and Future Goals were provided in response to questions about the Ascender learning community. High Expectations were placed under students' conversations about Meaningful Instruction because the codes are closely related. Finally, the code Future Goals was unique to student participants. The goals students discussed were related to future employment and educational attainment. I placed the Future Goals code under the overall research question because the Ascender program encourages students to transfer to a four-year university.

Meaningful Instruction. The participants in focus groups often discussed how they valued the Meaningful Instruction they received. This section begins with a brief

overview, followed by examples of explicit instruction, time management and motivational strategies, and validating instructor feedback.

Throughout conversations with students, I learned about how students valued receiving specific strategies and feedback in relation to writing assignments. For example, Isabella shared that the professors “definitely make it really clear... how to develop an essay, so now I know how to develop an essay like really well.” Victoria replied to Isabella’s statement and stated:

Our teacher... even if he has to repeat himself 100 times, he will sit there, and he will help you understand... how to put the hook and how to do everything. And he doesn’t get like annoyed, no matter what the question may be.

Throughout the five focus groups, students noted professors’ patience and the repetition of specific strategies and feedback in relation to writing assignments.

Explicit guidance. Another piece of Meaningful Instruction was explicit guidance. Students shared instances where they were aware of instructors’ willingness to walk them through skills and strategies. For instance, Jazmin felt her professor was “very helpful when developing our new skills.” Similarly, Camilla noted, “when you come to college like they actually show you and explain to you like what you did wrong... and then also point out the good points of your essay.” This wording suggests that Camilla was surprised by the professors’ choice to walk students through their work to help students improve. Mia also explained how this detailed support benefitted her. She shared how Ascender was:

A good experience for me because I didn't really know how to write that good.

And I started like getting closer to what like I needed because I didn't really know how to like make perfect sentences. I would make like fragments.

Similarly, Isabella reflected on how the variety of essays made her a well-rounded writer.

She shared:

And if you really like put a lot of effort into those essays, like you actually do become a better writer 'cause they're all like different kinds of essay, and it teaches you how to write a different way in each one of them.

Juliana also mentioned how hearing other students ask questions and breaking down the writing process, along with practicing and reviewing, helped make her a stronger writer.

Rebeca explained that her English 1301+ course was harder than her current English 1302 course because she was learning the structures and techniques needed to prepare her for English 1302. These combined remarks illustrate how students valued detailed feedback and instruction in their writing courses.

Time management and motivational strategies. Students also described how they appreciated Meaningful Instruction related to understanding the learning process, which included time management and motivational strategies. Juliana described the feelings she had when she learned that the Ascender programming was more advanced compared to what other students on campus received. Alejandro mentioned that he valued the lessons on time management. Juliana also enjoyed learning about motivational strategies. Victoria described an assignment where she learned more about how the brain works. Juliana stated “basically, ... your brain like never stops like

adapting to like how you learn and learning different things.” Later, Juliana shared how this helped her understand the impact of mindset when learning new skills. She noted:

A lot of people are like, “Oh, I’m bad at math. I can’t—I’m never gonna be good at it,” but really, if you put that work and you put that effort, like you can. Like you just have to have the want and the need to do it.

Students shared this understanding of the impact of work and effort throughout focus group conversations.

An emphasis on effort was specifically shared in the first focus group. Antonella, Alessandra, and Alejandro collectively noted how the professors would continue to work with students until they understood a concept. When I asked those participants if they emailed their professors, they laughed and said “a lot” and “all the time.” Jazmin had a similar response in a different focus group. She stated, “don’t be... ashamed to raise your hand and ask questions and stuff... to professors,” adding “I still raise my hand, and they make you feel comfortable.” Students echoed this perceived comfort, sharing their ease emailing professors or asking for clarification on assignments.

Validating instructor feedback. Another common theme of Meaningful Instruction was a sense of validation students noted through conversations with their instructor. For example, when Victoria was in high school she did not view herself as someone who excelled in her high school literacy courses:

He pulled me aside and told me like how good I was doing, and I was like, “Really?” ...I didn’t feel I was doing that well... But I guess he knows... so he knew what he was doing, and that made me feel a lot better... I feel like my being

able to do the essays and everything got a lot better... I felt more confident in what I was typing.

Joaquin had a similar experience, sharing he “thought I was bad at writing, but she [Ms. Ramos] said that I’m pretty good at it.” He added that this validation made him feel confident to join the honors class for the spring semester. Joaquin shared how he had been enrolled in the honors course in the spring semester when we conducted a member checking session. The honors course was taking a field trip to the state capitol later that week. When I asked what the honors course was like he stated:

Joaquin: Oh, it seems like it’s pretty... easy for me I think now that I got the hang about writing.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Joaquin: So, I feel confident about it. And so every time she says to write and to read about writing I’m just like, “Oh, this stuff is easy.” It just clicks in my head real fast.

Interviewer: Nice. And do you – you have the same instructor you had last semester?

Joaquin: Yeah.

Interviewer: Was that a easy transition?

Joaquin: Yeah.

Joaquin said his mom was supportive of his enrollment in the honors course. He shared, Oh yeah, she was very excited... I got the shirt, and I was like at first being in honors program is like one thing, but then as soon as I got the shirt made, it made me really happy. And then I told my mom about it, and she was very... very

proud. And, yeah, we got a lot of things goin' on at the house and everything- but she told me, "Don't quit," you know.

Although I heard the honors course mentioned in Ms. Ramos' fall course, Joaquin was the only student participant I spoke with who said he was enrolled. The next code, High Expectations, further illustrates the instructional elements in Ascender that students found meaningful.

High Expectations. Students often mentioned their professors' expectations when we talked about Ascender. These included general expectations, writing expectations, examples of motivation and time management strategies, and expectations in their learning frameworks courses. Alejandro explained that he was taking the same professor his second semester, noting that she had high expectations. Joaquin shared, "the teacher's always there to help us. Like they wanna succeed and not just get us through." He later added, "You know, that's their goal. Our success is their success. They wanna be proud of that." Several students also said the phrase "don't slack off" when discussing the course. When Joaquin said it, Isabella and Victoria agreed. Jazmin noted how these high expectations helped students, "develop a lot of our writing processes and how to properly write and cite and all of that. So that is gonna help me further along in college." Students shared how they were aware of expectations, as well as the impact those expectations will have on student success.

Motivation and time management strategies. Another common thread in conversations with students regarding high expectations was a better understanding of motivation and time management strategies. Alejandro noted, "a big thing that I always hear is time management." Juliana mentioned individual responsibility. She shared,

“you know, study 25 minutes a day, or do the assignments ahead before it's too late, or... ask questions about stuff that you are having trouble with.” When asked what future advice she would give herself, Jazmin replied, “just to keep up with my homework and not procrastinate, because I did a lotta that this year, and I’m... not satisfied with my grades, but I am passing.” In focus group one Antonella, Alessandra, and Alejandro noted how time management teaches students to not leave assignments until the last minute. The four students above all shared tangible ways they could use time management or motivational strategies. There was not a question in my focus group protocol related to either topic, but students shared valuable insights they valued throughout conversations.

Learning frameworks course. Isabella shared how high expectations were covered in her learning frameworks course. She explained the “Ascender program definitely motivates you like in school a lot more like to keep going, and like it reminds you why you should go to school and why you should try hard.” She later added that it “makes you like more eager to learn, and yeah, it just- it’s just made me like more open to new ideas and definitely has opened so many opportunities.” This awareness of new opportunities ties to students’ shared future goals. Students were also aware of the opportunities provided due to Ascender’s learning community format. The next code highlights several aspects students noted when I asked about their experiences in the Ascender program.

Valued Aspects of Learning Community. Students noted Valued Aspects of the Learning Community when discussing the program’s attributes. Jazmin explained that she was a social butterfly and Ascender allowed her to be “closer to my teachers so that I

can learn and be okay with asking questions and stuff.” Joaquin mentioned how working with the same students in his classes resulted in healthy competition. He noted, “I would kind of compete with the other people that... know how to write, and then... I would wanna put more words in there.” Additionally, Victoria was eager to have the same professor both semesters, making sure she signed up for classes on the day they opened up.

Future Goals. Although there was not a question about future goals in my focus group protocol, it generally came up when discussing the campus visit organized by Ascender. In the fall, students visited a local four-year university campus and went on a guided tour, which Tomas noted, “was actually a little exciting.” Students named several institutions where they would like to earn their four-year degree. Juliana explained that trips to these colleges provided the opportunity to visit multiple universities and learn from “the participants from that university teaching us about what it's like, and it could be from the tuition to career-wise or anything. And that was really important to me as well.”

Future careers. Students mentioned a variety of future careers including media and digital arts (Tomas), biomedical engineer (Jazmin), registered nurse (Juliana), nurse practitioner (Camila), petroleum engineering (Carlos), journalism and mass communication (Isabel), criminal justice (Rebeca and Isabella), teacher (Josefina), nurse (Mia), zoology (Victoria), and cybersecurity (Joaquin). Joaquin noted that he was not concerned about the time it took to finish his program “as long as I graduate.” In the first focus group Antonella, Alejandro, and Alessandra all mentioned plans to attend a four-year university, but we did not discuss future majors.

Additional opportunities. Ascender also offered an opportunity for students to have an internship on campus. This provided students the opportunity to write articles each month to get published. Josefina, who was working as an intern, said, “you write about like what's goin' on at the school and stuff like that. ... each month you have... a certain article due.” Mia mentioned that she wanted to do Ascender because it looks good when you transfer to a college. She also shared how participating in a sociology club provided an opportunity to help the homeless. These future goals provided a window into how the Ascender program’s emphasis on transferring to a four-year institution and providing opportunities for publication impacted the goals of student participants. The next section explores how student participants perceived and experienced an inclusive culture in relation to the Ascender learning community.

Sub-Question 1A: Promoting an Inclusive Culture

The first research sub-question asked, *Do students enrolled in a community college learning community perceive that their developmental literacy courses promote an inclusive culture? If so, how?* The four codes that were prevalent in response to this question were Valued Aspects of Learning Community, Validation, Familial Aspects, and Culturally Relevant Aspects. Therefore, this section shares how students noted an inclusive culture in Ascender, focusing on what they valued in a learning community setting, as well as aspects specific to Ascender programming (Validation, Familial Aspects, and Culturally Relevant Aspects).

Valued Aspects of Learning Community. There were several conversations about how students valued the Ascender learning community in relation to a feeling of an

inclusive culture. When I asked a focus group about the Ascender community in general, Isabella shared how students became close over the semester:

I would definitely say that it... definitely helped me like ease into college. It was like definitely like really helpful, and it gives you like a lot of guidance, and it makes English... instead of it being stressful, it makes it like more fun, you know.

When I asked Isabella how Ascender was more fun or less stressful, she added:

Isabella: Well, the fact that like we went on field trips, and kind of how like we all get really close together in our... English class, and it definitely makes you a better writer... Ascender definitely has really good professors in the program, so that's definitely one thing that did help.

Interviewer: Awesome, so, uh, when you talk about being close together, do you mean... being able to work with some students... outside of class, or just even like knowing the students?

Isabella: Yes. Yes, like outside of class, like, um, as a classroom, I think like we're all kind of... I don't know how to explain it. Like, um, like really comfortable around each other.

Isabella also shared how Ascender provided an environment where she could take risks in class:

Isabella: So... when we're in class, we're really open to... speaking about our ideas, and... it's just more comfortable, and it's... I don't know how... do I say it?... I guess... being

comfortable around your classmates makes it like funner
and easier to learn cause-

Interviewer: Yeah, for sure.

Isabella: -You're not afraid of like being judged if you say your
opinions, you know.

Isabella noted how she was not afraid to say her opinions in class. This level of comfort was a specific asset mentioned by student participants, which was also often simultaneously coded with Familial Aspects. Two common discussion points when talking about Valued Experiences of the Learning Community were friendship and emotionally safe spaces for students to share their experiences.

Friendship. Students also valued how the Ascender learning community provided an inclusive environment within their peer groups. For example, Camila stated, "I think like another good takeaway would be like the friendships and bonds we built during the program because... after a semester we have like somebody else... like they have our back." Similarly, Alejandro explained in Ascender, "you want to keep that friendship going." Joaquin stated, "you'll make friends easily" and shared that he had several friends from the program. He added, "I have four of them, and we all hang out. Like... if school's cancelled and we're here, we'll just go to like the Mall or go eat somewhere." Victoria, nodded to Joaquin and added "We go to lunch, Taco Cabana." The predictability of having the same students in two courses their first semester resulted in friendships and opportunities to socialize outside of Ascender.

Emotionally safe environment. The inclusive nature of Ascender was accompanied by what several students described as an emotionally safe space to share

their work. For example, Victoria and Isabella discussed an assignment in Mr. Lopez's course for Dia de los Muertos, where they shared stories about family members who passed away. The inclusive atmosphere of the classroom was noted in their conversation:

Victoria: It was difficult, but everyone, like how she was saying, everyone's really comfortable around each other, so I feel like that made it a lot easier. We all... gave all our full attention and supported everybody-

Isabella: -Clapped and everything after.

Victoria: Yeah, it was... definitely hard, but it was also like really good to know that like-

Isabella: You weren't like the only one experiencing that.

Victoria: -Judged or anything.

Isabella: Yeah.

Victoria and Isabella were completing each other's sentences when discussing how comfortable they felt sharing challenging material with their peers.

Outside activities including Noche de Familia, field trips, and cultural events were also mentioned throughout focus groups. Isabella and Victoria talked about how they saw a speaker who told attendees about voting and how the younger generation matters. Isabella said it was "really cool" and Victoria added that it was "really eye-opening." Rebeca valued the free field trips and that students could "get out of their comfort zone."

Validation. Validation, for the purpose of this instrumental case study, is defined as support from external people, including faculty, family, and friends (Rendón, 1994). Students shared stories in focus groups about how they felt comfortable sharing in

class, noting validation from peers and faculty. For example, Victoria explained how she felt more comfortable taking risks in Mr. Lopez's course and "saying it out loud instead of just, like, waiting for someone else to." Rebeca, who also had Mr. Lopez, explained that "if it's wrong, then he'll say—well, it's not wrong, but it's good that you said it, but here's another point of view" Validation recognizes the experiential knowledge of students (Padilla, 1999; Perez & Ceja, 2010), which can include noting varied points of view.

A former student gave Ascender students a tour around a four-year university campus and also spoke at Noche de Familia. Victoria shared:

He explained like his story... he was saying like how he was... in his shell and would never talk. Like he was just the quiet one in class, and... now he's presenting in front of all of us... I thought that was really cool cause I don't like talking in front of people or anything.

Victoria shared how she felt validated by seeing the success of a former student from the Ascender program.

Students also felt like a priority as a member of Ascender. Rebeca talked about how students in the program were treated like a priority because they have access to events and often get served food first. She also mentioned that Ascender students get priority registration so they can take the same professor for English 1301+ and English 1302. Victoria echoed this statement when she was registering for English 1302.

Victoria shared, "I literally told my advisor, I was like, 'I want him.' I was like, 'I don't want anybody else.'" This priority registration is an outside support that allowed students to enroll in courses with instructors they previously connected with.

Familial Aspects. Familial Aspects were prevalent when discussing an inclusive environment. As previously noted, Familial Aspects overlapped with the codes Validation and Culturally Relevant Aspects. All three of these codes were part of Ascender’s programming. Familial Aspects specifically related to the bonds made in the Ascender program. The closeness of the group afforded opportunities for students to share in class. Isabella shared that she did not feel judged when sharing her opinions in class. Juliana, who admitted that she can be shy, mentioned that Ascender helped her become more confident when asking for help:

Juliana: To have the confidence to... not be afraid to work with other people and to work with the professor or to go to tutoring or... in general, just to feel like you're a part of that, like you are in that little circle-

Interviewer: Yeah.

Juliana: - with other people, so y'all can get together and to become one whole... circle... by the end of the semester.

Sharing these Familial Aspects, Juliana discussed how she could take risks in the classroom while feeling like a member of the community. Similarly, Alejandro shared that he felt having the same people in classes removed the need for him to try to express himself to find friends in class. Other students shared how this Familial Aspect impacted their education. Camila said students in Ascender “have our back” and the learning community was like a family. Tomas also shared that he had a friend in class who he could work with and depend on to help him when needed.

Culturally Relevant Aspects. Several students mentioned the inclusive nature of the cultural events and field trips that Ascender offered throughout the semester. Tomas talked about how he brought his little brother to Noche de Familia. Victoria, Isabella, and Joaquin also discussed Noche de Familia, specifically focused on the former student who came to speak. Victoria noted how this student was “the quiet one in class, and like now he’s presenting in front of all of us ” Students shared how this student later took them on a campus tour. Additionally, I observed this student attend the mentor night on campus as an administrator of the Ascender program.

Isabella and Victoria connected with a different speaker who discussed the importance of young voters. Antonella, Alessandra, and Alejandro recalled an artist who also created short plays for Cesar Chavez. Students explained how the artist discussed his life and struggles with the students who attended.

Students also discussed how their assignments related to their inclusion in class. Jazmin, Camila, and Mia shared an assignment, Knock-Knock, where they wrote a letter to themselves as if it were from their parents. Jazmin stated, “it was very sentimental and emotional, but at the same time it was also helping us.” The group added:

Jazmin: And so thinking about that like if they actually said that maybe it would boost our confidence a little bit more.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Jazmin: And so finals stresses you out and you’re like, yep, I’m relaxed.

When I suggested that students pull the paper out because it was the week before finals, Mia responded, “I know. I still have it in a frame.” Jazmin and Mia’s conversation about

the inclusive assignment noted how students can benefit from reflecting on their own lives.

Sub-Question 1B: Representation of Students' Identities and Language Practices

My second research question was centered on students' experiences and perceptions about the representation of identities and language practices. As previously noted, three overlapping codes were part of the Valued Program Aspects theme: Validation, Culturally Relevant Aspects, and Familial Aspects. Student participants most often discussed the representation of their identities and language practices in relation to the code Culturally Relevant Aspects. However, they also mentioned the code Student Stressors.

Culturally Relevant Aspects. Students described the impact of several assignments, including Spirit Crushers, What's in a Name, Dia de los Muertos Sugar Skulls, and other texts they connected with. As previously noted, this study is not a program evaluation. Therefore, specifics on the assignment or copies of prompts are intentionally omitted. Instead, an overview of prompts given to students, or an overall explanation of the assignment, is provided when applicable. Although I initially only knew the assignments in the context described by students, observations and discussions with faculty provided additional context to the Culturally Relevant Aspects of these assignments. The representation of students' identities and potential representation of language practices varied based on assignment.

Spirit crushers assignment. Several student participants discussed an assignment where they identified a spirit crusher in their lives. The assignment referenced an article titled "Don't Let the Spirit Crushers Get You Down," written by Robin Abcarian and an

excerpt from *Burro Genius* by Victor Villasenor. The prompt asked students to reflect on the inner strengths they used, people who helped them, and any other methods used to overcome a spirit crusher.

Although most students who talked about the Spirit Crushers assignment related it to their personal experiences, Jazmin chose to write about the spirit crushers her mom faced. She explained:

[My mom] had to overcome a lot, 'cause... she had me and my brothers at a very young age, and so that's what I wrote about was that all those people who were telling her that she wasn't gonna make it, or that we weren't gonna amount to anything, and we ended up proving them wrong.

When I asked Jazmin if she shared the assignment with her mom she said “no” explaining, “she knows what she went through.”

Knock Knock assignment. Students read a poem titled *Knock Knock*, which shared how the author navigated growing up with an incarcerated father. Additionally, students also watched a video of the poem performed by the author. The poem describes how a father was absent for important discussions. Toward the end of the poem, the poet stated, “And I dream up a father who says the words my father did not” (Beatty, n.d.). The poem ends with a letter to the son, written by himself, with the words he longed for his father to say. After reading and listening to the poem, a writing prompt was given. Students were asked to “Think of the parent with whom you had the most difficult relationship when you were growing up,” then “Write a letter to yourself in that parent’s voice.”

Jazmin and Mia both said their papers for the Spirit Crusher assignment helped boost their confidence. When I asked Isabella to explain the assignment she stated:

Isabella: So like if you were to say, like if your dad was never part of your life, like you would be writing a letter of like your dad was writing it to you, and... what he would say to you-

Interviewer: Oh, okay.

Isabella: - so you kind of had to put like yourself in like their shoes and like think about what they would say, but it was like still coming from you cause it's like you were writing what they want to tell you.

Victoria added,

And you kinda had to like... like not answer back, but you could also like put your side. It's like what you'd say if that person ever said those things, like apologized or anything like that. You could say like how you would feel about it, if you would accept it. If not, like how would you go about it.

Later, I commented that it sounded like a personal assignment. Isabella and Victoria agreed that it was. Isabella shared, "It was... my dad hasn't really been part of my life, so... definitely." I asked if the assignment helped her when she navigated the encouragement piece. Isabella noted, "Yeah. It just made me realize how... I really just like don't need him." She also stated how, "I have accomplished so many things, and there's so many things that I want to do... I got to the point where it's fine if he's not part of it because like I have my mom... And I have like a lot of support

and like a lot of great friends, great teachers.” Victoria echoed this response a few moments later adding,

Victoria: It wasn’t... I mean... it was hard, but at the same time, like... but not hard in an emotional way for me. It was more like anger, and I feel like it helped let out a lot of anger.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Victoria: Cause, um, my parents got divorced two years ago, and my mom’s like a completely different person now. And our relationship used to be like perfect, and now it’s like trash, basically.

Victoria later noted how the assignment was emotional for her. She explained:

Victoria: And so like I got really like angry doing it. Like I had to like step back and be like, okay, like this—it’s just an essay kind of thing.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Victoria: Like it... but at the same time, I feel like it helps cause like a lot of stuff, you keep bottled up.

Victoria later noted that the assignment “takes it out without having to like, I guess verbally like do it and like lose your cool kind of thing... Cause I definitely would *[Laughter]*.” This writing assignment was a part of the Ascender curriculum that several students mentioned in focus groups.

What's in a name? assignment. Another assignment under the Culturally Relevant Aspects code was called “What’s in a Name?” This assignment description asked students to reflect on their name’s meaning and impact on their lives. Camila and Jazmin both talked about how they enjoyed the assignment during their focus groups. In a separate focus group, Rebeca and Juliana explained they related to this assignment because they had significant family stories related to their births. Rebeca found out that there was an argument over her name in the delivery room. She stated:

My poem said something about my name... it's almost as long as the alphabet. And I just started writing about that. And my parents said that the day I was born, they had a name, but my grandma, she entered, like, the delivery room, and she was like no, no, no. And she ripped the paper, and she did a whole scene. And she's like... that's not gonna be her name. Like, it's not. So then they had an argument in the delivery room... so my dad left the delivery room, and then he came, and he's like, you know what? This is gonna be her name, and that's it. So they put a long name.

Juliana also said the assignment was emotional for her because she was born prematurely. She noted, “And it's very emotional for me, my family, and even if I talk to about—even if I talk about it with my friends” because her mother’s life was saved when doctors noticed something wrong with her appendix in her scans. She added that the doctor brought her back when she was about to leave the ER: “and if she'd left, me and my mom could've died.” The tone in Juliana’s voice suggested that the story was still emotionally impactful to her nearly 20 years after it occurred.

Dia de los Muertos assignment. Mr. Lopez had assigned a Dia de los Muertos assignment where students decorated sugar skulls in remembrance of family members who passed away. The assignment asked students to share the story of a loved one who had passed away. These stories were written on the back of ornately decorated sugar skulls. Mr. Lopez initially emailed a picture of these sugar skulls to me. Later, I saw the skulls in person when conducting a focus group in a computer lab where they were prominently displayed. Isabella shared:

We did a lot of personal stuff in our classroom... we also did like a letter to the dead... we all had to go out the classroom and talk about like a person that we have lost. And a lot of people like kind of cried and like got really emotional.

Victoria also mentioned how the assignment was emotional when discussing assignments that she related to:

The sugar skull one definitely... You had to write about... a loved one that had passed away and... I wrote about my grandma. She passed away... I think it will be four years in June. And I didn't know we were going to have to like present it in front of everyone, and I hate speaking in front of other people. Like I just don't... do it. Especially in high school. Like, I would freak out.

Victoria later expounded on how the assignment was easier to share because of the familial environment:

I think it's also the environment that he makes in the class. Everyone feels comfortable enough. Even if you're the most terrified person when it comes to, like, public speaking, ...it's the environment that he makes that makes it to where you're like, "Okay. Like, I can do this," type thing.

She also noted how her peers worked to share their stories, despite how emotional the assignment was:

All of us. I mean, all of us supported each other. There was no, like, negative thoughts and that class whatsoever. You know, people were ...brought to tears. Some did cry. Some, you know, held it back or whatever. I held it... I mean, I definitely held it back. Because, like, speaking it... like, what were you wrote is basically like to them, and so it made us feel like we were talking to them.

When I suggested that the assignment would be emotional to share, Victoria added, “Yeah. But I mean, ...that was like, hands down, like, the best one. So I think anyone in that class says that.” Victoria’s response to this culturally relevant assignment illustrated the importance of reflecting on students’ experiential knowledge.

Other noted assignments. Students also mentioned the financial literacy presentation and motivation lessons, which Juliana explained were a part of her learning frameworks course. Antonella, Alessandra, Tomas, and Alejandro also discussed the book *The Four Agreements* that they read in their learning frameworks course. Alejandro shared that it was interesting to hear how his classmates related to the book. Rebeca discussed a poem read in class called “Dusty,” which was about distant relationships with parents. Although she did not experience that herself, she explained that she knew people in that situation. Rebeca added, “And they said that they feel, like, lonely... like, they have their parents. They're physically there, but they're not emotionally or mentally there.”

Some student participants mentioned how students might not relate to culturally relevant assignments. For example, Tomas mentioned that when working on the name

assignment he was “doing the work that was told for me to do,” as opposed to connecting to his own life. He also found that when he read the text *The Four Agreements* it was “more like reading about somebody else’s life.” Joaquin discussed how he was able to write his first assignment because it was about personal information, including his major and future goals. When I asked if he found it easier to write about his own life, Joaquin responded:

Joaquin: Mmm, it can be, it depends I guess, yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, alright.

Joaquin: ‘cause not everybody experiences, so if you had to tell us about a major or, you know, it might not be easy for somebody that doesn’t have a plan-

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Joaquin: -instead of somebody that does, so.

Interviewer: That’s true. So because you kind of knew the answers to those questions-

Joaquin: Yeah.

Interviewer: -you were good to go.

Joaquin: Right.

Joaquin understood that his assignment was easier for him because he had the experiences he needed to share. Although Tomas was the only student who did not mention a personal connection with culturally relevant assignments, Joaquin noted how a connection to assignments requires the necessary experiences.

Student Stressors. Some of the assignments mentioned above also highlighted

Student Stressors. When Joaquin talked about his family, he explained:

Joaquin: Cause I always... had negative people in my life my whole life.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Joaquin: ...and everything that they did to me in the past has actually made me a better person now, and I wouldn't be here if it wasn't... I mean, I'm sorry. Because of them... I mean if it wasn't for me pushing it back, I wouldn't be here.

I asked Joaquin if he felt as if he was able to persevere over the negativity he described.

Joaquin answered:

Joaquin: Yeah, cause I took them out of my life, and that's why I'm here. I wouldn't be a better person if it wasn't for me noticing that I'm surrounded by negativity, so—

Interviewer: Okay, so you're kind of surrounding yourself by more positive people.

Joaquin: Yeah. Yeah.

Isabella agreed with Joaquin telling the group, "It's just like I got really personal with that. I feel like a lot of people got really personal with that one." Isabella talked about her absent father and Victoria chimed in, sharing how her life had changed since her parents' divorce. However, that did not stop students from sharing their stories. For example, Victoria explained how the environment in class helped students feel

comfortable, despite potential fears of public speaking. She noted that the familial environment helped students feel comfortable, even if “deep down in your mind you’re like freaking out.”

Although assignments like Knock-Knock and Spirit Crushers could be challenging to share, Victoria explained that the familial environment made a difference. Student Stressors were shared in context with identity and language practices. However, they also permeated discussions unrelated to those factors. The next section shares how the code Student Stressors adds context to the data previously shared, as well as the faculty data that follows.

Contextual Code: Student Stressors

Conversations with students about Student Stressors were woven throughout the responses to my research questions. However, I found the varied stressors students had were important to highlight in isolation to help provide context to the lives of student participants. The narrative of this data shows the additional components students were managing while in their first year of college. The stressors outlined include parenthood, family stressors, school stressors, and employment stressors. Throughout the focus groups, students mentioned Potential Stressors they had to navigate. For example, Joaquin, the oldest student participant, took a two-year break before beginning college. In a member checking session, he explained that Ascender “helped me out to understand... the classes better. Since I took a break, you know, I didn’t remember a lot, so they helped me through all that.”

Parenthood. Victoria was the only student participant to discuss balancing school, work, and a child. When I asked her focus group if there was anything they wanted to add about Ascender, Victoria shared:

I just thought school like wasn't for me. Like and I know a lot of people say that, I'm sure, but like I really was like, I don't even know if I can do this. Like had a lot on my plate. I have a son. I work, but even with those things, like I'm able to- I mean I feel like I did pretty well this semester.

Victoria later explained that she lived about thirty minutes from campus, depending on traffic, and her son was enrolled in a Head Start program near her home. She also worked at a children's clothing store, which she mentioned was very understanding on occasions where her son was sick and she could not go to work.

Victoria was initially home-schooled but later attended a high school. She noted that she did not do the required work when she was at home: "Like I took advantage of the situation. And so that made it a little harder. I mean, my mom said for someone who's never been in school my freshman year, I mean, I passed like all A's and B's." When she was in high school she explained, "I had so many medical like health issues. I like almost broke my foot. ...it was a lot and so I kept missing a lot. And so I had to do attendance recovery." She ended up earning her degree online and shared "So like that right there like hands down you're busy and you have a lot on your plate. I mean, it's the same thing as a high school diploma. It's not a GED."

Victoria expounded on how her first assignment in Mr. Lopez's course was a wakeup call for her. She realized she needed to put in more effort:

Victoria: I mean, I passed. ... but I slacked off a lot and I learned that I can't do that with this. And like seeing that grade was like a wake-up call.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Victoria: Like I can't. I didn't want to keep getting that.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Victoria: And, like, my biggest motivation is my kid.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Victoria: And so I saw that and I was like, no. Because if he came home... [with] that, I'd be like, "Oh, hell no."

Interviewer: Yeah.

Victoria: And so I was, like, "No. Like I need to do better than that." And so... I mean, there are... trust me, there are times I procrastinate. When you have a three-year-old, you know, it happens.

This understanding of how Victoria would perceive her effort as a parent was a unique sentiment, compared to other conversations with students. Although students discussed their effort or their parents' responses to their education, Victoria was the only participant who imagined what she would say to her child regarding college assignments.

Family stressors. Students brought up other family stressors. Joaquin mentioned how his brother was "not around. He doesn't talk to me or my family anymore." Jazmin talked about how her mother "had me and my brothers at a very young age" and that there were "people who were telling her that she wasn't gonna make it, or that we

weren't gonna amount to anything, and we ended up proving them wrong." Jazmin explained that her mom was going to graduate in the spring with a Masters degree. As previously mentioned, Isabella noted that her dad was not a part of her life when discussing the spirit crushers assignment and Victoria added that her parents were divorced and her relationship with her mom had changed. Joaquin noted how his mom was proud of his honors class. He stated:

Joaquin: And then I told my mom about it, and she was very... very proud. And, yeah, we got a lot of things goin' on at the house and everything-

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Joaquin: -but she told me, "Don't quit," you know.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Joaquin: And keep doing that, and to be better than her cause, you know, we all have situations a lot.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Joaquin: But college is gonna pay off. It might be hard now, but... it's gonna pay off in the future.

School stressors. Alejandro discussed how the book *The Four Agreements* related to many students in his class. He found that people shared things that most would not expect and that was interesting to him. When I asked what he wrote about, Alejandro explained:

Alejandro: Uh, it was about... I think it was people are afraid of dying.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Alejandro: I think that's what it was... like that saying, uh, life is short and all that.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Alejandro: You know... you wanna use up all your time now instead of, you know, waiting later and you don't have nothing to do. It's boring and all that. And I was like, I find that true but also to take your time because you might miss out ...on something great as well-

Interviewer: That's interesting.

Alejandro: - something better.

Alejandro added how he wanted to take his time in college because there is a lot to learn and "it opens up... so many doors." Later, Alejandro elaborated on how he planned to take his time on assignments and use the time management strategies from his learning frameworks course.

Alejandro was not the only person who connected what he read to stressors that may occur outside the classroom. For example, Jazmin noted, "you have to be informed and acknowledge that these things are actual things that happen to people, and so you have to be mindful of everybody and all that around us." This understanding of being aware of the bigger picture when reading assigned materials was not prompted in either discussion but shared perceptions from students' experiences.

Employment stressors. Most of the focus groups were scheduled before the winter break and students often discussed heading to work after the focus group and the work-related conversations sometimes occurred before the focus group when students

were eating. Students mentioned working in the local mall, restaurants, and grocery store.

Joaquin also discussed his work at a local grocery store during our member checking session. He explained “Oh yeah. Yeah, I have two jobs, so, you know, besides that I have to- if I’m not working I’ll be at home studying or taking care of my sister while my mom’s at work.” His mom also worked two jobs. Joaquin’s second job was a grocery delivery service. I explained to him that I thought about doing that while working on my dissertation, but found I was overwhelmed and did not sign up. He noted “It’s extra money, so whatever you’re makin’ now plus the extra. You know, say you do 12-13 orders a week, it’s an extra \$200 right there.” When our conversation was coming to a close, Joaquin explained:

I gotta make time for everything. If I’m at work I might take my stuff with me.

You know, on break I’ll study. Or if I’m at home I’m on my desk doing work.

That’s pretty much how my life is for the next 16 weeks.

It was clear through our conversations that Joaquin’s schedule was busy, but he was early for both the focus group and member checking conversation. Joaquin noted that it was a challenge to balance work, family responsibilities, and his schoolwork. However, like the other students in focus groups, he had a perceived resolve to get through his program and transfer to a four-year institution.

Summary of Student Findings

My instrumental case study was conducted to help stakeholders better understand *what were the perceptions and experiences of students enrolled in a community college learning community’s developmental literacy course?* Throughout conversations with

students, I learned that they specifically valued Meaningful Instruction and Valued Aspects of Learning Community. Students also shared the impact of instructors' High Expectations and their Future Goals, which included attending various four-year universities and programs.

I also wanted to learn more about students' perceptions and experiences by answering two corresponding sub-questions. The first sub-question asked, *Do students enrolled in a community college learning community perceive that their developmental literacy courses promote an inclusive culture? If so, how?* Data from conversations with students showed that students shared Valued Program Aspects in relation to an inclusive culture including Validation, Familial Aspects, and Culturally Relevant Aspects. Stories were shared about how the familial atmosphere and validating conversations impacted student experiences and perceptions. Student participants also Valued Aspects of the Learning Community. These aspects included having students in multiple classes and building friendships with students in Ascender.

The second sub-question asked, *Do students enrolled in a community college learning community perceive that there is a representation of their identities and language practices in their developmental literacy course? If so, how?* Focus group conversations noted Culturally Relevant Aspects the most in relation to this question. However, Student Stressors were explicitly mentioned in relation to some of the Culturally Relevant Aspects codes.

Student Stressors were provided at the close of the student data section to lend context to the experiences student participants had while attending their first year in college. These stressors included parenthood, family stressors, school stressors, and

employment stressors. Validation was another key component of Ascender, which was often mentioned in relation to these Student Stressors. To highlight this validation piece, I close this section with the comments shared by Victoria at the end of our member checking session:

Interviewer: Is there anything that either came up in your head while we were talking now or that you just think, that it's important that I know about like Ascender learning community or about your 1301 class?

Victoria: Even if like you don't think that you're meant for college life... which, trust me, I never did. Ever. Ever, ever, ever. Try it at least because honestly... through the program like having a teacher that's like that... I've gone to him for a lot. Like... he's very understanding. He knows I have a child. He knows like if I had to miss a class... it wasn't just because I wanted to stay home.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Victoria: Trust me. It was probably something disgusting. And he's always been very understanding and always, you know, made sure that I was able to get my stuff in on time. And... having teachers and... advisors that understand that, makes a huge difference.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Victoria: Like a lot of people think... “Oh, no one’s going to care.”
Like, I have this responsibility or have a kid or have this or
I have that... it’s possible. You’ve just got to put yourself
out there and try it.

Interviewer: That’s an awesome message for everyone to hear.

Victoria: Thank you.

Interviewer: ...I understand that hesitation about, is this right for me?
I’ve had that for every single step of the way.

Victoria: It’s fear of failure.

Victoria noted how a potential fear of failure could be a barrier to student success. When I asked her if there was anything she wanted to add about Ascender, she took that moment to address those concerns and encourage students to put themselves out there and try it. Victoria’s assertion is indicative of student participants’ collective emphasis on the value of Meaningful Instruction and Validation when discussing the impact of the Ascender program. The next section focuses on the faculty participants’ perceptions and experiences, noting “what happens behind the curtain.”

Faculty Participants: What Happens Behind the Curtain

Although many of the same themes and codes are present in the faculty participant interviews, the story the data told shows a different set of perceptions and experiences. Faculty foregrounded the theme of Valued Program Aspects, sharing how the codes Validation, Culturally Relevant Aspects, and Familial Aspects were present in their courses, as well as the Ascender learning community. Next, the Epistemological Choices theme was shared, showing “what happens behind the curtain.” This included

the codes High Expectations, Changes Regarding Acceleration, and Scaffolding. The final theme, Potential Stressors, wove throughout faculty discussions. The codes Auxiliary Actions and Student Stressors were present when faculty discussed the choices made to ensure student success, which often included being aware of the stressors in students' lives. Additionally, the Growth of the Program since it began in 2012 became a final code woven throughout interviews. Table 6 shares the themes and corresponding codes in faculty discussions:

*Table 6
Themes and Codes in Faculty Findings*

Themes	Codes
Valued Program Aspects: Valued aspects that directly related to the Ascender program	Validation Culturally Relevant Aspects Familial Aspects
Epistemological Choices: Instructional choices made by faculty	High Expectations Changes Regarding Acceleration Scaffolding
Potential Stressors: Outside factors that could potentially add stress to participants	Auxiliary Actions Student Stressors Growth of Program

The Big Picture: Experiences and Perceptions of Faculty

The purpose of my instrumental case study was to understand the perceptions and experiences of participants regarding inclusive instruction. The overall research question that guided my conversations with faculty participants was “*What are the perceptions and experiences of faculty working in a community college learning community?*” What I learned through discussions with faculty was the amount of work done “behind the curtain” when working as part of Ascender. The previous section shared how students valued Meaningful Instruction and Validation. This section shares the Epistemological Choices made to achieve the perceived Meaningful Instruction, as well as the Potential

Stressors that faculty navigated along the way. I observed the literacy course instructors' first semester using the newly mandated English 1301+ course accelerated format. This mandate, coupled with a continually growing program, provided a succession of challenges for faculty to navigate.

Behind the Curtain: Navigating Potential Stressors and Epistemological Choices

There were two themes from faculty interviews that emerged from my data sorting process in regards to the big picture question of experiences and perceptions in Ascender. These two themes were Potential Stressors and Epistemological Choices. These themes had quotes from conversations that provided context to working in Ascender but were not related to my instrumental case study's sub-questions on representation or identity.

Potential Stressors. The first theme shared by faculty was Potential Stressors. The Potential Stressors that faculty navigated showed the work done behind the scenes that students were likely unaware of. Faculty quotes that were coded as Potential Stressors were organized into three codes: Auxiliary Actions, Growth of Program, and Changes Regarding Acceleration.

Auxiliary Actions. The first of three codes mentioned in regards to Potential Stressors was Auxiliary Actions. For the purpose of this instrumental case study, Auxiliary Actions are defined as when faculty go above and beyond what is required. In a learning community setting, there are several initiatives and events that take place outside of class. This can, as Dr. Garcia explained, result in burnout:

One of the things that they recommended when I first went to the training with the Puente Project was that you should rotate out instructors because there's burnout.

And that people need to, you know, rotate out and get somebody else in and then bring somebody back in... in and out. And... there's three of us that's been with the program since it started and we're still there. ...and there's other people... there's a lot of folks that have come in, stay one semester, and move out... Like, one or two years... and then move out. And ...I've seen that happen.

Auxiliary Actions in this section include additional responsibilities, planning for the future, and burnout.

Additional responsibilities. The learning community component requires additional meetings and events. Dr. Garcia still meets with the vice president to discuss how the learning community is going. She transitioned from presenting to mentoring newer staff who present about their Ascender program. She explained, "I've done my time. Give somebody else a chance. And I think that then I can sit back and, like, I'm part of it but I can sit down, and I don't have to be on the stage, anymore." Events including Noche de Familia, the end of semester celebración, mentor night, cultural events, and campus visits all occur outside of class. Planning these events includes money for bussing and meals. Sometimes students go to free events, including cultural events on campuses or a free night at the local museum. When discussing the level of commitment, Dr. Garcia shared:

So, it's work. I mean, it's work. But, you know, there's people that enjoy doing that kind of stuff. And there's people that don't want to do anything extra. So, I think it's a... really, a matter of getting the right people in. And making sure that you're committed to what you're doing.

Additionally, Ascender faculty attends a yearlong certification program, followed by summer and fall institutes. Faculty can apply to be a leadership fellow after their first year. Mr. Lopez is a leadership fellow and was asked to train at seminars and the fall institute. Ms. Ramos also lectures about the program. Our first in-person conversation occurred after a weekend-long training where she presented about Ascender.

Planning for the future. There is also the potential to meet outside of campus to discuss programming and the success of the program's shared students. Additionally, faculty members are also thinking of the future. Ms. Ramos discussed future semesters where more courses could be added to Ascender. Dr. Garcia mentioned how she changed things each semester, stating "there's a better way of doing this." Mr. Lopez shared how he created a pool of Ascender assignments he had collected from trainings and workshops that he allows students to choose. Dr. Hernandez writes articles about Ascender to share what they are doing with other stakeholders and Ms. Flores wrote a book, sharing the stories of past mentors, asking them why they chose to go to college and "what pearls of wisdom would you give your mentee?"

Burnout. The breadth of outside work may result in the potential to become, as Dr. Garcia worded it, burned out with all of these Auxiliary Actions. When asked how she does not burn out, Dr. Garcia explained:

Well, I think it's because I enjoy it. I really... believe in it. I think that burnout, to me, also is a physical thing. I mean... it's mental. Burnout is mental and it's physical. And I think, for me, what keeps me going is my colleagues and the support that I get, but in the event that I don't continue getting support... from whomever that I need to get my support from, which is ...either my

administrators or my team, then I'm gonna get out. But, as long as my team members are there, I'm like, "I'll do it if you do it." "Okay. Let's do it."

Dr. Garcia mentioned the potential burnout with all of these Auxiliary Actions. However, each faculty member I spoke with did not mention wanting to stop being a part of the Ascender learning community.

Growth of Program. The second code mentioned in regards to Potential Stressors was Growth of Program, which includes the expansion of Ascender, additional faculty, and the mentor component. I have outlined each factor below, as told through the narrative of faculty participants' experiences and perceptions.

Expansion of Ascender. The field site's Ascender program has changed and expanded since it began on campus in 2012. When the program first started in Texas, there were three campuses that participated. Dr. Garcia shared "now there's so many of them." Ms. Ramos also explained that the program is constantly scaling up. This growth impacts scheduling for spring courses because the advisors used to come to class to work with the students on scheduling, so they recently added a faculty member as a club sponsor to help.

Additional faculty. Dr. Garcia suggested having a committed faculty member to recruit students during new student orientations and at high schools. When looking for additional members to work in a learning community setting, Dr. Garcia added that the first priority should be to "pick the right people that want to do it and are dedicated." There is also a possibility of adding additional courses to the field site's Ascender model. Ms. Ramos discussed potentially bringing in a humanities or history course when brainstorming future partnerships. Dr. Garcia mentioned the possibility of eventually

adding developmental math as a piece of the program. She noted, “I think that the more you add into the mix, the harder it is to do.” The growth of Ascender has resulted in changes in staffing and busier schedules. Dr. Garcia explained:

We used to meet once a week and just meet and just talk about our students. Talk about what we’re doing in the classroom. Talk about what’s going on. And now, we don’t meet as often, just simply because it’s gotten bigger and there’s... I don’t wanna say... that there’s not commitment, but I don’t see the closeness that we used to have. You know? I mean, we were truly a familia. And I used to see a true familia. I mean, with each other.

Mentor component. As previously mentioned, the mentor piece was another aspect of the program that has evolved. The mentor component used to provide students with individual mentors when the program initially started. This initiative is Ms. Flores’ priority for the program. Ms. Flores described the stories of the mentors and why she chose to write a book about them:

Their stories are so incredible ...the students need to know what their mentor went through. Because the mentors are very professional and have their career, and they look so nice and they're a little older. You look at that person cause even now some of my colleagues that are in this book I would never have imagined that they went through so much in their childhood. Like one of my colleagues said, “I didn't know when we were gonna eat.” And I said, “What? You-you didn't know when?” “No.” He said, “my mother would leave us in the daycare.” And she was a single mom, and I mean, some of them were like really sad.

The individual mentor component, which Dr. Hernandez spoke highly of, was replaced with a mentor night. This event included a roundtable discussion with members of the community instead. When I asked Ms. Flores if this change was a result of the growth of the program she responded, “Yes. ... but still it's possible. I think we started with like 140 students... I think it's very possible to recruit 140 professionals from the community.” She added that she was not teaching the learning frameworks course when she was the mentor coordinator for the program and that piece should be given to a staff member. Dr. Garcia echoed the change in programming, explaining that the process was easier when the program was smaller. The mentor panel, she explained, is “an event where they interact with the students. So, the students could ask them questions, too.” I observed this event during the spring semester, where eighteen mentors were invited to speak with students. The mentors each rotated to three tables to discuss their experiences with students.

Changes Regarding Acceleration. The third and final code mentioned in regards to Potential Stressors was Changes Regarding Acceleration. Although many of the changes to the field site’s Ascender program were a result of scaling up, there were also changes made to the program’s developmental literacy component. Formerly, the program used an INRW course for the literacy component. Due to a mandate by THECB, the course is now an English 1301+ course, which means the course is similar to a Composition 1 course, but with an additional lab component. This new accelerated co-requisite format allows students to enroll in a college-level literacy course in their first semester. When discussing this change, Dr. Garcia stated, “I know that students want to

be like college-level courses, but also don't want to set them up for failure." In addition, scores to qualify for developmental courses were changed. Ms. Ramos explained:

The state recently changed the TSI scores cutoffs... the students who are now even more academically underprepared are coming into the college for credit course, even with the co-rec.... it's a lot. It's definitely more challenging for them.

The two current literacy faculty, Ms. Ramos and Mr. Lopez, both discussed navigating this change. Mr. Lopez explained that he initially had trouble navigating how to balance the five essays in his course with other Ascender assignments. He met a professor at another community college at an Ascender event and discussed how to approach those changes. Ms. Ramos also added that the co-requisite model could be a challenge for students, stating "I think they feel the pressure more."

The 1301+ course is a composition course, so that is a departure from the traditional INRW model. Ms. Ramos discussed the faculty teaching INRW courses:

It's all ...former English instructors who are INRW instructors. So they have to teach the reading component as well. And sometimes it's real easy. And I'm the INRW lead, so when we have our first meeting of the semester before we get classes started, now I try to stress that...It's real easy as an English instructor to focus on the writing process and getting through that process.

There are several essays due throughout the semester in the 1301+ course, and faculty use culturally relevant literature in the form of short stories, poems, and articles. There was no assigned novel in the fall semester, which may have been due to the focus on composition in English 1301+ courses.

Epistemological Choices. The second theme noted in the broad understanding of faculty's experiences and perceptions of Ascender, Epistemological Choices, had three corresponding codes: Scaffolding, High Expectations, and Changes Regarding Acceleration. Participants only mentioned Scaffolding in relation to their broad Epistemological Choices. Faculty also noted how their Epistemological Choices related to the codes Culturally Relevant Aspects, Student Stressors, Auxiliary Actions, and Familial Aspects. This weaving together of themes and codes was a piece of the data narrative. Faculty made Epistemological Choices that were impacted by Valued Program Aspects, as well as Potential Stressors. Therefore, although this section shares faculty's use of scaffolding, the narrative is also told through the codes Culturally Relevant Aspects, Student Stressors, Auxiliary Actions, and Familial Aspects.

Scaffolding. The choice of scaffolding assignments, where instructors gradually released responsibility, was evident throughout conversations. The scaffolding process was described as part of writing, reading instruction, and presentations.

Writing. All three literacy course instructors discussed scaffolding in relation to the writing process. Often, creative writing or free writing was discussed as a way to ease students into academic writing assignments. Dr. Hernandez recounted an example of students free writing about a story by Sandra Cisneros. He asked them to keep writing and then they used the free-write to draft an essay. Sometimes, a piece of students' drafts could be used and refined. Mr. Lopez explained that after students shared their prewriting with a peer, he could guide them through how to refine it:

Let's look at the structure of her first story. Even though, maybe, there's not a thesis statement in it, there's still a main idea, and there's a message, and it still has an opening and a beginning and an end.

Mr. Lopez later added, "So, just give me something that has a opening, a beginning, a middle, and an end and structure it that way. And just make sure you give me a new topic." Mr. Lopez explained that this process helps students organize their writing and acts as a foundation at the beginning of the semester.

Ms. Ramos also discussed assignments that transitioned students to more academic writing. She explained:

Before we get to ...the formal academic paper we do some sort of fun activity to prepare. So we do things like... summarize a movie, and then we have a competition, like who can summarize a movie the best. ...and then they... make those connections to life because you do that every day. Someone asks you how your weekend was, you tell them how your weekend was. You're summarizing for them your weekend, right? So we put things into context that way. So they start making those connections and then they can start looking at things a little bit differently, through different lenses.

Ms. Ramos also described the writing process as formulaic and explained that it required practice. She stated, "the students will pick it up and, and in some ways it's also a memorization... you know, your thesis goes here, your paragraphs go this way, this is the format." The format may look similar, but throughout the semester the required length and depth of assignments may change. Dr. Hernandez explained how students move from shorter assignments to longer ones:

‘Cause a student one time told me, “Uh, sir, so how did they build the Wall of China? You know? How was that built?” I said, “One rock at a time.” He says, “Awww, that makes sense.” “So, how are you gonna write that essay? One word at a time. One sentence, and before you know it, you have a lot.” Then we go back and play with it.

Reading instruction. Reading instruction also had a scaffolding approach. For example, Dr. Hernandez taught students how to write in the margins of books and underline text. He explained, “The program teaches them to look for strong lines. Strong lines. And then the students, they’ll look for it... ‘Why is this a strong line for you? Tell me.’” Mr. Lopez also talked about using strong lines from texts in class and during his interview. For one assignment, the strong line is used for an essay’s “hook,” which is described as a way to engage the reader. Mr. Lopez explained:

In both pieces, when we read it ...they find a strong line and they have to incorporate at least one quote from each one in their essay. It can be the strong line or not. Okay? So ...they can use the quote in the beginning as the hook. They can use the bridges that... describe... in the introduction, they have to describe that experience first, and then, the body, they develop how they overcame it... and then conclude. And that seems to be working well with them.

Another approach was to work with smaller pieces before moving on to larger texts. Dr. Hernandez stated:

So, I start with small pieces, short pieces that they can grasp [*snaps fingers*] within, let’s say, 15 minutes. And then we start talking about it. “What did the author mean by this?” ...And before you know it, they’re getting hooked in. They

get hooked in very quick, and then they can start moving into the longer pieces.

Cause I'm not gonna start with, like, *Of Mice and Men* immediately... you know what I mean?

Ms. Ramos also discussed easing into reading because students do not often read texts outside of class. This impacts both the reading and writing process because of a lack of practice reading various texts. She explained:

But with the reading part, that's where we were having the biggest... challenge, because... students need to be good readers in order to be good writers, and, and a lot of them didn't have a lot of exposure to reading just even for pleasure. So we would... pick apart the reading. We would look for main ideas. We would look for supporting details. So then that they could transcribe that into their own writing, so that's why they knew how to put those things together.

Presentations. Other assignments were scaffolded, including a vision board presentation in Ms. Flores' learning frameworks course. When describing the assignment to me, Ms. Flores walked me through a student example, explaining how each PowerPoint slide had a different purpose and objective. For example, the presentation's profile slide was used to share something someone may be surprised to learn. Ms. Flores shared, "I've already told them you don't want to crowd it. You don't want to put too much for your audience. ...these are gonna be your speaking points."

Ms. Flores used her learning frameworks course to teach students about goal setting, telling students "you will be a lifelong goal setter." She used an analogy of using MapQuest for setting goals:

That is the purpose of setting goals. You... it's like you need MapQuest to go on a trip. How can you not use MapQuest? When you're going to the hill country or you wanna go tour... somewhere, you have to go somewhere in Austin you've gotta set the direction for your trip. For your life. This is your roadmap.

Dr. Hernandez discussed how students learning to listen carefully could be challenging, but it is a learning process. Mr. Lopez thought about how he revised the curriculum based on student needs, asking himself what he had to do to ensure students could “be successful in the course and have the skills they need to go on to the next course.” Dr. Garcia explained that motivation was one of her course’s learning outcomes, and she and the literacy instructor would pair together and co-teach the assignment. Dr. Garcia would teach the motivation piece and the INRW course would write about it.

Culturally Relevant Aspects. The first of four codes related to Scaffolding and Epistemological Choices was Culturally Relevant Aspects. Navigating how to approach teaching a culturally relevant curriculum in the new English 1301+ format required some epistemological changes. Mr. Lopez explained that he initially decided to separate the Ascender assignments from the five required essays. This division was accomplished by placing Ascender assignments in the lab component of the course. However, Mr. Lopez discovered:

But I found that, after working with them... after just two or three weeks, I needed to change that... it's because, in the beginning... They were getting confused about what was academic... and what was due and then what was this kind of creative kind of supplemental type work.

Ms. Ramos discussed how she had been working on finding the balance of putting a culturally relevant curriculum in the new English 1301+ format. Mr. Lopez found that the culturally relevant component of his course did not always “completely align with the regular curriculum here at the college.” After attending his second foundational institute, Mr. Lopez decided to make the fourth essay, an informal argument, an Ascender assignment by using a memoir. He explained that it was important that students receive support on foundational skills and he wanted to find a seamless way to blend Ascender assignments with the five essays. He stated:

I learned that the second year-round about, you know, how can we overcome the resistance... and find... a common ground where we can... mesh things together ...so that the students get the foundational skills that they need, but that the process is seamless because it helps a lot with the intimidation, starting off with them being intimidated just to be here in college. Starting off with the culturally relevant literature that they see themselves reflected.

Ms. Ramos also discussed having a culturally relevant curriculum throughout the semester. She shared short stories, articles, and poetry written by authors who identified as Hispanic. She added that the writing transitions into something more academic, such as a formal argument paper on immigration policy. These assignments all have a culturally relevant aspect to them. Mr. Lopez stated that students “react to it easier because they feel more comfortable with it. They have a lot to say. Their fingers fly on the keyboard after we read something by Gloria Anzaldua.” Ms. Ramos explained that this thread of culturally relevant curriculum would continue in the spring semester. She stated, “we’re adding the 1302 piece, it’s going to be all culturally relevant literature.

We're going to focus mostly on works from people of color.” During observations of English 1302, I watched videos of a folk dance group in Mexico and an African American poet. Students also read and analyzed a Native American poem.

Student Stressors. The second code related to Scaffolding and Epistemological Choices was Student Stressors. Faculty shared how they navigated Student Stressors while facilitating classes. For example, Ms. Ramos wanted to make sure I understood the challenges students in her course endured. She mentioned that the high schools some students attended, as well as the educational attainment students had achieved so far, were challenges for students she taught. Dr. Hernandez explained that he did not have students use third-person on their first paper because they aren't always properly trained to do so. He added that some students from what he determined to be elite schools "... already know third-person. Some of these kids, they don't know, and so I have to show them.” He also added that students in his INRW courses need more time to write.

I asked faculty about what they would like to add to their Ascender program. Ms. Ramos answered:

Oh gosh. Um, what would I add? I think the only thing maybe I would add is more computers. ...we don't get enough time on the computers and I feel like with this population, I often times have students who tell me that they... don't have access to the Internet at home or they don't have a computer at home. So those kinds of challenges sometimes hinder their academic progress... and then they don't have a car, they take public transportation. So staying on campus to finish an assignment or go to the library and do all these things, these are all challenges. So if I could just have computers at their disposal so that we could work and they

could... complete tasks and because I know they want to. It's outside of their control. I think that would be it.

Although the students did have access to computers in the lab, it was a limited time to complete assignments. When I came back to observe Ms. Ramos in the spring, her class was in a room that had computers lining the perimeter. At the mentor night, I asked Ms. Ramos if she had specifically asked for that room, reminding her of our previous conversation regarding the lack of computers. She explained that she always asks for rooms with computers as a preference, but does not always get a chance to teach in them.

Ms. Flores had a focus on public speaking in her learning frameworks course, which was not an easy task for some students. She explained that one student was so nervous she was shaking. Ms. Flores asked all students to try, offering some modifications if needed, including making eye contact with her or turning off the lights when presenting.

Dr. Garcia explained that she does not change the content of her course or teaching strategies for her Ascender section of learning frameworks. She explained:

Sometimes when we have students in there that are maybe you could tell they're not at college-level. ...I think that if you put students up to a challenge, I think they eventually, you know, rise to the...occasion. You know? That they usually do what they need to do.

Dr. Hernandez also discussed how students rose to the occasion when he discussed the discipline needed in his INRW course. At the beginning of the semester he held up one of the texts for the course and explained:

I say... “This is one of the textbooks you’ll be reading.” “It’s *a lot of* reading.” They go, “Yes.” “I cannot make you read this book. It has to come from you.” “I can leave it there. You have the choice of conquering this or not conquering this. You have the choice. You have to make choices. I can help you and guide you, but you have to help me too.” And... that’s how we do it. Cause I can’t baby them... so I have to let them know this is gonna be... a rigorous course. “You’re gonna have to do this,” and they start learning it.

Dr. Hernandez chuckled when he remembered a former student reminiscing about his class. He said the student exclaimed, “I never forget when you made us read all those books! I can’t believe I was able to do it. It was crazy! You know? Man, it was a lot of work!” The books Dr. Hernandez spoke about were not a part of the current English 1301+ course. Instead, students read creative non-fiction, articles, and a textbook.

Auxiliary Actions. The third code related to Scaffolding and Epistemological Choices was Auxiliary Actions. In other words, navigating how to approach Ascender curriculum in the learning community courses resulted in some extra work for faculty. For example, Ms. Ramos said it is easy for English instructors to focus on the writing process over the reading piece. She stated:

But you have to focus on the reading part at some point with these students because they don't, they can, they can probably write something, you know, a five paragraph essay, let’s just get through that. But to have them understand and the comprehension piece is really important. So that’s, that’s just our challenge.

Dr. Hernandez echoed this when he stated a need for the balance of reading and writing. He added, “It’s gotta be balanced.... ‘cause what are they gonna write about if they can’t

read? And, look, they both help hand-in-hand. If you're a good writer, that means you're a good reader."

Additionally, the change from INRW to English 1301+ resulted in some challenges for faculty. Ms. Ramos explained that students were not supposed to do research in English 1301+ and as a loophole she explained, "I'll do research and I'll bring it in and then they get to use those to write their papers." Mr. Lopez started his fall semester with the plan to assign high-stakes essays throughout the semester and Ascender assignments in between. By the end of the semester, he had made one of the high-stakes essays a culturally relevant assignment. Navigating the new English 1301+ format for the first time meant that there was flexibility in their approach. Mr. Lopez told students that he may make changes in the syllabus throughout the semester. Mr. Lopez shared with me how changes took place throughout the semester based on his goal to add more Ascender assignments into the writing assignments.

Familial Aspects. The final code related to Scaffolding and Epistemological Choices was Familial Aspects. A sense of familia was present when discussing Epistemological Choices. This included scaffolding responsibilities to students throughout the year. For example, students had learning frameworks instructors for one semester, unlike the two-semester option for literacy courses. Ms. Ramos explained:

Our Learning Frameworks instructors will still pop into class. They work with them on advising. Um...we have mentor panels, and so we're all together for those. The... CTN team is always working with the students. So in the spring, even though they don't have that instructor anymore, that instructor is still very present.

Dr. Hernandez discussed how mentors were brought up in his literacy course, including authors they read. Dr. Garcia mentioned using culturally relevant examples to tie her learning frameworks course to an essay in the paired literacy course.

Familial Aspects were also used to describe dividing work to student groups in Dr. Hernandez's course. These groups worked on a large text, divided in chapters, and presented them to each other. The material covered was on an exam, so students had to present the material well. Dr. Hernandez expounded on this process:

So, one Tejano book is like 360 pages, so I gave 'em long chapters, and they got teams of four. One covers the summary of the chapter. Another one talks about significant lines in the chapter. Another one talks about... strong points, and then the other one ... gives the interpretation of what's happening. ...and they meet together in teams. So, ... let's say one Tejanos book is divided by eight chapters, then I've got eight groups...

Dr. Hernandez noted how this process was used to provide opportunities for students to depend on their peers in class.

The next section shares how faculty navigated representative curriculum and identity by sharing data related to the instrumental case study's two sub-questions. The remaining faculty data will be organized by sub-question. Additionally, similar to the previous section, due to the open-ended nature of my interview protocol, other codes regarding Epistemological Choices and Potential Stressors were noted. Those additional codes will be explored after the sub-questions are addressed. The operational definitions for codes can be found in Table 4 on page 112. Interview data are organized beginning

with research sub-questions 2A and 2B. Codes were present in more than one research question or theme, as the codes discovered were woven throughout interviews.

Sub-Question 2A: Promoting an Inclusive Culture

My first sub-question asked: *Do faculty working in a community college learning community perceive their developmental literacy courses promote an inclusive culture? If so, how?* Multiple codes aligned with this question: Validation, Familial Aspects, Culturally Relevant Aspects, Auxiliary Actions, High Expectations, and Growth of Program. These codes were infused throughout discussions of promoting an inclusive culture as ways to help students succeed. Each code is explored below with accompanying data. As previously noted, codes were closely intertwined. As a result, the data is placed where it was best suited, with an understanding that the themes blended together due to Valued Aspects of the Program, Potential Stressors, and Epistemological Choices.

Validation. The first of six codes related to promoting an inclusive culture was Validation. This section will begin with an overview of how validation was used, followed with sections on student challenges, mentor night, and transitioning to a four-year degree.

Praise was mentioned by faculty in relation to validation. For example, Dr. Hernandez stated, “Validation theory operates this way, through caring a million... Like, telling them, ‘You can do it’, and making ‘em part of the family.” Ms. Flores had a similar understanding of validation theory, explaining:

Catch the Next that introduced me to validation theory. I mean, we all do it.

Except I didn't have a name for it... I love it. It's beautiful... I naturally just was

drawn to it. I said this is something that I can really emphasize in my classes.

And all my classes actually.

Ms. Flores often had opportunities for feedback, such as comment cards for assignments. When students completed a large project, she had students provide encouragement using comment cards. She explained that students found them meaningful, mentioning how one former student told her she still reads her comment cards. Ms. Flores ended her comment cards conversation by telling me:

I'm all about validation and motivating them, and I said you have to motivate yourself. And you have to inspire yourself because nobody makes you want to be here... you've gotta want this so badly, as badly as breathing that's how badly, because you've got to just keep pushing through. When it gets hard push through. When it gets painful push through until you wear the cap and gown.

This sense of validating students beyond the learning frameworks course was indicative of the value Ascender faculty placed on Validation.

Student challenges. Validation was mentioned in relation to the challenges students faced. When closing out my interview with Ms. Ramos, I asked if there was anything I needed to know that I did not ask. She wanted to discuss the student population she served, which she explained came with certain challenges. Ms. Ramos explained, "We work with, ...I don't want to deficit them to death. Like they... have challenges but those challenges... they know what their challenges are, let's talk about what they're good at." Dr. Hernandez echoed this statement when he stated:

And a lot of praise - a lot of praise. And I tell 'em that a lot of writing is cut-and-paste, and they gotta be able to understand that - that it's not perfect the first

time... So, sometimes I'll show 'em an edited piece by Stephen King. They can see all the markings and, you know, "What happened here?" This is - This is Stephen King at the beginning, but he does several drafts. And then at the end, like, "Wow, this is good." "Well, yeah, but look how he started."

Much like Dr. Hernandez shared the Stephen King example with students, participants often discussed ways they used validation in their instruction. Mr. Lopez mentioned how the pair/share format helps validate students. He explained that there is a reader and a listener. Each student takes a turn reading their writing and the listener identifies a strong line in the piece, perhaps asking a question to learn more about the writing. Dr. Garcia mentioned how motivation theory is used in her course when using culturally relevant examples. She explained how she assigned an essay about a Latina student who attended an Ivy League school while living in her car. The essay shared how the student navigated completing her homework by driving around to find Wi-Fi hotspots.

Ms. Flores explained how she emphasized reading and writing in her learning frameworks course. She noted that students have to speak in college and in their profession, so they might as well practice with her. Dr. Hernandez shared:

And I do use a lot of...it's called "validation theory"- where I'm telling 'em, "You can do it! You can do it!" So, that's one of the things about students, first-generation students. You gotta give *a lot of* validation. They need to be validated. And they gotta understand that ... cause I always tell 'em, "Sometimes if you fail, so get up!" It's like when you were learning to walk, you'd fall, your mother didn't say, "Whoops! He's a failure. He's never gonna walk again!"

Throughout our conversation, Dr. Hernandez noted how he used an explanation of the step-by-step nature of writing, as well as analogies to validate students. The analogy above illustrates how Dr. Hernandez used humor to remind students that the writing process takes time to master.

Mentor night. A key piece of the Validation component was mentoring. Dr. Garcia mentioned how the learning community could impact student success, including elements like mentor night. Ms. Flores explained how the mentor component used to provide a personal cheerleader for students, someone who could text to check in on students about their semester. Dr. Garcia explained, “When we first started out, we had a one-to-one mentor for every single student.” Now there is a mentor panel in the Spring semester due to the growth of the program. The event invited eighteen mentors to speak with students by rotating to three roundtable discussions.

Four-year degrees. Another Validation element was encouraging students to think about transferring to a four-year university, which was discussed by several participants. Dr. Garcia shared several four-year universities that students traveled to. Mr. Lopez shared that “the-the aim of the program is to get students to transfer to a four-year university because the program is-is part of the 60 by 30.” Ms. Ramos explained why she felt the program kept scaling up:

The partnerships that we have with the other instructors are really what make... the program itself be successful. And we’ve found that. ... our data always shows that our students who are in the program are more successful than the students who aren’t, which is why we keep scaling up.

Ms. Flores echoed this statement, explaining that the end of the semester is bittersweet. She does not get to spend two semesters with students and makes sure to personally say good-bye to each student when they finish their final exam, offering words of encouragement. Ms. Flores explained that she tells students:

You are a joy to work with, and now we gotta say good-bye. So I have to understand that you are gonna go on to bigger and better things. You... promised me you're gonna stay for just two years. You have to move on.

This final encouragement to students provided by Ms. Flores ties to Familial Aspects, the next code present in interviews.

Familial Aspects. The second code related to promoting an inclusive culture was Familial Aspects. Every faculty participant discussed promoting an inclusive culture in relation to Familial Aspects. This section begins by discussing Epistemological Choices related to Familial Aspects, followed by learning community elements and the mentor component.

Epistemological Choices. Familial Aspects were noted in relation to the instructional choices made by faculty. For example, Ms. Ramos discussed the change over the semester where students become part of a collective, similar to Dr. Hernandez's assertion that validation makes students "part of the family." Mr. Lopez discussed embracing varied cultures in the classroom:

Even though the majority of the students are Latino, but I have some from... non-Latino students who... maybe come from the rural area... I guess, um, Anglo American students... and they have a culture, too. You know what I mean? They have a voice, too... I wanna find literature that... they can respond to as well.

He also discussed how there have been African American students in his classes and he hoped to collaborate with another Ascender program to learn about their approaches and assignments using African American literature. Mr. Lopez also noted a need for using social media and how that can change the nature of communication for students. He explained how students could communicate with and encourage peers differently using this format:

I notice, with this generation, too, if I give ‘em a discussion that they can respond to on the computer, they... tell you all. But, if I ask them to speak in class, they don’t give as much, and then they respond to one another, and they respond to the chat, and they tell one another nice things. They motivate ... and they encourage one another... I see their voices and their encouragement of one another in a way that... I wouldn’t see otherwise in the classroom.

Mr. Lopez offered this online component as a strategy to encourage students. However, when sharing it, Mr. Lopez also noted how this strategy also provides opportunities for Hispanic males to share encouraging words in what he perceived as a safer environment.

As previously noted, Ascender uses a pair share format to provide feedback, which was shared in conversations with Mr. Lopez and Dr. Hernandez. Providing peer feedback also takes place in learning framework courses, including when Ms. Ramos uses comment cards on presentations. This aspect ties to the Familial Aspects code because peer feedback is encouraged and expected in several Ascender courses.

Learning community. The learning community element was often discussed in relation to the Familial Aspects code. Ms. Ramos stated that the “team effort, it really helps the cohort model be successful.” Mr. Lopez explained that his ability to have

students two semesters in a row helps students transition from English 1301+ their first semester to English 1302 the following semester. The literacy instructors mentioned the opportunity to have students a second semester. Dr. Garcia mentioned that she would like the same format to keep a connection with the students: “What would be ideal, I think, would be... if ...I was teaching another course in the second semester with the same students. That way, I can have that continuous connection with them for a whole year.” Ms. Flores talked about how the transition at the end of the semester is challenging, but she gets closure with students by individually saying goodbye as students finish their final exams. Dr. Hernandez discussed the format, explaining that he had the opportunity to meet with various stakeholders to arrange what students are doing in the learning community.

Mentor component. Another piece of Familial Aspects was the previous mentor format. Ms. Flores was reminiscent of the former mentor setup where students had individual mentors, stating, “That I would say is the top of my priority list for this program.” Dr. Hernandez added that the individual mentor aspect was very important, explaining, “And they discuss things. And you talk about them, ‘So what are you doing in school? So, what’s a hard thing?’ Kinda like an older sister.” This previous format provided another familial connection during Ascender students’ first year at college.

Culturally Relevant Aspects. The third code related to promoting an inclusive culture was Culturally Relevant Aspects. Mr. Lopez discussed how using culturally relevant literature helps with student comprehension. He used, “relevant literature to validate the students because they see themselves reflected in the literature, so they have a stronger... a better comprehension of what they’re reading.” Dr. Garcia explained how

she used culturally relevant examples in her learning frameworks course, discussing potential barriers to success. Dr. Hernandez noted how he used Hispanic literature as part of an explanation of “the mirror and the window:”

I started with a lot of Hispanic literature, right, or Tejano literature. And once they get involved with that, I said, “This ... is gonna lead you to other worlds.” And I tell them that for me... literature is a mirror, not a window. So.. the “mirror theory” is that they look at themselves. The “window theory” is they look outside to other worlds, so I always try to use those two complementary worlds of literature. The “mirror” and the “window.”

During a member checking session, Dr. Hernandez shared that the mirror and window concept was a piece of the Ascender curriculum.

There were a variety of culturally relevant lessons discussed by participants. Mr. Lopez discussed Dia de Los Muertos. Dr. Garcia mentioned Hispanic Heritage Month, cultural events, and Fiesta week, which includes a large festival. Students with varied backgrounds were also discussed in interviews. Mr. Lopez mentioned content for students who did not identify as Hispanic. For example, his first year in the Ascender program he had a student who moved to the United States from Jamaica. He also discussed a need to bring in stories that his Anglo American students could identify with, explaining that identifying their culture is also important. This collective embrace of culture affords students who do not identify as Hispanic to feel like part of the family as well.

Auxiliary Actions. The fourth code related to promoting an inclusive culture was Auxiliary Actions. Faculty described various moments where they went above and

beyond to promote an inclusive culture. Dr. Garcia discussed a commitment to the learning community, which included taking students to cultural events and the closeness of staff. Dr. Garcia explained that Ascender works because:

Not only do you see results because the two people want to do it and they're in constant contact, but it's also fun for them. You know? And ...it's because they want to do it; not because they're forced to do it. So, the connection between the students, the connection between the faculty... those...are some of the reasons why they work.

Ms. Flores discussed her use of comment cards to motivate students, which took her several hours. Ms. Ramos explained focusing on what is happening in the world around students: "we're focused on the academics but then we also focus on what's happening in the world around them."

High Expectations. The fifth code tied to promoting an inclusive culture was High Expectations. Several faculty members noted high expectations with regard to student success. Dr. Garcia discussed the importance of having motivated students:

Students that say, "You know what? This program is gonna help me be a better student and I'm gonna do what it takes to do it." 'Cause when you think about it, students that do something like... [Ascender] are already more committed, you know? What we want them to do is stay. Stay in school. Complete, and graduate and move on.

This commitment included attending events outside of class and persevering. Dr.

Hernandez mentioned an example of persevering:

One of my ex-students in that Catch the Next—*[whispers]* very shy, *very* shy. And I got ‘em out of that through doing those presentations. And then, one day, he was asked if he could give a presentation to the faculty at our convocation, and he just freaked out. But then, he just bit his tongue, and just got up there and talked. And he talks very logical, very slowly and very logical. So, he says, “Oh my God, there were like 400 faculty members there.”

Dr. Hernandez noted how this conversation highlighted the transition his former student had from being reserved to persevering and talking in front of large audiences.

Growth of Program. The final code related to promoting an inclusive culture was Growth of Program. The growth of Ascender gave educators a chance to learn about other communities. As previously noted, Mr. Lopez explained that another college was going to be serving primarily African American students. He shared, “So, they’re gonna use different literature in their courses than, maybe—than we would use here. And it would be nice to, maybe, collaborate with them sometimes to find out what they’re doing- and what are their approaches?” This aspect of growth increases opportunities for faculty to use a culturally relevant curriculum. The next section navigates how faculty addressed students’ identities, as well as their language practices.

Sub-Question 2B: Representation of Students’ Identities and Language Practices

My second sub-question asked “*Do faculty working in a community college learning community perceive that there is a representation of students’ identities and language practices in their developmental literacy course? If so, how?*” The three codes that were placed in this question were: Culturally Relevant Aspects, Validation, and Scaffolding.

Culturally Relevant Aspects. The first code that was linked to the representation of students' identities and language practices was Culturally Relevant Aspects. This section begins with a brief overview of Ascender's emphasis on culturally relevant materials. Next, the code is explored in engaging materials, the reflection of student experiences, and cultural events.

Ascender uses culturally relevant materials as part of their programming. When discussing the importance of representative materials, Dr. Hernandez said, "Start with what you know. Ease them in, so [you] go into what you don't know later on." For example, Dr. Hernandez discussed starting with a family portrait assignment to ease students into the semester:

But it's a learning process. But the thing to do is the family portraits, because it's easy. "Who knows about the family?" "You do!" But if I ask you to write about something unknown, "Ugh, I don't know about that." "Well, why would you write something about..." "Like what?" "But if it's a picture of your great-grandmother or— And then you probably heard stories about her."

One consistent note about representative materials was that faculty perceived these to be engaging to the students in Ascender.

Engaging materials. One of the common tenants of starting students with what they know is looking for material that students will find engaging or interesting. The English 1301+ course was beneficial for students in Ascender because, as Ms. Ramos stated, they get to see readings that may be more relevant to their experiences. Ms. Ramos discussed reading Sandra Cisneros, stating, "Seeing their home language reflected in literature was kind of exciting for them. They were able to connect and make

connections to, to fit their everyday lives, uh and not feel like they were in such a foreign place.” Many of the pieces shared in interviews and observations were by Hispanic authors, but some Anglo American artists, including Eminem and J. D. Vance, were also discussed. Dr. Hernandez explained, “Culturally-relevant literature deals with the literature that pertains to the community. So, if the community is 50 percent Hispanic and 50 percent White- then the literature has to come from the community.” The text by Vance, *Hillbilly Elegy*, is focused on the experience of a white man. Dr. Hernandez explained, “So, we talk about it, ‘What did he gain? What did he lose?’ And I always tell the students, ‘Really, he didn’t really lose that culture. It’s part of him He just gained another culture. He can use both.’” Later, Dr. Hernandez added, “It’s like bi-culturalism. He can navigate two worlds. And I told ‘em, ‘The language that we use in academia is not the language of working-class families.’” This example shows a different perspective of navigating more than one culture.

Reflecting student experiences. Texts were also used to validate and acknowledge students’ experiences. Ms. Ramos explained that texts like the memoir *A Place to Stand* provided opportunities to:

Pull from... in terms of also understanding that there’s literature out there that’s not just Shakespeare and not just... things that they read in high school but also things that were relevant to and very much like the scenarios that they found themselves in growing up... We had incarceration, you had drug use, you had... gang violence. All of these things that they were familiar with, unfortunately... but they saw it in print and then translated... those things helped the writers become different people in a way... we talked a lot about that as well.

Similarly, Mr. Lopez discussed a short story by Sandra Cisneros titled “My Name” at the beginning of the semester. There were also several assignments previously mentioned by students, including an assignment titled Don’t let the Spirit Crushers Get you Down, where students wrote letters to themselves in the voices of their parents. Mr. Lopez also used another poem students mentioned titled “Knock Knock,” where author Daniel Beatty recounts growing up without an incarcerated father.

As students previously noted, Ms. Flores used the book *The Four Agreements*, a Toltec wisdom book, as part of her learning frameworks course. She explained that students tell her “thank you for making us read this book. It has changed my life.” Validation was used in relation to texts as well. Dr. Garcia used the story of a Latina Ivy League student who overcame obstacles. Dr. Hernandez shared award-winning authors who graduated from the field site. As Dr. Hernandez stated:

Well, one of the things is that I try to do is, I try to open up their own world. Cause if I were to start talking about Shakespeare, they’d be completely like, “Whoa! What does this have to do with me?” So, I always try to give readings that relate to their world. And once they get that, I got ‘em hooked.

Several faculty members used this strategy of using familiar materials and experiences to engage students.

Cultural events. Ascender also promoted cultural events that were used to represent identities and language practices. For example, events occur on campus that students can attend for extra credit or as a required component of their course. This component includes several on-campus events during Heritage Month. Students were able to see the artist Luis Valdez speak, then write about the importance of activism or

social activism through artistic mediums. When asked if the students enjoyed the event, Ms. Ramos stated:

Yes... a lot of them didn't know who he was, and then they, they knew a little bit of the background. Like... they've heard the names, like Cesar Chavez, before. And they knew about that, but they didn't understand how art could also fit into that and drama... and how you can also be an activist through a craft. So... we support that a lot.

Evenings like this cultural event, or Fiesta week as Dr. Garcia noted, provided opportunities for students who identified as Hispanic to experience relevant activities outside of class.

Validation. The second code that tied to the representation of students' identities and language practices was Validation. This validation piece was seen in three ways: validation through literature, validation of students' learning preferences, and validation from the community. Each of these three forms of validation is outlined below.

Validation through literature. Mr. Lopez explained that the Ascender literacy courses start with culturally relevant literature so students "see themselves reflected." He explained that this validates students because they see themselves in the literature and have an easier time comprehending what they are reading. This begins with assignments like the previously noted Spirit Crushers paper, where students describe an experience they had with a spirit crusher, followed by another free-write where students talk about using their inner strengths to overcome the spirit crusher. Later in the semester, students move on to argumentative assignments. Ms. Ramos discussed how this assignment is unique for her students:

That part is always very exciting because they bring in... they have a different view than... even just their generation. It's a generational thing. They have more issues, social issues that they're facing. So seeing them almost go from... a student who maybe was underprepared because our feeder schools um are, you know, low-performing in general. But then... becoming... passionate about something and then writing about it, and even though those skills maybe aren't as ... polished as they should be... they're still using their voice. So that's always very exciting.

As the semester progresses, students begin to transition from writing reflection pieces to argumentative pieces. Ms. Ramos stated that she enjoys:

The end of the semester, we focus on argumentative writing... I let them take a couple of different paths for that. And it's always exciting to see what they're interested in. So sometimes it's... topics that, that are relevant to them, like immigration or... DACA... is huge right now, so... they'll take a... stance on that. And that's one of those loophole things, so I'll do research and I'll bring it in and then they get to use those to write their papers.

In addition to the students' literacy courses, Ms. Flores also requires reading in her Learning Frameworks course. Her students read the text *The Four Agreements*. The text is used to align with the course's textbook and learning outcomes.

Validation of students' learning preferences. Faculty also validated students' comfort level when speaking in academia, learning to navigate how to best serve their student population. Mr. Lopez discussed possibly adding an online discussion component to his course for peers to encourage each other in a different way. He

specifically discussed how males may be able to express their emotions more in an online environment. Mr. Lopez explained, “I think that’s a Latino thing... because ... they’re not taught... we’re not taught to speak about your emotions in public.” Ms. Ramos echoed this concern about students speaking in class when she stated, “sometimes they don't feel like they can ask questions because... they’re not given permission to ask questions. ...or they don't feel like their questions are important enough.” This shared understanding illustrates the way faculty in Ascender navigated the social and cultural norms of the students.

Validation from the community. Faculty also validated students by providing examples of students and other members of the community who persevered. Several faculty discussed a former student who graduated from the Ascender program. Dr. Hernandez shared a YouTube video where a student from the field site eventually graduated from the University of Texas with honors despite being a high school dropout. Dr. Hernandez explained that just because a student had bad grades does not mean he cannot apply himself:

He applied himself. He is one of our speakers at one of our seminars we had for CTN, where he explained how he did it, so the students can see like, “Ohhhh, that’s how.” And he tells ‘em, “It’s not easy. You have to discipline yourself.”

Additionally, Dr. Hernandez talked about authors like Reyna Grande who “went from not speaking a single word of English to writing three books. And they’re *New York Times* bestsellers. One of them just... I was looking at her interview in the *New York Times*.” Dr. Hernandez explained that the students’ reaction to her success was a favorite moment.

Scaffolding. The final code that tied to the representation of students' identities and language practices was Scaffolding. Faculty discussed a scaffolding process when teaching writing, where they provided guidance at first and then gradually released that responsibility. Dr. Hernandez explained how this unfolded in a process essay:

I said, "I want you to, what does your father do?" "He... he's a roofer." "Okay, I want you to ask you... where does he start? At the top or the bottom?" "Well, that's silly! He starts so-and-so." "Okay, I want you to tell me *why* he starts there, and what does he..." "My father lays tile." "So, I want you to ask him, where does he start when he lays down..."

He explained how this process essay allows students to compare the process of writing to the processes their fathers do at work. Dr. Hernandez discussed a similar process when students wrote about family portraits, asking questions and guiding students using their responses. Ms. Ramos, Mr. Lopez, and Dr. Hernandez all mentioned using a reflective writing piece at the beginning of the semester. Dr. Hernandez shared, "the first paper, I let them be themselves. I let them use 'I' and the first-person, and later on, they move into the academic." Mr. Lopez began his semester with a narrative and then moved to a persuasive argument that he described as "academic writing."

Summary of Faculty Findings

All faculty participants wove through the codes of Familial Aspects, Culturally Relevant Aspects, and Validation throughout their interviews. However, some themes were unique to faculty participants: Potential Stressors and Epistemological Choices. These themes had codes unique to instructor perceptions and experiences, including Growth of Program, Changes Regarding Acceleration, and Auxiliary Actions. These

codes helped tell the narrative of “what happens behind the curtain” when faculty plan lessons, as well as outside events.

The research question that guided my conversations with faculty participants was *What are the perceptions and experiences of faculty regarding culturally inclusive curricular elements and representation of student identities in literacy instruction?*

Participants mentioned the code Scaffolding when discussing their broad Epistemological Choices. Codes related to faculty’s Epistemological Choices were: Culturally Relevant Aspects, Student Stressors, Auxiliary Actions, and Familial Aspects. The narrative of the data showed how faculty made Epistemological Choices that were impacted by Valued Program Aspects (Culturally Relevant Aspects and Familial Aspects) and Potential Stressors (Student Stressors and Auxiliary Actions).

My guiding question was informed by two sub-questions. My first sub-question asked, *Do faculty working in a community college learning community perceive their developmental literacy courses promote an inclusive culture? If so, how?* Multiple codes aligned with faculty’s response to this question. The codes included Validation, Familial Aspects, Culturally Relevant Aspects, Auxiliary Actions, High Expectations, and Growth of Program. The data narrative showed how these six codes were woven throughout interview discussions related to promoting an inclusive culture as ways to help students succeed.

My second sub-question asked, *Do faculty working in a community college learning community perceive that there is a representation of students’ identities and language practices in their developmental literacy course? If so, how?* The three codes that were placed in this question were: Culturally Relevant Aspects, Validation, and

Scaffolding. Through conversations with faculty, I learned how the representation of students' identities and language practices were addressed through elements including engaging materials, reflecting students' experiences, and cultural events. The final section shares a cross-case analysis of the faculty and participant data.

Cross-Case Analysis

Initially, this study was intended to be an instrumental case study and I did not plan to include a cross-case analysis between participant groups. However, due to the open-ended nature of my protocol, there were noticeable similarities and differences in the conversations with participants. Khan and VanWynsberghe (2008) warned the possibility of cross-case analysis has the potential to cause uniqueness from cases to “get lost when the content is simplified in order to make comparison possible” (p. 8). Therefore, I made sure to provide data for both participant groups that pertained to my coding process before sharing my cross-case analysis. Stake (2010) noted how case studies focus on fewer people to understand the experiences of participants, which can be simultaneously unique and common (Stake, 2010). Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) noted how cross-case analysis affords researchers the opportunity to review multiple cases and then group passages together. In other words, these passages from cases “are then rebuilt into an ordered whole and put into the natural social context” (Miles, et al., 2014, p. 103).

This is an interpretive synthesis, which provides an understanding of the similarities and differences of the cases (Miles, et al., 2014). I was not planning a cross-case analysis while conducting my first focus group, but a student participant noted the possibility. Before ending focus groups, I would ask students if they had any questions

before I turned off the recorder. At the end of focus group one, students were curious with what I would be doing with the data. Although this was previously described in the consent form and recruitment email, the students likely had more context for my goals and interests as the focus group concluded. I explained the instrumental case study to the focus group again and it was suggested by the student participants that I was completing a compare and contrast essay. I replied, “Yeah, exactly. ...it’ll either be a ... summary together or a compare and contrast. I don’t know yet.” Antonella, Alessandra, and Alejandro laughed as we closed out the focus group.

Much like the students in Focus Group One predicted, this section begins by noting similarities and differences within the two research questions. Next, I note the various themes and codes that moved to the foreground when talking with students and faculty. This section ends with a synthesis of similarities and differences. Quotes from the previous sections are used throughout this cross-case analysis to provide context to these comparisons.

Sub-Question A: Promoting an Inclusive Culture

The purpose of sub-question A was to learn if students and faculty enrolled in a community college learning community perceived that their developmental literacy courses promoted an inclusive culture. Students had four codes that were prevalent in answering this question: Valued Aspects of Learning Community, Validation, Familial Aspects, and Culturally Relevant Aspects. Faculty had several codes that aligned with this question: Validation, Familial Aspects, Culturally Relevant Aspects, Auxiliary Actions, High Expectations, and Growth of Program.

Similarities. There were three common codes for sub-question A: Validation, Familial Aspects, and Culturally Relevant Aspects. These codes are explored in the context of focus groups, interviews, fieldnotes, and observations.

Validation. The first common code for sub-question A was Validation. Students and faculty mentioned Validation as an important aspect of providing an inclusive culture. For example, Rebeca previously noted how Mr. Lopez validated opinions in class: “whether it's right or wrong, and then if it's wrong, then he'll say—well, it's not wrong, but it's good that you said it, but here's another point of view.” This was observed in his class when Mr. Lopez was discussing a poem’s interpretation with students. When a student provided an interpretation other than his, Mr. Lopez noted that although it was different from his understanding of the poem, “that doesn’t mean its not there. Maybe I’m not seeing it.”

Dr. Hernandez previously stated that part of Validation is telling students “You can do it,” and helping them feel like part of the family. Victoria noted students should try college even if they might not think they are “meant for college life.” She shared:

A lot of people think ... ‘Oh, no one’s going to care... I have this responsibility or have a kid or have this or I have that.’ ...it’s possible. You’ve just got to put yourself out there and try it.

Joaquin discussed how he was taking an honors course the spring semester, one I heard Ms. Ramos describe in her English 1301+ course. The honors course program option of English 1302 required that students have a 3.25 GPA and two writing statements. Accepted students received priority registration for English 1302, the course that followed English 1301+ the next semester. Joaquin shared his excitement about the

program: “Like I got the shirt, and I was like at first being in honors program is like one thing, but then as soon as I got the shirt made, it made me really happy. And then I told my mom about it, and she was very... very proud.”

Validation on campus. Validation also appeared to be a part of the campus as a whole. Signage on campus provided students with academic resources, as well as motivational quotes. There were also two large banners outside of the field site. They stated, “My career starts here” and “My legacy starts here.” In addition to motivational signage, there was also signage that offered additional resources to students on campus. While driving to the building for my meeting, I noticed a banner sharing financial literacy workshops, including how to fill out FAFSA. Bulletin boards lined the halls where I observed classes and met with faculty. One flyer offered holiday gifts to children of need who were 10 or younger. Another flyer showed enrollment for childcare services on campus. In the bathroom, a poster hung inside stalls sharing student resources including a Goodwill clothes closet, food pantry, mental health services, personal counseling, and the number for the campus police department. These resources tie to what Victoria noted about how understanding the Ascender program was about her child. She noted that Mr. Lopez was, “... very understanding. He knows I have a child. He knows like if I had to miss a class, like it wasn’t just because I wanted to stay home.” She later noted that “And like having teachers and advisor—like, you know, advisors that understand that, makes a huge difference.”

Familial Aspects. The second common code between participant groups for sub-question A was Familial Aspects. This included examples in interviews and focus groups, as well as Familial Aspects in observations and on campus. Students and faculty

both noted Familial Aspects in relation to an inclusive culture. Students embraced a sense of familia with each other. For example, during focus groups, students often shared that their peers will go to the mall or out to lunch together at Taco Cabana, a local fast food restaurant. Camila noted these new friendships when she previously explained how, “the friendships and bonds we built during the program” were important to her. I observed one student give her friend a traditional Mexican doll before class, explaining that she bought it from work. The doll had ribbons in her hair and wore a traditional folk dress.

Faculty also placed importance on Familial Aspects. For example, Ms. Ramos noted a change after students first enter Ascender where they seem to become part of a collective unit. As previously noted, Mr. Lopez mentioned bringing in varied cultures to his instruction because “they have a culture, too.” This sense of familia was noted in observations of both literacy courses. One example was a field trip students could attend at the state Capitol for Community College Day. Mr. Lopez checked in with the students who attended the trip individually, asking what they valued about the experience. Ms. Ramos wrote and printed letters for students who wanted to go on the field trips but had conflicts due to work or class.

Familial Aspects in observations. Familial Aspects were also coded in observations of student and professor interactions. Mr. Lopez often stood outside the room to greet students before class and walked around to check in with students, asking about their jobs or their peers. Once he asked a student where an absent peer was. After the student responded Mr. Lopez added, “tell her I asked about her.” Ms. Ramos often joked with students before class and had conversations with students about her weekend

and her family. One student in her class was pregnant. Ms. Ramos talked with her about modifications to her course, including posting things online. She told the student to give her a timeframe and empathized with how difficult things like sleep and going to work are near the end of a pregnancy.

Familial Aspects were also noted outside of the classroom. During the holiday party in December, students talked with faculty about topics unrelated to Ascender, including makeup. Students and faculty took informal group pictures and played games, including What Do You Meme. Several students also hugged their professors goodbye before leaving for the winter break. Others made sure to wave and acknowledge them before leaving.

Familial Aspects on campus. While observing the campus as a whole, there was also a familial sense to the main gathering space on campus, near the student center. There was a large green space with colorful hammocks, plastic chairs, and benches ensconced with trellises. On the first week of classes, there was a person with audio equipment playing happy music. Sometimes food trucks lined the green, offering barbeque po boy sandwiches or Asian tacos. Using fieldnotes, I explained the scene at the common space one morning toward the close of the fall semester:

On a sunny winter day the hammocks were mostly taken before 11 am. Students sat in groups, laughing and talking. Dress and reaction to the weather varied; It was 54 degrees and sunny, so some students were bundled up and wearing snow hats. Others are wearing short sleeve shirts and took their shoes off to sit in hammocks. One student in a varsity coat dragged a large plastic chair to sit near his friends in hammocks.

The hammock area is not particularly large. However, there are clusters of seating options where students can cluster together. The students sat on hammocks to converse, shouting to each other across the lawn or engaging with students walking by. Other than the one skateboard, everyone else was walking by the green space. A student did a trick on a skateboard and a male student yelled “GOOD JOB ELIZABETH” and other students cheered. One student at the closest hammocks stated “I’m taking pictures of all my friends. Pose!” She circled around the cluster of friends, taking additional pictures with the phrase “aaaand pose!” Some students sat at picnic tables closer to the student center as a pregnant student walked to class while she talked on her phone.

Many of the passersby were wearing backpacks and stared at their cell phones while walking. Traffic in the area ebbed and flowed with the release of classes. The students in the green appeared to be clustered, but not the students walking around from class. The majority of those students walked alone. A police officer walked around the green, hands on his vest. He seemed to be concentrating attention on the green, but was doing a perimeter walk. At 10:55 a.m. the green became quieter and students walked away from their hammocks and chairs. One student shouted “bye, loves!” as his peers walked away.

This sense of community where students laughed, encouraged one another, and took pictures of each other was echoed in my fieldnotes for classroom observations and attending outside of class activities in Ascender.

Culturally Relevant Aspects. The final common code between participant groups for sub-question A was Culturally Relevant Aspects. Both participant groups mentioned

the code Culturally Relevant Aspects in relation to an inclusive environment. Culturally relevant assignments previously noted in focus groups, interviews, and observations included What's in a Name, Knock-Knock, Spirit Crushers, Dia de los Muertos Sugar Skulls, and outside cultural events.

One of the most talked about assignments was Knock-Knock. Students often referred to it as “the letter to the parent.” I was able to see a video of the poet share his work when observing English 1302. In his English 1302 class, Mr. Lopez shared the poem *Knock Knock*, which was also used in his English 1301+ course. A student who did not generally speak in class shared that she had watched the video several times. The video was played in class for students, who also had printed copies of the poem. The poem was about a young boy's father going to prison and how the boy dealt with his father's absence. When Mr. Lopez asked why the father from in the poem might be in jail, students responded with “racism” and “I feel like he stood up for himself and got in trouble for it.”

Students used this poem as inspiration when writing the previous semester. Students composed a letter from their parents, where they imagined what their parents would say to them. Students mentioned absent parents, divorce, and other struggles they navigated in relation to that assignment. Jazmin previously noted, “it was very sentimental and emotional, but at the same time it was also helping us.” Students also mentioned outside events including Noche de Familia, a talk on the importance of young voters and an artist who worked with Cesar Chavez.

Differences. Although both students and faculty mentioned Validation, Familial Aspects, and Culturally Relevant Aspects, there were also codes that were not shared

between the two groups of participants. Students discussed the code Valued Aspects of the Learning Community, and faculty noted the codes Auxiliary Actions, High Expectations, and Growth of Program.

Student code. Students had one unique code in relation to inclusive environments: Valued Aspects of the Learning Community. I noted the code Familial Aspects was also commonly found with Valued Aspects of the Learning Community when coding focus group transcriptions. However, there were also noted differences between the codes. For example, Valued Aspects of the Learning Community not related to a sense of Familial Aspects included priority registration and guidance in classes. Isabella noted that Ascender “was like definitely... really helpful, and it gives you like a lot of guidance, and it makes English a lot—you know, instead of it being stressful, it makes it like more fun.”

Faculty codes. Faculty noted three codes in relation to inclusive environments: Auxiliary Actions, High Expectations, and Growth of Program. Students discussed the cultural events, which require additional outside planning and coordination. Faculty mentioned these events in relation to Auxiliary Actions and the Growth of Program codes. For example, the code Growth of Program was noted when Dr. Lopez discussed collaborating with other Ascender programs to learn about approaches with African American students.

Additionally, Dr. Garcia and Dr. Hernandez both mentioned high expectation. Dr. Garcia explained:

It’s about changing students’ lives and-and helping them get through it, you know? The students that... you know that they got the potential but...they don’t

always have the motivation. They don't always have the support of family. They certainly don't have the resources and the money.

Dr. Garcia's comment shows how Ascender instructors infuse high expectations despite the Potential Stressors students may have.

Sub-Question B: Representation of Students' Identities and Language Practices

The goal of including sub-question B in my instrumental case study was to learn if students and faculty in a community college learning community perceived that there was a representation of student identities and language practices in their developmental literacy course. Students mentioned the codes Culturally Relevant Aspects and Student Stressors. Faculty codes were: Culturally Relevant Aspects, Validation, and Scaffolding.

Similarity: Culturally Relevant Aspects. There was one common code for sub-question B. Students and faculty both mentioned the code Culturally Relevant Aspects when discussing the representation of student identities and language practices. For example, Ms. Ramos previously shared how there was a perceived need to note what was happening in the world around students: "we're focused on the academics but then we also focus on what's happening in the world around them." Jazmin shared a similar sentiment when she noted, "you have to be informed and acknowledge that these things are actual things that happen to people, and so you have to be mindful of everybody and all that around us." Both participant groups had a shared understanding of how we are collectively impacted by what happens around us.

Students previously mentioned assignments including the Spirit Crushers, Knock-Knock, What's in a Name, Dia de los Muertos Sugar Skulls, and readings including the text *The Four Agreements* and a poem titled "Dusty." The poem "Dusty" was shared in

Mr. Lopez' English 1302 course on a day I was observing. When discussing the poem in class, students noted that the author of the poem was speaking to herself about the absence of her mother. The author wrote her name in the dust on the family furniture, which was promptly erased by the mother. Students talked about how perhaps the mother was anonymous because she was not working and staying at home instead. The instructor countered, "why isn't that valued?" As previously noted in the student findings, in a focus group after class, Rebeca noted that she knew people in similar scenarios. She shared, "And they said that they feel, like, lonely, like... like, they have their parents. They're physically there, but they're not emotionally or mentally there."

Dr. Hernandez previously noted how he would, "Start with what you know. Ease them in, so [you] go into what you don't know later on." All faculty participants noted the use of what they perceived to be culturally relevant materials. As previously noted, Ms. Ramos shared that it was important to:

Pull from, um, in terms of also understanding that there's literature out there that's not just Shakespeare and not just um things that they read in high school but also things that were relevant to and very much like the scenarios that they found themselves in growing up, you know. We had incarceration, you had drug use, you had uh gang violence. All of these things that they were familiar with, unfortunately, uh, but they saw it in print and then translated um, those things helped the writers become different people in a way, and so you know we talked a lot about that as well.

Although this quote was shared in the faculty findings section, it was shared again to solidify "what happens behind the curtain" in regard to navigating culturally relevant

materials and Student Stressors. Faculty also used *The Four Agreements*, a Toltec wisdom book, as well as various culturally relevant poems, short stories, and articles. Dr. Hernandez noted, “I always try to give readings that relate to their world. And once they get that, I got ‘em hooked.”

Differences. Both groups of participants noted the Culturally Relevant Aspects code. However, there were three codes that were not shared between groups. Students discussed the code Student Stressors. Faculty noted the codes Validation and Scaffolding.

Student Stressors. Students mentioned one unique code in relation to sub-question B: Student Stressors. For example, students shared stressors when expounding on their Spirit Crusher assignment. This assignment focused on people who, intentionally or unintentionally, crush students’ spirits. While sharing this process in a focus group, Joaquin explained, “I always had negative people in my life my whole life.” He later added, “everything that they did to me in the past has actually made me a better person now.” Students also mentioned the divorce of parents, estranged family members, and absent parents.

Validation. The first of two unique codes instructors shared in relation to sub-question B was Validation. Instructors mentioned using culturally relevant and representative assignments to connect with students. Another strategy was discussing students and members of the community who persevered. One example is the author Reyna Grande who Dr. Hernandez told students, “went from not speaking a single word of English to writing three books.” Examples of former Ascender students and former students from the college were shared as well.

Scaffolding. The second code instructors mentioned related to sub-question B was Scaffolding. The scaffolding process came up when discussing representative curriculum. Dr. Hernandez mentioned using examples from students' home life to model essay writing. He guided students through the process of a parent's job to show how to write a process essay. Dr. Hernandez also mentioned how he guided students through their family portrait papers by asking sensory questions about the family members. He described the process:

So, I tell them, "I want you to bring pictures of your grandparents." "Bring a picture of your grandparents." "Now I want you to tell me what you see. What do you think your mother or grandmother's doing there at that particular time?"

A reflective writing piece was used in the literacy courses of all three participants who taught INRW.

Unique Codes that Emerged

Due to the open-ended questions in my focus group and interview protocols, there were unique codes that arose during the coding process. Students and faculty both had three unique codes woven throughout their discussions. The following section highlights the unique codes for student participants and faculty participants.

Focus groups- unique codes that emerged. Student focus groups had three unique codes: Meaningful Instruction, Valued Aspects of the Learning Community, and Future Goals.

Meaningful Instruction. The first unique code, Meaningful Instruction, was prevalent in each focus group with students often discussing how their instructors motivated and validated them. Students, including Victoria and Joaquin, mentioned how

they were told they were strong writers even though they did not initially think so. Students also discussed how professors were patient and explained items step-by-step until they comprehended the subject matter.

Valued Aspects of Learning Community. Students mentioned a second unique code, Valued Aspects of Learning Community, in relation to sub-question B. There were aspects of the learning community that students valued unrelated to culturally relevant curriculum. These aspects included priority registration and having the same instructor two semesters in a row. Students also discussed the benefits of having the same students and instructors in classes, which were key learning community components.

Future Goals. Finally, the third unique code mentioned by students was Future Goals. Mr. Lopez mentioned that Ascender focuses on students transferring to four-year universities. This was not a topic on the interview or focus group protocols. However, students often shared their goals for future colleges and professions in focus groups when discussing a recent campus tour. This included which four-year institution they planned to attend, as well as their future major.

Faculty interviews- unique codes that emerged. There were three unique codes from faculty participants that emerged from the coding process: Auxiliary Actions, Growth of Program, and Changes Regarding Acceleration.

Auxiliary Actions. The first unique code mentioned by faculty was Auxiliary Actions. Dr. Garcia mentioned the potential for burnout when faculty work in learning communities. There were several outside events that Ascender required students and faculty to attend, including Noche de Familia, mentor night, cultural events, campus

visits, and end of semester parties. In addition to these commitments, faculty initially attended a yearlong certification program, followed by seasonal institutes.

Growth of Program. Faculty mentioned a second unique code, Growth of Program. The program has grown on campus since 2012, when there were fewer faculty. The growth of the program allowed five faculty to teach Ascender courses and more students to join the program. However, there have been notable changes as the program grew, including the changes to mentor night and cultural events.

Changes Regarding Acceleration. Several faculty members mentioned the final code, Changes Regarding Acceleration. The courses I observed were English 1301+ courses, which were an accelerated format where a freshman composition course had a one-hour lab for extra support. The former model had students enrolled in an INRW course, followed by a English 1301 course the following semester. There were concerns from faculty regarding the changes in cut-scores and format. For example, Dr. Garcia stated, “I know that students want to be like college-level courses, but also don’t want to set them up for failure.”

Summary: Synthesis of Similarities and Differences

The student and faculty participants shared six common codes and both had three unique codes. These similarities and differences are synthesized in this section. First, the six common codes are described. Next, the six unique codes are explored. The similarities and differences in codes can be viewed in Table 7, which provides a theme and code comparison.

Table 7
Theme and Code Comparison

Themes	Codes	Faculty	Students
Valued Program Aspects	Validation	X	X
	Culturally Relevant Aspects	X	X
	Familial Aspects	X	X
	Future Goals		X
Epistemological Choices	High Expectations	X	X
	Changes Regarding Acceleration	X	
	Scaffolding	X	X
Potential Stressors	Auxiliary Actions	X	
	Student Stressors	X	X
	Growth of Program	X	
Valued Experiences	Valued Aspects of Learning Community		X
	Meaningful Instruction		X

Similarities. There were six codes that both students and faculty had in common. Valued Program Aspects had three shared codes: Culturally Relevant Aspects, Familial Aspects, and Validation. Epistemological Choices had two shared codes: High Expectations and Scaffolding. Potential Stressors had one common code, which was Student Stressors.

Differences. There were six codes that were only found in one group. The three unique codes for students were Valued Experiences (Valued Aspects of the Learning Community and Meaningful Instruction), as well as Future Goals. These codes were often related to the Ascender program, but not necessarily the research sub-questions. For example, although Future Goals are not part of my focus group protocol, campus visits and encouraging transfer to a four-year institution are parts of the Ascender program.

The unique faculty code for Epistemological Choices was Changes Regarding Acceleration. Additionally, there were two unique Potential Stressors: Auxiliary Actions and Growth of Program. These three codes were discussed in relation to “what happens

behind the curtain” regarding the planning and facilitation of the Ascender program, as well as the new English 1301+ accelerated format.

Overall research question. I conducted this instrumental case study to answer the question *what are the perceptions and experiences of students in a community college learning community?* Through focus group discussions, I learned that students emphasized the value of Meaningful Instruction and the Valued Aspects of Learning Community. I also wanted to learn *what are the perceptions and experiences of faculty in a community college learning community?* Throughout interviews with faculty, I learned “what happened behind the curtain” as faculty navigated implementing Ascender curriculum while also being mindful of Student Stressors and Auxiliary Actions. This overall research question was accompanied by two sub-questions, which also proved to show similarities and differences between participant groups.

Sub-Question A. My first sub-question for students asked, *Do students enrolled in a community college learning community perceive that their developmental literacy courses promote an inclusive culture? If so, how?* There were several codes tied to an inclusive culture in this sub-question. Students’ codes included Valued Aspects of Learning Community, Validation, Familial Aspects, and Culturally Relevant Aspects. My first sub-question for faculty asked, *Do faculty working in a community college learning community perceive their developmental literacy courses promote an inclusive culture? If so, how?* Faculty had several codes that aligned with this question: Validation, Familial Aspects, Culturally Relevant Aspects, Auxiliary Actions, High Expectations, and Growth of Program. This cross-case analysis showed how both participant groups noted Valued Aspects of the Program (Validation, Familial Aspects,

and Culturally Relevant Aspects). Students shared the unique code Valued Aspects of Learning Community. Faculty shared codes that helped articulate “what happens behind the curtain:” Auxiliary Actions, High Expectations, and Growth of Program.

Sub-Question B. My second sub-question asked, *Do students enrolled in a community college learning community perceive that there is a representation of their identities and language practices in their developmental literacy course? If so, how?* Students mentioned the codes Culturally Relevant Aspects and Student Stressors in relation to identity and language practices. I also wanted to know, *Do faculty working in a community college learning community perceive that there is a representation of students’ identities and language practices in their developmental literacy course? If so, how?* Faculty mentioned the codes Culturally Relevant Aspects, Validation, and Scaffolding. Therefore, although both participant groups noted the Culturally Relevant Aspects piece when discussing this sub-question, they also had other unique foregrounded codes. This chapter concludes with a summary of the findings from student and faculty data.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to better understand the perceptions and experiences of student and faculty in the field site’s Ascender learning community. This summary briefly covers findings for each research question, followed by unique codes uncovered through the coding process.

Research Questions

I conducted this instrumental case study to answer the question *what are the perceptions and experiences of students and faculty in a community college learning*

community? As noted in the cross-case analysis, students emphasized the value of Meaningful Instruction and the Valued Aspects of Learning Community when discussing Ascender in general. In contrast, faculty shared “what happened behind the curtain,” which included implementing Ascender curriculum in a changing literacy course structure and navigating Student Stressors and Auxiliary Actions.

I included sub-question A to determine, *Do students and faculty in a community college learning community perceive that their developmental literacy courses promote an inclusive culture? If so, how?* Cross-case analysis results indicated that both participant groups noted Valued Aspects of the Program (Validation, Familial Aspects, and Culturally Relevant Aspects). However, the participants also discussed unique codes related to an inclusive culture.

I asked sub-question B to discover, *Do students and faculty in a community college learning community perceive that there is a representation of their identities and language practices in their developmental literacy course? If so, how?* Students and faculty noted Culturally Relevant Aspects when discussing this sub-question. However, they also foregrounded additional unique codes.

Unique Codes

Both participant groups discussed the Valued Program Aspects of Validation, Culturally Relevant Aspects, and Familial Aspects. However, there were also several codes foregrounded for the two participant groups. This noted difference, due in part to the open-ended nature of my protocol, required a cross-case analysis of the two participant groups. Although all participants noted Valued Program Aspects, Scaffolding, and High Expectations, some codes were unique to participant groups.

Students noted Valued Aspects of the Learning Community, Meaningful Instruction, and Future Goals. In contrast, the faculty participants discussed Auxiliary Actions, the Growth of the Program, and Changes Regarding Acceleration. The next chapter will discuss these findings and potential implications for future practice and research.

5. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter begins with a succinct explanation of how my positionality helped inform the discussion and implications section. After, I explore data related to my research questions, noting codes from students and faculty. Next, I outline four sections, which were guided by codes from Chapter 4, Findings. These sections are Familial Aspects, Meaningful Instruction, Culturally Relevant Aspects, and “what happens behind the curtain,” as noted in the codes Epistemological Choices and Potential Stressors. Next, I cover implications, including CRP in DE, validation and acceptance, learning communities, and pedagogical changes due to policy. Then, I outline limitations, followed by recommendations for future research. The chapter closes with a summary of conclusions and implications.

Positionality

As noted in Chapter 3, Methods, I identify as a White woman who grew up in the Midwest. As someone who often read texts written by White authors with similar life experiences, I realized that would potentially not be the case for students who identify as Hispanic. When approaching this instrumental case study, I assumed students would note the use of Hispanic authors in our conversation, an assumption that was not representative of the focus groups I spoke with. The framework I chose works to “support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence” (Paris, 2012, p. 95). What I found through conversations with students and faculty was that cultural aspects of students’ communities were celebrated, even if that was not what

was foregrounded in conversations with students. My interpretation and impressions of these conversations are woven throughout the discussion section.

As Lather (2017) stated, “data must be allowed to generate propositions in a dialectical manner that permits use of a priori theoretical frameworks, but which keeps a particular framework from becoming the container into which the data must be poured” (p. 21). The use of my theoretical framework was appropriate for the data collected and guided my analysis when some of my assumptions regarding data collection were not. In other words, the theoretical framework, which focused on validating students’ varied experiences, afforded an opportunity to learn from unique codes provided by participants. This chapter illustrates my perceptions of how faculty worked to provide experiences that celebrated the cultures of the students they served, while also navigating stressors including state mandates, auxiliary actions, and a growing program. Although the faculty explained the labor involved with their work in Ascender, students shared how they benefitted from the fruits of faculty’s labor. These fruits included the meaningful instruction and familial atmosphere faculty provided, as well as Ascender elements like cultural events and advising. The following sections situate my findings from interviews, focus groups, observations, and my field notes in current research in education.

Overview of Research Questions and Unique Codes

I provided an in-depth look at the research questions and unique codes in the Findings chapter. This Discussion section begins with a succinct review of the prominent codes related to each sub-question, as well as a review of codes that were unique to each participant group. Due to the student-first focus of my study, each of the following

sections will begin with student perceptions and experiences, followed by the perceptions and experiences of faculty.

Sub-Question A: Inclusive Culture

As previously noted in the Findings chapter, the first sub-question was focused on an inclusive culture. In focus groups, Validation and Familial Aspects were foregrounded as forms of inclusion in focus group discussions. The three codes found in students' responses to this question were Validation, Familial Aspects, and Culturally Relevant Aspects.

The overriding theme I noted in relation to sub-question A when focusing on faculty interview transcriptions was “what happens behind the curtain.” In other words, students did not note the planning or course design, but they did discuss the impact of those choices made by faculty. Codes faculty participants discussed in relation to sub-question A were Validation, Familial Aspects, Culturally Relevant Aspects, Auxiliary Actions, High Expectations, and Growth of Program.

Sub-Question B: Representative Curriculum

Students discussed the representation of their identities and language practices when noting the codes Culturally Relevant Aspects and Student Stressors. Often, these codes were simultaneous. This may have been because the culturally relevant assignments asked students to make connections to their own lives and experiences. Students often brought up personal struggles and stories from their past in relation to their family.

Faculty discussed the representation of students' identities and language practices. The code Culturally Relevant Aspects was foregrounded in interviews, followed by

Validation and Scaffolding. The first code, Culturally Relevant Aspects, showed the Ascender program's focus on student identity and language practices. The codes Validation and Scaffolding were used to describe how faculty facilitated lessons, which often included Culturally Relevant Aspects.

Unique Codes

As previously noted in the cross-case analysis, six codes were unique to only one participant group. The differences between student and faculty codes can be seen in Table 7 on page 188. Student focus groups had one unique theme, Valued Experiences, which contained the unique codes Meaningful Instruction and Valued Aspects of Learning Community. These unique codes showed the importance of instructional elements, as the patience and instructional practices of faculty were often foregrounded in focus group conversations. Students also had a unique code under Program Aspects: Future Goals. This code was a result of students discussing four-year universities they planned to attend, as well as future programs. Mr. Lopez explained that transferring to a university is one of Ascender's goals. Students often mentioned this in relation to conversations related to the Ascender program's university tours.

Faculty also had three unique codes that were not found in students' conversations. Two of the three unique codes from faculty interviews were in the theme Potential Stressors: Auxiliary Actions and Growth of Program. Both of these codes were mentioned when faculty explained navigating the learning community's required trainings and events, as well as changes made on campus due to a larger group of students joining the program. The third code, Changes Regarding Acceleration, was part of the theme Epistemological Choices. These choices were made in response to the

INRW course becoming an English 1301+ course, which was a composition course with an additional lab component. The next section explores what this study's findings mean for educators and researchers.

Discussion

This section describes topics that were prevalent in the Findings chapter: Culturally Relevant Aspects, Meaningful Instruction, Familial Aspects, and “what happens behind the curtain” regarding Potential Stressors and Epistemological Choices. Each of these topics is examined in regard to current literature.

Culturally Relevant Aspects

Culturally Relevant Aspects were noted throughout discussions with participants. However, students did not bring up the college's HSI status or the Ascender learning community's focus on Hispanic authors. Instead, students discussed Familial Aspects and assignments that they connected with personally. Some assignments mentioned were culturally relevant, but I did not know this initially because they were not described in that way. One might infer that students did not place the Hispanic literature and cultural activities at the foreground of the conversation. This aligns with Janks' (2010) understanding of the fluidity and hybridity of students' identities. Noting this fluidity of identity involves the avoidance of assigning students to a particular community and choosing to accommodate the language practices and identities of students (Janks, 2010). The conversations I had in focus groups noted the hybrid identities of students, as opposed to static identities that attached themselves to one distinguishing factor.

During my time on campus, I noticed that the street names and building names were often of Hispanic origin. As previously noted, the community college was an HSI

and students were primarily Hispanic. While initially walking through the campus, I noted how even some of the buildings appeared to have what I perceived to be a sort of Hispanic architecture. Additionally, I often noticed billboards and other signage written in Spanish while driving to campus. Later, I began to wonder if Hispanic authors were not fore fronted in conversations with students because the campus had a larger Hispanic influence compared to other campuses I had visited in Texas. For example, the university I attended was also designated as an HSI but did not have the same noticeable saturation of Hispanic influences, language, and architecture.

Culturally relevant assignments. As I previously noted in the Findings chapter, There were several assignments where students shared their life experiences, including Spirit Crushers and What's in a Name, where students were asked to read a text, then compose a piece of writing reflecting on their own life. Finding one's identity in text is part of students' roles in making meaning when reading. This acknowledgment of students' roles in meaning-making is noted in Rosenblatt's (1994) Transactional Theory of Reading and Writing. As previously noted, Rosenblatt's (1994) approach saw students' experiences and relationships as elements that transacted with a text. Rosenblatt's (1994) approach, which built on Iser's (1972) earlier work, focused on how meaning does not simply exist in the text, rather meaning is made by the transaction between the reader and the text. Several students shared how their own lives related to the texts in class. As I noted in the Findings chapter, student participants shared assignments about personal experiences that often resulted in recounting emotional events. For example, assignments like Knock-Knock were challenging but helped students navigate challenges that were previously bottled up. Tatum (2018) noted, "there

is emerging evidence in fiction and nonfiction texts that both reading and writing can help heal wounds over time” (p. 235). I assumed the Ascender assignment would be challenging to facilitate because it would ask students to navigate messages that they wished to hear from loved ones. This would require trust in the instructor as well as the peers that would hear the assignment. Learning about these assignments from the students’ perspectives helped me understand the familial atmosphere present in Ascender courses in a way that observations alone could not.

College students can make meaning through conversations by infusing “their own (complementary and contradictory) perspectives into classroom discussions and academic writings” (Kazembe, 2017, p. 210). This process is done by connecting course learning outcomes with real-world examples (Kazembe, 2017). By sharing stories and perspectives from their own lives, students can enrich both discussions and writing assignments with their background knowledge. Geertz (2008) discussed how meaning is situated in how culture matters in context. This focus on context ties with Guba and Lincoln’s (1989) assertion that constructions are created realities that are a result of one’s interaction with

...information, contexts, settings, situations, and other constructors (not all of whom may agree), using a process that is rooted in the previous experiences, belief systems, values, fears, prejudices, hopes, disappointments, and achievements of the constructor. (p. 143)

Ascender placed an emphasis on this process of interacting with past experiences when sharing memoirs, poems, and other articles. Additionally, this was noted in a speech by the president of the college at mentor night. The president talked about how he used to

work at McDonald's and would sign his checks and give them to his parents, noting how he knew what it was like to help support a family at a young age. I did not have a childhood that included additional pressures to support my family financially, which reminded me of how my life experiences could not always provide context to the life experiences of participants. Although I did not have the opportunity to hear each mentor speak at their tables, the speech the president gave was inspirational and afforded students an opportunity to see someone with potentially similar hopes and disappointments share his successes.

Student Stressors. Students mentioned outside stressors, including work and family, as well as the academic task of navigating college life. Research shows that students who identify as Hispanic are more likely to work while enrolled, which includes working longer hours and can sometimes lead to dropping out (Saenz, Garica-Louis, Drake, & Guida, 2018). Several students mentioned working before or during focus groups. Additionally, despite parents' aspirational capital, students who identify as Hispanic may navigate familial and life obligations while in college (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012; Vega, 2016). Students' families have influenced the motivation of students who identify as Hispanic, noting "group needs take precedence over individual needs" (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012, p. 92). For example, Joaquin shared how he navigated two jobs, studying, and watching his sister. Students' navigation of family dynamics and obligations can be a compounding stressor for students.

Critical literacy and CSP. My research questions focused on identity, representation, and language practices in a developmental literacy course. I was interested in the possibility of a critical literacy approach in the Ascender courses.

Critical literacy is an interrelation of four dimensions including “disrupting the commonplace, interrogating multiple viewpoints, focusing on sociopolitical issues, and taking action and promoting social justice” (Lewison, Flint, & Sluys, 2002, p. 382). I found elements of critical literacy throughout the Ascender assignments, as well as the argumentative paper topics. For example, a common component of critical literacy is asking students how to “examine and question the practices of how rule systems are organized and the systems affecting the social fields of everyday life” (Avila & Moore, 2012, p. 28). As noted in my Findings, all faculty participants discussed this in some way.

The Ascender program uses the term culturally relevant. However, the theoretical framework for this instrumental case study is culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP). I chose CSP because Ascender not only focused on the empowerment of students who identify as Hispanic but also served students who did not identify as Hispanic (Catch the Next, 2018c). In the Findings chapter, several communities and identities were evident in course descriptions and observations. For example, Dr. Hernandez and Mr. Lopez focused on Anglo-American authors. Mr. Lopez also shared work by Native American authors and an African American poet while I observed. A focus on multiple racial and ethnic identities echoes Ladson-Billings’ (2014) assertion of how CSP builds on her earlier work regarding CRP.

Paris (2012) also asserted that CSP honors and extends the language and literacy practices of students. As I noted in the Findings chapter, Dr. Hernandez echoed this assertion when he shared that he started the semester with what students knew, then built on it. Similarly, Janks (2018) noted how our identities are shaped by our communities, as

well as the discourses used in those communities. Therefore, Janks (2018) explained, “identity becomes the basis for how people respond to texts” (p. 98). This identity-based response needs to be acknowledged when working with students (Janks, 2018). Dr. Hernandez used this identity-based response with his family portrait assignment and shared how this learning process embraced students’ prior knowledge. Shipka (2005) noted, “composition courses present students with the opportunity to begin structuring the occasions for, as well as the reception and delivery of, the work they produce” (p. 278). This focus on delivery was present in several conversations with faculty, which provided opportunities for students to present to their peers.

Representation. Garcia (2017) noted how HSIs could promote a culture that embraces culturally relevant instruction. Serving students who identify as Hispanic is connected to cultural elements, including racial and ethnic identities (Garcia, 2017). This connection was seen in a variety of contexts, from cultural events to classroom assignments. Research also shows students who identify as Hispanic value the representation of their identity (Acevedo-Gil et al., 2015; Hagedorn et al., 2007; Nuñez et al., 2010; Rendón, 1994; Santos & Acevedo-Gil, 2013). I was interested in learning if this theme was salient with the participants in my instrumental case study. Garcia (2017) noted, “having faculty and staff who connect with students via language, provide valuable support through cultural connections, and advocate on behalf of students is important” (p. 127S). Garcia’s (2017) focus on the impact of cultural connectedness and support is evident in conversations with faculty and staff.

Situating Culturally Responsive Aspects in the research. Research was conducted on the importance of relevant materials that connect to students’ lives by

several researchers in postsecondary (Alim & Paris, 2017; Gee, 2013; Iser, 1972; Janks, 2010; Kazembe, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Rosenblatt, 1994; Paris, 2012; Rendón, 2002; Tatum, 2018). This study offers a unique perspective because it shares how relevant materials are used in DE literacy courses in Texas, which is a continually changing landscape due to mandates over the past decade (THECB, 2018).

Additionally, research was conducted on the need to include students' life experiences in the classroom (Geertz, 2008; Gloria & Castellanos, 2012; Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Saenz, et al., 2018; Vega, 2016). This study navigates including students' life experiences but also highlights the familial elements I observed that potentially helped students feel comfortable sharing challenging material.

There is literature that navigated both critical literacy and CSP (Alim & Paris, 2017; Avila & Moore, 2012; Garcia, 2017; Howard & Rodriguez-Minkoff, 2017; Janks, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Lewison, et al., 2002; Nuñez, Murakami, & Cuero, 2010; Paris, 2012; Rendón, 2002; Shipka, 2005). However, this study is the first to note how CSP is used in a developmental literacy course, which served students who primarily identified as Hispanic. As previously noted by the research, students who identify as Hispanic benefit from the representation of their identity (Acevedo-Gil et al., 2015; Hagedorn et al., 2007; Nuñez et al., 2010; Rendón, 1994; Santos & Acevedo-Gil, 2013). This study shares how faculty in one Ascender learning community navigated this while approaching a new curriculum format in English 1301+.

Meaningful Instruction

Students valued several elements of instruction. Salient topics included feedback, high expectations, scaffolding, future goals, and keys to future success. This discussion section examines what these codes mean for current and future research.

Feedback. Research on students enrolled in community college reported a lower perceived structure in community colleges, along with sporadic feedback and high chances of variability when compared experiences in high school (Karp & Bork, 2014). Conversely, the feedback provided by instructors in the Ascender program, from comment cards on projects to real-time feedback in observations, seemed to be consistent and abundant. In the Findings chapter, I shared how some students noted that they did not view themselves as strong writers before Ascender. These reflections show how crucial the explicit validation of student work is to Meaningful Instruction. By noting that students have legitimate skills and background knowledge is a crucial piece of validating writers. As Denny (2010) stated:

In supporting writers, we never just sit side by side with them as purely writers; they come to us as an intricately woven tapestry, rich in the authenticity and texture of identities, but this cloth often requires something extra to be legitimated in the academy. (p. 103)

I included several examples in the Findings chapter where student participants noted legitimation in relation to the writing process. These conversations with students were the “something extra” that Denny (2010) noted legitimized students’ experiences (p. 103).

High Expectations. Faculty often mentioned their high expectations in regards to student success. Recently, de Oliveira and Athanases (2017) noted how “High-challenge, high-support classrooms attend to diverse students’ learning,” which aligns with participant conversations regarding instructors’ high expectations. Interestingly, students mentioned the high expectations of both Mr. Lopez and Ms. Ramos, but neither instructor explicitly stated this in their interviews. However, I did observe Mr. Lopez and Ms. Ramos outlining high expectations during their instruction. A study focused on the faculty behaviors that may predict the success of students who identify as Hispanic in community colleges noted common predictors: high-quality interactions with professors, the availability of professors, and students’ work to meet instructors’ high expectations (Lundberg, Kim, Andrade, & Bahner, 2018). Several students echoed the inclusion of high-quality interactions and high expectations in focus group conversations. High-quality interactions in classes can help students navigate the writing process.

Scaffolding. This code was often specifically shared in relation to instruction. Scaffolding is an instructional approach where educators “teach with gradually withdrawn supports as learners move toward independence” (Smagorinsky, 2018, p. 253). Three instructional conditions for scaffolding include contingency, fading, and transfer of responsibility (van de Pol, Volman, & Beishuizen, 2010). Contingency refers to the calibration and attentiveness of instructional support, while fading is used to describe the reduction of support. The third characteristic, transfer of responsibility, gives more control and autonomy to students as the support is reduced (van de Pol, et al., 2010). An effective use of scaffolding can reduce cognitive load for students and add tailored supports (Athanases & de Oliveira, 2014), which were noted by participants.

Ms. Ramos, Mr. Lopez, and Dr. Hernandez all assigned a reflective writing piece at the start of the semester. The assigned narratives at the beginning of the semester served as a tailored support for students because they activated prior knowledge while students navigated the writing process.

Future Goals. A unique code described by students was Future Goals. Students mentioned transferring to several four-year colleges. Programs mentioned ranged from media and digital arts, engineering, the medical field, journalism and mass communication, criminal justice, zoology, and cybersecurity. When discussing the Puente model, Rendón (2002) shared how “Students go on field trips to visit potential 4-year colleges and universities. Counselors constantly remind students that they will be transferring. They help make college a natural process, as opposed to one that is disjunctive in nature” (p. 659). This objective aligns with Catch the Next’s Transfer Motivational Conference, which provides students with an opportunity to learn more about university experiences including admissions, financial aid, transferring credits, housing, career planning, and time management (Catch the Next, 2019).

Students value keys to future success. One of the most unexpected themes in focus group conversations was how students foregrounded learning strategies for success in our conversations. Students valued instruction related to literacy skills, as well as workshops on financial literacy. Research was conducted on aspects important to community college success, including admission and application processes and financial aid (Karp & Bork, 2014). Ascender provided opportunities for students to learn about financial literacy, as Juliana noted in focus groups. Another noted perk students mentioned was priority registration, which ensured they could take the same instructor

for literacy courses in the fall and spring semesters their first year at the college. Additionally, “Being a member of a tight network, which can provide information as well as structure norms and expectations, can have an important influence on whether and where students apply to college” (Roska & Deutschlander, 2018, p. 6). The Ascender program focused on transfer to a four-year college by taking students on campus tours and offering leadership institutes in the summer.

Expectations for students are not always clearly communicated by institutions, which results in the need for “students to exhibit high degrees of reflection, such that they can cognitively evaluate their actions in order to modify them if necessary” (Karp & Bork, 2014, p. 11). Conversely, students in focus groups mentioned how they were aware of expectations and given opportunities to refine their work to meet professors’ expectations.

Situating Meaningful Instruction in the research. As noted in the findings, Meaningful Instruction can have an impact on how students perceive their postsecondary experiences. Although studies have shown the impact of feedback (Denny, 2010; Karp & Bork, 2014), this particular study shares how students value step-by-step instruction and patient feedback. Student participants also mentioned High Expectations, which research shows to have positive effects (de Oliveira & Athanases, 2017; Lundberg, et al., 2018). Student participants’ repeated use of the phrase “don’t slack off” in focus groups and their emphasis on improvement over time showed the impact of this code. Faculty discussed how students would rise to the occasion, but students shared experiences where they noted meeting or exceeding instructor expectations.

Scaffolding is another component of Meaningful Instruction, which has been covered in primarily K-12 contexts (Athanases & de Oliveira, 2014; Smagorinsky, 2018; van de Pol, et al., 2010). Findings from this study show the impact of scaffolding in postsecondary through conversations and observations. Faculty mentioned the gradual release of responsibility. In addition, student participants shared how this step-by-step approach afforded them an opportunity to better understand the writing process.

Students mentioned Future Goals, which are part of the Ascender program (Catch the Next, 2019; Rendón, 2002). Although the Ascender program I observed was located in a community college, it encouraged students to focus on attending four-year universities. Students also noted keys to success when planning their futures. Research was conducted on how college experiences impact student success (de Oliveira & Athanases, 2017; Karp & Bork, 2014; Roska & Deutschlander, 2018). Students mentioned keys to success including study skills, time management, and financial literacy in relation to valued pieces of the Ascender program. The next section focuses on how students and faculty noted the Familial Aspects of their learning community.

Familial Aspects

Both student and faculty participants discussed the Familial Aspects related to Ascender. Aspects included the learning community setting, validation, and a familial atmosphere. This discussion section examines how these codes situate my instrumental case study in educational research.

Learning community setting. The learning community format afforded students a feeling of a familial atmosphere. Three shared common characteristics of learning communities are shared knowledge, shared knowing, and shared responsibility (Tinto,

2003). More recent studies have outlined what Tinto (2003) initially shared about learning communities. For example, Washington, et al. (2010) noted how learning communities have been shown to increase interaction and interdependence between students. This was evident in focus group conversations throughout my Findings. Learning communities “also offer students the opportunity to form deeper ties with their peers and with faculty, thereby strengthening their support networks and institutional attachment” (Bettinger et al., 2013, p. 102). The interaction and interdependence between students was prevalent in focus group conversations.

Validation. The validation piece of Ascender was also a part of the Puente model, which Rendón (2002) shared in her research. Catch the Next began by mirroring the Puente model and later transitioning to Ascender in 2018 (Catch the Next, 2018c). Rendón (2002) noted how validation includes validating students’ subjective forms of knowledge, including personal feelings and emotions. Peer support is an important piece of validation (Rendón, 2002). In the Findings chapter, I noted several instances where students were given opportunities to validate the work of their peers in the pair/share format. Rendón (2002) noted the importance of “validating the students’ personal journeys to discover meaning and purpose” (p. 656). As noted in the interviews with faculty in the Findings chapter, the validation of students’ voice is a crucial piece of the literacy courses I observed.

Bergenhengouwen (1987) noted how student participants in his study “... felt restrained from entering into a discussion with the teacher during formal lectures, owing to the massiveness or the impersonal relations” (p. 538). More recently, Rendón (2002) explained that some students “feel unentitled to request academic assistance” (p. 654). A

hesitancy to request assistance was not an issue brought up in focus group discussions, and students often discussed feeling comfortable emailing professors or asking for assistance.

When faculty interactions validate students, they can increase the academic self-concept, sense of belonging, and persistence of students who identify as Hispanic (Alcantar & Hernandez, 2018). Conversations with faculty and students that I included in the Findings chapter suggested that student participants' self-concept, sense of belonging, and persistence were impacted by faculty actions and interactions. Students often shared times professors helped them believe in themselves as writers. Additionally, students noted the familial atmosphere and talked about attending four-year universities upon completion of their associate's degree.

Familial atmosphere. One aspect that I found to be salient in observations and conversations with participants was the familial atmosphere of Ascender. Giroux (1978) noted how "the heart of the schools function is not to be found in the daily dispensing of information, but in the day-to-day social encounters shaped by the structural properties of the educational setting" (148). Students were given opportunities to work together in class, provided feedback when working in a peer-to-peer format, and attend outside events together.

Rendón (2002) noted how "the family is one of the most validating elements of the Latino community" (p. 656). Focus groups often discussed the sense of community in their literacy courses. The perception of a welcoming campus is dependent on relationships and social networks (Saenz, et al., 2018). A familial atmosphere is a crucial piece of building social networks and relationships within Ascender and stakeholders can

benefit from understanding the impact this sense of community has on students. This ties to Giroux's (1978) assertion that "The hidden curriculum of most classrooms prevents students from developing a sense of solidarity and community with their peers" (151). I did not perceive students were prevented from a sense of community. In contrast, it appeared as if the faculty and staff worked to create occasions where students could feel a sense of community in Ascender classes and outside events.

Crisp et al.'s (2015) review of research on students who identified as Hispanic found that a combination of characteristics contributed to success, which included: sociocultural characteristics, identity, college experiences, motivation, and support. These characteristics align with the Familial Aspects of Ascender. Additionally, there were inclusive elements that tied to students who did not identify as Hispanic, which ties to Jang, et al.'s (2018) focus on differentiating cultural diversity in the classroom.

Situating Familial Aspects in the research. There was previous research conducted on the impact of learning communities (Bettinger, et al., 2013; Rendón, 2002; Tinto, 2003; Washington et al., 2013). However, this study shares how the Ascender learning community aspects impact student and faculty perceptions and experiences. This instrumental case study was not a program evaluation. However, it is important to note that aspects of Ascender's learning community format including paired courses, outside events, and trips to four-year universities had an impact on the students I spoke with.

Validation in education was previously explored using various contexts (Alcantar & Hernandez, 2018; Bergenhenegouwen, 1987; Giroux, 1978; Rendón, 2002). It is important to note that both participant groups mentioned this validation piece

consistently. Faculty noted the steps they took to validate students in Ascender and the focus group participants acknowledged these moments and why they were valued. These findings provide a window into the impact of validation on students, most notably students who identify as Hispanic who are being validated in a developmental literacy course setting.

Finally, the benefits of a familial atmosphere have been previously noted in research (Crisp et al., 2015; Giroux, 1978, Jang, et al., 2018; Rendón, 2002; Saenz, et al., 2018). This study's findings show how a familial atmosphere can afford opportunities for students to take risks in class. This includes navigating challenging material that may connect with emotional pieces of one's past. The students who experienced this explained it as a challenging experience that was rewarding. Students also noted that they did not feel judged by their peers when sharing personal stories. While speaking with Victoria and Isabella in their focus group I was struck by the fact that they were so open about sharing these difficult topics. As noted in the Findings chapter, Victoria and Isabella were finishing each other's sentences about their experiences. I perceived this to mean that they related similarly to the experience. Moreover, this perceived vulnerability when sharing was strengthened when I realized that Joaquin, who was also in the focus group, was not in their class. He was experiencing these stories for the first time like I was. When he asked for clarification, his peers shared willingly and openly. This moment was where I personally made the connection to how the familial aspects of Ascender could result in an environment where students could be vulnerable and take risks. The next section shares "what happens behind the curtain" when faculty plan and facilitate their Ascender courses and outside events.

What Happens Behind the Curtain

Although faculty discussed the planning and labor of the program, students shared the fruits of the faculty's labor. This section shares "what happens behind the curtain." Faculty discussed this in relation to Auxiliary Actions, Growth of Program, and Changes Regarding Acceleration.

Auxiliary Actions. Providing an inclusive culture often required Auxiliary Actions from faculty. Faculty in Ascender were required to host or attend several activities outside of class. Research shows how feelings of being overwhelmed or overload can cause stress at work (Basim, Begenirbas, & Can Yalcin, 2013). This can cause emotional labor, which is the regulation of emotions in the workplace (Basim, et al., 2013). In other words, faculty may appear calm when they are actually overwhelmed. I did not sense any regulation of emotions when observing classes or outside events. However, that does not mean the regulation of emotions or work stress was not occurring (Basim, et al., 2013). Burnout can be characterized as a result of work stress (Basim, et al., 2013). Truta (2014) noted how teaching is a vocation with high levels of emotional labor because educators spend a prolonged amount of time with the students they teach. I perceived that the faculty in Ascender spent more time with their students than a professor who was not part of a learning community. There are also professional development requirements for Ascender faculty. Instructors in Ascender are required to attend a yearlong certification program, which is followed by summer and fall institutes.

Growth of Program. Faculty also mentioned the continual growth of the Ascender program, which was prevalent throughout conversations with participants. The largest change to the Ascender program at the study's field site may be the mentoring

component. Dominguez (2017) explained how “inviting the guidance and wisdom of local communities into the teacher education setting, and partnering with ethnic and cultural studies departments, are strongly recommended to help do this work of foregrounding new ways of seeing and being” (p. 234). Recently, the individual mentor component was replaced with a mentor night. The event offered an opportunity for mentors to circulate through the room three times, offering students an opportunity to ask them questions. Rendón (2002) referred to the use of mentors as “affirming the real possibility that students can be successful college students” (p. 653). Students were able to discuss challenges and successes with the mentors in a roundtable format, which had the potential to affirm students’ success in college.

The growth of Ascender afforded instructors the opportunity to impact more students. This includes students who do not identify as Hispanic. In the Findings chapter, I shared times where Ascender faculty mentioned curricular choices used to recognize varied cultural backgrounds. This acknowledgment mirrors Jang, et al.’s (2018) emphasis on the importance of differentiating cultural diversity in the classroom. Dominguez (2017) explained that we need to produce decolonizing educators who allow CSP to be possible in the classroom, reminding educators of Paris and Alim’s (2014) hope that instead of comparing students of color to White middle-class norms, educators should learn from and with youth about exploring and honoring community practices and heritages.

Changes Regarding Acceleration. There are also Auxiliary Actions that are specific to literacy courses. For example, one foundation of INRW is the reciprocal foundation of reading and writing (Goen & Gillotte-Tropp, 2003). Faculty discussed

navigating balancing reading and writing instruction. This balance can prove to be challenging for Ascender faculty because the state mandated a co-requisite model. In Texas, the passing of House Bill 2223 mandated that developmental literacy courses use a co-requisite model approach (THECB, 2018). The field site's traditional INRW course format was changed to an English 1301+ format, where students took a credit-bearing English course with a lab as extra support. One concern with accelerated approaches like English 1301+ is the reduction in class time (Bickerstaff & Raufman, 2017; Paulson & Holschuh, 2018; Paulson et al., 2018; Saxon, et al., 2016). Paulson and Holschuh (2018) described the benefit of INRW's emphasis on the interrelatedness of pedagogy and shared language practices, noting how this benefit did not exist when literacy experiences were "artificially truncated due to time" (p. 36). There was notably less time in the English 1301+ format, due to its accelerated approach. The field site's English 1301+ course students took had less of an emphasis on reading, in part because the objectives of the course were related to composing texts.

I was initially confused when Mr. Lopez referred to either Ascender assignments or academic assignments when we spoke. I wondered "why are Ascender assignments not considered academic? They seem academic to me." After observing the course and spending time reflecting on our conversations, I realized that this was because the Ascender assignments did not neatly fit into this new English 1301+ format, which was primarily essays. During our member checking conversation, I asked Mr. Lopez how the semester worked out. He noted the difficulty of having Ascender assignments fit in the new format, but also discussed how successful the students were. He added that he

worked to fill in the gap between policy and practice, focusing on a student-first approach.

Situating what happens behind the curtain in the research. As noted in the literature, Auxiliary Actions can result in emotional labor or burnout (Basim, et al., 2013; Truta, 2014). Several of the Auxiliary Actions taken by faculty were tied to Culturally Relevant Aspects due to their effort to tie the Ascender curriculum with the course requirements. Previous studies have shown the importance of connecting students' lives to their assignments (Dominguez, 2017 Jang, et al., 2018; Paris & Alim, 2014). However, this study focuses on the Auxiliary Actions taken by faculty to ensure students received culturally relevant materials in class. These actions were further impacted by recent changes in policy, requiring an accelerated English 1301+ course, as opposed to the former INRW course (THECB, 2018). Research was previously conducted on acceleration (Bers 2018; Goen & Gillotte-Tropp, 2003; Bickerstaff & Raufman, 2017; Hern, 2012; Hern & Snell, 2014; Paulson & Holschuh, 2018; Paulson et al., 2018; Saxon, et al., 2016; Schnee, 2014). However, this study shares the impact of acceleration on the instructional choices of faculty in one learning community in south Texas.

Implications for Research

I conducted this study to learn about the perceptions and experiences of students and faculty in Ascender. Specifically, I aimed to better understand participants' perceptions and experiences related to inclusive and representative instruction in developmental literacy courses. An instrumental case study is not intended to be generalizable (Stake1995). Stake (1995) noted how qualitative research seeks to understand a case, as opposed to focus on how it differs from other cases. Therefore, I

have not included implications for practice. However, this section notes several implications for research, based on what I learned from participants. Implications from this study will be covered including the use of CSP in DE, an emphasis on validation and acceptance, learning community stressors, and pedagogical changes due to policy.

CSP in DE

The first implication is the use of CSP in a DE literacy component. One of the salient themes from conversations with students and faculty was how validation was used with instruction that was representative of students' identities and experiences. These conversations tie with Comber's (2015) assertion that literacy instruction can enrich students' lives while also providing legitimacy to their identities and background knowledge. CSP "sees the outcome of learning as additive rather than subtractive, as remaining whole rather than framed as broken, as critically enriching strengths rather than replacing deficits" (Alim & Paris, 2017, p. 1). An intentional avoidance of a deficit-oriented perspective was noted by several faculty members including Ms. Ramos, who said, "I don't want to deficit them to death" and chose to focus on student strengths. This focus on student persistence aligns with Alim and Paris' (2017) view of CSP, which enriches strengths as opposed to replacing deficits.

Rendón (2002) explained the importance of affirming the cultures of the students served. Additionally, Rendón (2002) discussed how students' personal experiences were reservoirs of knowledge, which could be utilized in the literacy classroom. Part of representation and validation is an understanding of one's identity in relation to his or her community (Nuñez, Murakami, & Cuero, 2010). This was evident in the Findings

chapter, where I shared several examples where Ascender faculty discussed selecting texts that mirrored students' lives.

As I noted in the Findings chapter, critical literacy was a piece of the Culturally Relevant Aspects code. Janks (2017) defined critical literacy as “an ability to ‘read’ the world to understand how power works to include and exclude and to privilege some at the expense of others” (p. 133). Faculty discussed navigating these societal challenges, including incarceration. Additionally, although most of the students identified as Hispanic, a variety of beliefs, discourses, and ethnicities were explored using literature. Although critical literacy was previously explored in the context of DE, there is not research using the lens of CSP in a learning community setting. My instrumental case study’s focus on CSP in a DE learning community adds a much-needed understanding of how CSP can be used in developmental literacy courses and supports.

An Emphasis on Validation and Acceptance

The second implication is the participants’ emphasis on validation and acceptance. VanDerHeide and Juzwik (2018) noted how instructors could teach the concept of an argument by using conversation. These conversations can be “disciplinary in nature, such as literary arguments, or they can be more connected with students’ lifeworlds outside of school: neighborhoods, workplaces, artistic spaces or troupes, churches or other spiritual communities, athletic teams and fan communities, and so on” (VanDerHeide & Juzwik, 2018, p. 69). I noted this in the Findings Chapter, but it would benefit educators and researchers to observe this in varied postsecondary contexts with varied student populations.

Ford-Connors and Robertson (2017) referred to an instructional strategy called the third turn, where instructors “can extend students’ thinking, as they probe, clarify, provide feedback, prompt elaboration, or hold the idea up for others to consider” (p. 132). This extension of thinking was observed in classroom discussions. For example, Mr. Lopez allowed alternative interpretations of text in class discussions, stating that he did not see what the student shared, “but that doesn’t mean it’s not there.” He asked students to provide evidence from the text to support their thinking, which involved follow-up questions when necessary. Ford-Connors and Robertson (2017) argued that by using this third turn approach, instructors could shape how conversations progress and help students achieve a deeper understanding of content.

Student Stressors. Several students mentioned balancing working at restaurants, the grocery store, or the mall before or during focus groups. Research indicated that students who identify as Hispanic work longer hours, which can sometimes lead to dropping out (Saenz, et al., 2018). No student participants mentioned thinking about dropping out during focus group conversations and member checking sessions. However, students did mention how work made it challenging to navigate their daily lives. For example, one student noted how he had to take care of a sibling as well as navigate work life. This ties with research stating how students who identify as Hispanic navigate both familial and life obligations while in college (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012; Vega, 2016). Research notes how it is common for Hispanic families to emphasize that “group needs take precedence over individual needs” (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012, p. 92). In his speech at mentor night, the president of the college shared how he and his sister both signed their checks from McDonald’s and gave them to their parents, supporting

their family at a young age. It is important to note that the president of the college took time to explain how he had the familial and financial obligations reflected in the literature.

Mirror and window. The final piece related to an emphasis on validation and acceptance is the concept of a mirror and window. Bishop (1990) explained how texts act as windows when they offer views of new worlds, which could be real or imaginary. In contrast, texts that act as mirrors allow readers to contextualize their own lived experiences when compared to the world around them (Bishop, 1990). Moreover, Tatum (2009) noted how using culturally relevant texts with African American students helped with processing events and healing emotional wounds over time. In the Findings Chapter, I shared how Dr. Hernandez used Hispanic literature as part of an explanation of “the mirror and the window” by using literature as a mirror so students could see themselves and a window so students could see outside worlds.

It may not be possible to infer which texts students see as windows or mirrors. Scieurba (2015) noted that stakeholders in education might overlook what students perceive to be interesting texts. She explained, “To presume that readers gravitate exclusively toward texts that mirror them does not sufficiently honor the complexities of racial/ethnic or gender identities, nor does it consider the complexities of the very act of reading and responding to texts” (Scieurba, 2015, p. 309). Mr. Lopez and Dr. Hernandez both shared how they used works from authors of varied backgrounds and ethnicities. This may help students connect and engage with texts that relate to their own lives, as well as open windows to new worlds. When noting a variety of text choices, Holmes (2018) shared:

We need to fearlessly cultivate our own literary appetite by engaging with texts that speak to our soul, whether sanctioned by the literary critics or not. We help those whom we serve become boundary crossers by honoring their literary choices (p. 348).

Students and faculty outlined the varied ways of promoting validation and acceptance, which provided a unique snapshot of a learning community in south Texas. This snapshot affords stakeholders an opportunity to understand how instructional choices impact the perceptions and experiences of students enrolled in DE literacy courses and learning communities. Although a sense of a familial atmosphere made students comfortable sharing their life experiences and taking risks in class, faculty used texts as a mirror for stressors experienced by students in the Ascender community. This is a notable contribution to Bishop's (1990) mirror and window concept in a contemporary CSP setting.

Learning Community Stressors

The third implication related to this study is in regards to what we know about learning communities. Tinto (1993) noted how learning communities and other academic involvement could have an impact on student persistence. This academic involvement piece is noted to be a factor, which can additionally impact students' feelings of validation on campus (Nora, Urick, & Quijada Cerecer, 2011). Some studies cover the student perceptions of learning communities, but a unique aspect of this instrumental case study is how faculty participants navigated the growth of the Ascender program.

Growth of Program. The growth of Ascender at this particular field site impacted staffing, student numbers, and outside activities. Perhaps the aspect that

changed the most since 2012 is the mentoring component. Initially, there was a mentor for every student. Dr. Garcia noted that it was easier then because they needed approximately 50 mentors to participate. The mentor panel is an event where students can ask mentors questions in a roundtable discussion format. Ms. Flores said that she would prefer a more set mentor program for students. She explained that the roundtable discussion was a chance for students to talk with mentors, but does not replace the experience of having a personal mentor. I asked Ms. Flores if this change in format was due to the growth in students participating in the Ascender learning community. She replied yes, but “I think it's very possible to recruit 140 professionals from the community.” The most recent mentor panel invited eighteen mentors.

The Auxiliary Actions and changes made to accommodate the growth of Ascender were noted by faculty throughout our conversations and evident in my observations of classes and outside events. These actions are important implications because they outline how Ascender faculty navigated the opportunity to provide supportive and tailored instruction to students in their learning community. Stakeholders in learning communities can learn from the actions taken by faculty participants in regards to creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment. More research on this growth could provide more context to varied Ascender programs throughout Texas.

Pedagogical Changes Due to Policy

The final implication of this study is in relation to pedagogical changes made as a result of the new policy. Acceleration is a common reform strategy on community college campuses, “providing college credit not only to students who are traditionally expected to move seamlessly into postsecondary education but also for those students on

the fringes of the college track” (Henry & Stahl, 2017, p. 614). The policy change of accelerating INRW resulted in students spending less time in developmental literacy coursework. In the Findings chapter, I noted that Dr. Garcia empathized with students wanting credit-bearing courses, but she also wanted to make sure they succeeded. Ms. Ramos echoed this when she shared how Texas recently changed the cutoffs for the TSI exam, resulting in more students who were perceived as having more challenges as they entered a college-credit course. Dr. Garcia and Ms. Ramos both shared concerns regarding the changes made in developmental coursework, which were out of their control. The state of Texas requested INRW courses to be scaled in 2016 (THECB, 2016), followed by a new co-requisite format two years later (THECB, 2018). Faculty participants noted this succession of changes in our discussions regarding acceleration and course structure. Stakeholders in Texas would benefit from learning how one learning community navigated the most recent change to DE literacy course requirements.

Limitations

This instrumental case study was conducted to better understand the perceptions and experiences of students and faculty in one learning community. As a result, the generalizability of this study is understandably unlikely. Data and analyses shared in this dissertation may not be generalizable to the larger entities of the Ascender program, learning communities, or community college system where the learning community was housed. Additionally, Stake (1995) noted how qualitative research is subjective and relies on interpretation.

In addition, the students who were recruited in-class came from one section of English 1301+ taught by Mr. Lopez and one section taught by Ms. Ramos. I also recruited students at an end of year celebration. Therefore, many of the students who volunteered were from the same sections of the course. This helped students share experiences from the course, but it may have unintentionally omitted experiences from other sections of English 1301+.

Recommendations for Future Research

Findings from this study add to the literature on DE, learning communities, and CSP in DE settings. I have outlined several implications for research, but I would like to explicitly note three areas in need of future research to better understand these phenomena. Recommendations include continued research on learning communities like Ascender, research on DE supports for students who identify as Hispanic, and pedagogical changes due to policy.

Continued Research on Learning Communities Like Ascender

My first recommendation for future research is to continue studying inclusive and representative learning community programs. Nora, et al. (2011) noted the need for ethnographic studies on validation theory. Ethnographic studies need to occur in learning communities like Ascender to better understand the impact of validation on students. Participants who took part in my instrumental case study were very generous with their time and conversations. Data collected in my instrumental case study provides a chance to learn the perceptions and experiences of one learning community, but my collection time was limited when compared to an ethnographic approach. Since DE has an

overrepresentation of minority populations (Chen, 2016), it is crucial to delve into this issue with an ethnographic lens.

Continued Focus on DE Supports for Students who Identify as Hispanic

My second recommendation is to continue research on how DE supports impact the education of students who identify as Hispanic. Texas is one of four minority-majority states, which affords researchers an opportunity to conduct research in a state with a high concentration of students who identify as Hispanic (Gandara & Hearn, 2019). As previously noted in this study's problem statement, research needs more information to determine if or how DE, or representative curriculum in DE, impacts students who identify as Hispanic (Doran, 2015; Doran & Singh, 2018). Additionally, research describes how HSIs can impact students who identify as Hispanic with features including taking courses with Spanish-speaking instructors, noting salient understandings of student identities, and a sense of belonging on campus (Garcia, 2017). My instrumental case study is focused on the experiences and perceptions of one learning community, and studying initiatives in HSIs provides researchers relevance outside of the state. Although my study is unique because of this intersection of factors, more studies should be conducted on additional learning communities to better understand how DE supports impact students who identify as Hispanic.

Pedagogical Changes Due to Policy

My final recommendation is to continue research on how policy changes impact pedagogical choices. Research noted that policy decisions in Texas are informed by data sources in the state and less likely to be impacted by data outside of Texas (Gandara &

Hearn, 2019). This use of local data is due to the unique demographics of the state and accessibility to quality statewide data (Gandara & Hearn, 2019).

As previously mentioned, Texas scaled INRW courses in 2016 (THECB, 2016) and required a new co-requisite format two years later (THECB, 2018). Although policy changes were not the purpose of this instrumental case study, conversations regarding these changes occurred with several faculty members. This emphasis on recent policy changes suggests that there is a need for research on this changing educational landscape. Additionally, the curricular mandates required over the past decade have caused a ripple effect of changes. The INRW course's transition to English 1301+ resulted in additional changes for staff to navigate regarding reading selections and placing assignments in an English 1301+ context.

As I learned more about the changes made to meet THECB's (2018) current mandate I wondered how other faculty were navigating this change in focus. As previously noted, THECB (2018) mandated "a corequisite model, which allows the student to enroll in the entry-level college course but requires co-enrollment in a developmental education course/intervention designed to support the student's successful completion of the college-level course." (THECB, 2018, p. 1). INRW courses utilize a balance of reading and writing instruction (Goen, & Gillotte-Tropp, 2003), a task that seems improbable in a composition course. The additional intervention was a lab component in my instrumental case study's field site. What does this change in course structure mean for the reading skills of students who require extra reading supports? Additional studies are needed to answer this question.

Summary of Discussion and Implications

This instrumental case study was conducted to learn about the experiences and perceptions of students and faculty in Ascender's learning community at one community college location. Through conversations with participants about their experiences and perceptions, I found that the participant groups valued similar experiences and assignments, but foregrounded codes specific to their experiences and understandings. In other words, although students discussed benefitting from the fruits of Ascender faculty's labor, the faculty outlined "what happened behind the curtain" at Ascender. This summary briefly outlines the discussion, implications for research, and recommendations for research.

This chapter noted four salient discussion points from the Findings chapter of my instrumental case study. These discussion points are outlined below.

- **Culturally Relevant Aspects:** Students and faculty noted culturally relevant assignments. Additionally, Student Stressors were also navigated when composing or discussing culturally relevant essays. The use of CSP in developmental literacy was also discussed, as well as representation.
- **Meaningful Instruction:** Students shared how the code Meaningful Instruction impacted their perceptions of the Ascender learning community. Meaningful Instruction included feedback, faculty's High Expectations, and a Scaffolding approach. Additionally, students' Future Goals and keys to success were also mentioned in relation to this instruction.

- **Familial Aspects:** The Familial Aspects covered by faculty and student participants included the learning community setting, a use of Validation, and a familial atmosphere.
- **What Happens Behind the Curtain:** Faculty discussed the Auxiliary Actions and Epistemological Choices made while teaching Ascender courses. They also noted the Growth of Program and Changes Regarding Acceleration.

These four salient points add to the literature on how CSP was used in a learning community setting. Additionally, they help provide context into the labor faculty noted inside and outside of class, as well as the fruits of the labor that students benefitted from.

I outlined four implications, which were shared in a way to help guide future research. The first implication is the use of CSP in DE. This instrumental case study is one of the first to focus on CSP in developmental literacy courses and more research is needed to provide a larger context and understanding. The second implication focuses on faculty's emphasis on validation and acceptance. This instrumental case study discussed several instances where this occurred, but the findings were not intended to be generalizable. Educators in postsecondary could benefit from learning about how validation and acceptance are approached in various postsecondary settings. The third implication is the navigation of Student Stressors using literacy as a way to navigate challenging experiences and topics. The fourth implication focused on learning community stressors, including the growth of the Ascender program. Although my study focused on how five faculty members navigated this growth, research should be conducted to learn how other faculty members have navigated these changes. This ties to the last implication, pedagogical changes due to policy. My study shares how faculty

navigated the changing DE landscape in Texas, but more research on these changes would provide additional context to these findings.

Although the above implications include suggestions for how future research can add to what was learned in this instrumental case study, I also wanted to explicitly outline three urgent recommendations for future research. First, there is a need for continued research on learning communities like Ascender so stakeholders can better understand how faculty serve students who identify as Hispanic in community college settings. As previously noted, DE courses have an overrepresentation of minority students (Brickman, et al., 2013; Chen, 2016).

This ties to my next recommendation, which is a continued focus specifically on DE supports for students who identify as Hispanic. Texas is a minority-majority state (Gandara & Hearn, 2019), which provides a unique opportunity for researchers to learn more about faculty and students who identify as Hispanic. Moreover, with THECB supporting programming like Ascender (THECB, 2014), researchers can study various community college campuses across Texas.

The third recommendation is to provide a larger window into pedagogical changes due to Texas educational policy. This was not the purpose of my instrumental case study. However, the transition from an INRW course to a freshman composition course resulted in changes to the curriculum for faculty participants. If THECB's (2018) mandate places students in credit-bearing composition courses, research must be conducted on if instructors can balance reading and writing instruction in this new format.

APPENDIX SECTION

Appendix A: Focus Group Protocol for Students

Focus Group SCRIPT

Study Title: Inclusive Developmental Literacy: One Learning Community's Application of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy in a Texas Community College
Principal Investigator: Amber Sarker Co-Investigator/Faculty Advisor: Eric Paulson

Sponsor: n/a

Investigator will collect consent forms and pre-interview demographic forms.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this important study on inclusive and representative pedagogy in developmental literacy courses. Our focus group will take no more than 60 minutes. Please let me know if you have any questions as we proceed through the interview. To facilitate documentation of your affirmation may I digitally record this interview?

My name is Amber Sarker and I am a doctoral student at Texas State University. As discussed in your consent form, I would like to digitally record our interview, which should last no longer than one hour. I would like to remind you that to protect the privacy of focus group members, all transcripts will be coded with pseudonyms and we ask that you not discuss what is discussed in the focus group with anyone else.

Feel free to stop this interview at any time. During this time, we will cover three topics, including background, learning communities, and your literacy course. While we value the many diverse aspects of your position, our focus only extends to aspects of your experiences in your learning community. Thus, I may occasionally need to redirect your response or prompt you to a subsequent question, so that I can respect our focus and your time while remaining within the 60-minute time expectation.

I requested to interview you because you are a student in a learning community with a developmental literacy component.

Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

Introduction: Thank you so much for agreeing to this interview. It is very helpful to me and my research. I will be asking you some general questions about Ascender that I think will lead to some helpful conversations between us, but first I would just like to get to know everyone.

Introduce yourself and how you became a part of the Ascender learning community.

Topic Domain I: Learning Community

INTERVIEWER SCRIPT: The first topic that we will discuss today is your background as a student.

Lead-off statement:

How would you describe Ascender to a student?

Is this the first time you have been a member of a learning community? Tell me about your experiences.

Is there anything else I should know about how Ascender works or your experiences with Ascender?

Topic Domain II: Literacy Course

INTERVIEWER SCRIPT: Thanks for your responses thus far. Now we are going to change directions slightly to talk about your perceptions regarding campus culture.

Lead-off question:

How would you describe your literacy course to a student who was attending class for the first time?

Tell me about an assignment or topic that you studied. How was that for you?

Topic Domain III: Representative curriculum

INTERVIEWER SCRIPT: Again, thank you for all of your responses. We are going to change directions once again. Our next section discusses your perceptions of what you're learning.

Lead-off question:

How do the courses you're taking compare to experiences in your own life?

Have things in your courses echoed your experiences? Your background?

What kind of books have you read? Tell me about the people in them.

Conclusions:

Thank you for your time and for your honest responses to the question. Before we conclude, is there anything you feel we should have talked about in relation to your literacy course that we did not get to?

What about in relation to the ascender program?

Thank you for speaking with me today. To summarize what I think we've discussed... (2-minute member check/oral summary). Is there any discussion point I forgot to mention?

Post Interview Comments and/or Observations

Interviewee:
Interviewer: Amber Sarker
Date:
Start Time:
End Time:
Location:
Notes:

Interview Sections Utilized; Degree of Conformity to Protocol (Check if Used/Applicable)

- _____ **Pre-Interview and Demographics**
Degree of Conformity to Protocol ____%
 - _____ **Topic Domain I: Interviewee Background**
Degree of Conformity to Protocol ____%
 - _____ **Topic Domain II: Learning Community**
Degree of Conformity to Protocol ____%
 - _____ **Topic Domain III: Literacy Course**
Degree of Conformity to Protocol ____%
 - _____ **Conclusions:**
Degree of Conformity to Protocol ____%
 - _____ **Follow Up/Thank You Email**
Degree of Conformity to Protocol ____%
 - _____ **Other Topics Discussed:**
 - _____ **Documents/Artifacts Collected:**
 - _____ **Post Interview Comments/Concerns/Irregularities:**
 - _____ **Length of Interview:**
-

Appendix B: Interview Protocol for Faculty

INTERVIEW SCRIPT

Study Title: Inclusive Developmental Literacy: One Learning Community's Application of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy in a Texas Community College
Principal Investigator: Amber Sarker Co-Investigator/Faculty Advisor: Eric Paulson

Sponsor: n/a

Investigator will collect consent forms and pre-interview demographic forms.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this important study on inclusive and representative pedagogy in developmental literacy courses. Our interview will take no more than 60 minutes. Please let me know if you have any questions as we proceed through the interview. To facilitate documentation of your affirmation may I digitally record this interview?

My name is Amber Sarker and I am a doctoral student at Texas State University. As discussed in your consent form, I would like to digitally record our interview, which should last no longer than one hour. I would like to remind you that to protect the privacy of interview members, all transcripts will be coded with pseudonyms.

Feel free to stop this interview at any time. During this time, we will cover four topics, including your background, literacy course, instructional elements, and artifact analysis. While we value the many diverse aspects of your position, our focus only extends to aspects of your work related to developmental literacy. Thus, I may occasionally redirect your response or prompt you to a subsequent question, so that I can respect our focus and your time while remaining within the 60-minute time expectation.

I requested to interview you because you are faculty in a learning community with a developmental literacy component.

Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

Introduction: Thank you so much for agreeing to this interview. It is very helpful to me and my research. I will be asking you some general questions about Ascender that I think will lead to some helpful conversations between us, but first, I would like to learn more about you.

Topic Domain I: Interviewee Background

Tell me about your experiences as a literacy instructor- keeping in mind, my study is about developmental literacy and inclusive instruction.

Topic Domain II: Literacy Course

INTERVIEWER SCRIPT: Thanks for your responses thus far. Now we are going to change directions slightly to talk about your perceptions regarding your literacy course in the learning community.

Tell me about this course.... How do you think this course is different than other literacy classes you have taught in the past?

Tell me about an assignment or topic that you are passionate about in your literacy course. Why does this assignment resonate with you?

Topic Domain III: Instructional Choices

Tell me about an assignment in developmental literacy where the students seemed particularly engaged. What do you think encouraged that level of engagement?

If you had a magic wand that provided you with unlimited resources, what would you add to your literacy course? Why?

Topic Domain IV: Artifact Analysis

INTERVIEWER SCRIPT: Before this interview, I asked you to bring some items that represent curricular inclusivity or representation of cultures of curriculum. Can you tell me about what you brought?

How does this item represent inclusion or representation?

Conclusions:

Thank you for your time and for your honest responses to the question. Our conversation is about to wrap up. Knowing what I'm studying, what else should I have asked in relation to your literacy course that we did not get to?

Thank you for speaking with me today. To summarize what I think we've discussed... (2-minute member check/oral summary). Is there any discussion point I forgot to mention?

Do you have any questions for me before we end this interview?

Post Interview Comments and/or Observations:

Interviewee:
Interviewer: Amber Sarker
Date:
Start Time:
End Time:
Location:
Notes:

Interview Sections Utilized; Degree of Conformity to Protocol (Check if Used/Applicable)

_____ **Pre-Interview and Demographic Sheet Collection**

Degree of Conformity to Protocol ____%

_____ **Topic Domain I: Interviewee Background**

Degree of Conformity to Protocol ____%

_____ **Topic Domain II: Inclusivity**

Degree of Conformity to Protocol ____%

_____ **Topic Domain III: Instructional Elements**

Degree of Conformity to Protocol ____%

_____ **Topic Domain IV: Artifact Analysis**

Degree of Conformity to Protocol ____%

_____ **Conclusions:**

Degree of Conformity to Protocol ____%

_____ **Follow Up/Thank You Email**

Degree of Conformity to Protocol ____%

_____ **Other Topics Discussed:**

_____ **Documents/Artifacts Collected:**

_____ **Post Interview Comments/Concerns/Irregularities:**

_____ **Length of Interview:**

Appendix C- Data Collection and Analysis Charts

Table C1- Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis- Focus Groups

Phase 1: Interview Schedule for Student Focus Groups

Purpose: The purpose of this focus group is to collect qualitative data through open-ended questions using a focused group discussion.

- 1) Went over IRB Consent Form. Confirmed students were 18 or older and signed the form.
- 2) Participants were given a demographic information page to fill out before the focus group in the interest of participants' time and privacy. I collected these forms after the consent forms were filled out and returned.
- 3) Used the Focus Group Protocol (Appendix A), which begins with a welcome, overview of the study, and general ground rules regarding the conversation. The protocol then covers the focus group's questioning route (as seen in Table C4).
- 4) During the focus group, the discussion was be digitally recorded. In addition, I used field notes to help guide discussion points for something a participant said earlier (Stake, 1995; 2005; 2010).
- 5) I actively followed up on answers from students by extending statements and asking clarification. This included making sure I did not lead the discussion regarding perceptions of viewpoints (Brinkman & Kvale, 2014).
- 6) After the focus group, I debriefed, where I reiterated what was covered in the focus group, as well as any overall feelings about the conversation. I wrote this debrief in my field notebook to write up formally as a memo afterwards.

Phase 2: Member Check

Purpose: The purpose of member checking is to ensure trustworthiness. Additionally, asking for clarification may encourage other participants to agree or disagree with a perception.

- 1) I ended the focus group with an oral summary of the conversation, focusing on relevant findings. This provided some insurance that I did not miss any major points before concluding.
- 2) After transcribing, I contacted participants for follow-up questioning if there were remaining questions or ambiguity. In the interest of participants' time this was very brief.

Phase 3: Analysis

Purpose: The purpose of the analysis phase is to determine salient themes from the conversations that were recorded and transcribed.

Analysis in-between focus groups:

- 1) Transcribed data
- 2) Wrote a short summary of the focus group going question by question to determine where I could ask additional questions for more information.
- 3) Use information from the Transcription and Summary to guide future focus groups.

Analysis once all focus groups are completed:

- 1) Began the coding process
- 2) Prioritized analytic themes, looking for frequency, specificity, intensity, participant perceptions of importance, and internal consistency (as a group and as individual participants).
- 3) Used a priori codes (representation, identity) and listed any emergent codes (Stake, 1995; 2005; 2010).

Phase 4: Report Findings

Purpose: To provide findings to readers so they can create their own naturalistic interpretation of the perceptions of participants.

- 1) I organized findings by research question, as well as by salient themes I find while coding.
- 2) I included quotes and examples from focus groups in the findings section to help the reader better understand the perceptions of participants.
- 3) Finally, I incorporated these findings into the dissertation document, along with my individual interview data and observation data.

Note: This table was primarily informed by Krueger and Casey (2015). Other sources are cited accordingly.

Table C2- Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis- Interviews

Phase 1: Interview Schedule for Faculty

Purpose: The purpose of this interview is to collect qualitative data through open-ended questions using a focused group discussion.

- 1) Went over IRB Consent Form. Confirmed that participants were 18 or older and signed the form before proceeding.
- 2) Participants were given a demographic information page to fill out before the focus group in the interest of participants' time and privacy. I collected these forms after the consent forms are filled out and returned.
- 3) Used the Interview Protocol (Appendix B), which began with a welcome, overview of the study, and general ground rules regarding the conversation. The protocol then covered the interview's questioning route (as seen in Table C5).
- 4) During the interview, the discussion was digitally recorded. In addition, I used field notes to help guide discussion points if I wanted to call back to something a participant said earlier.
- 5) After the interview, I debriefed, where I reiterated what was covered in the interview, as well as any overall feelings about the conversation (Krueger & Casey, 2015). I wrote this debrief in my field notebook to write up formally as a memo afterwards.

Phase 2: Member Check

Purpose: The purpose of member checking is to ensure trustworthiness.

- 1) During the interview I restated concepts back to the participant if there was any ambiguity.
- 2) I actively followed up on answers from participants by extending statements and asking clarification. This included making sure I did not lead the discussion regarding perceptions of viewpoints (Brinkman & Kvale, 2014).
- 3) I ended the interview with an oral summary of the conversation, focused on relevant findings. This provided some insurance that I did not miss any major points before concluding (Krueger & Casey, 2015).
- 4) After transcriptions, I contacted participants for follow-up questioning if there were remaining questions or ambiguity. In the interest of participants' time, this was very brief.

Phase 3: Analysis

Purpose: The purpose of the analysis phase is to determine salient themes from the conversations that were recorded and transcribed.

- 1) Transcriptions of data
- 2) Wrote a short summary of the interview going question by question to determine where I could ask additional questions for more information (Krueger & Casey, 2015).
- 3) Used information from the transcription and summary to guide future interviews, was mindful of emergent codes that may become apparent.

Analysis once all interviews are completed:

- 1) Began the coding process
- 2) Prioritized analytic themes, looking for frequency, specificity, intensity, participant perceptions of importance, and internal consistency as a group of individuals and as individual participants (Krueger & Casey, 2015).
- 3) Used a priori Codes (representation, identity) and list any emergent codes

Phase 4: Report Findings

Purpose: To provide findings to readers so they can create their own naturalistic interpretation of the perceptions of participants.

Procedure:

- 1) I organized findings by research question, as well as by salient themes I found while coding.
- 2) I included quotes and examples from interviews in the findings section to help the reader better understand the perceptions of participants.
- 3) Finally, I incorporated these findings into the dissertation document, along with my focus group interview data and observation data.

Note: This table was primarily informed by Stake (1995; 2005; 2010). Other sources are cited accordingly.

Table C3- Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis - Observations

Phase 1: Observation

Purpose: The purpose of my observations is to better understand the case through observing context and collecting data.

Procedure:

- 1) Arranged a preliminary visit to the literacy classroom. Wrote observations in field notebook.
- 2) Memoed after the observation.
- 3) Observed the literacy classroom three to five times to capture an accurate description of the field site and the case.
- 4) Observed other learning community events during my study, which included the end of year celebration and Mentor Night.

Phase 2: Potential Member Checks

Purpose: To ensure trustworthiness when there is ambiguity.

Procedure:

- 1) These observations were for context of inclusive instruction. Therefore, member checking only occurred if something was unclear or I could not hear an important exchange.

Phase 3: Analysis

Purpose: The purpose of the analysis phase is to determine salient themes from observations, being mindful of providing ample data before tentative conclusions.

Procedure:

- 1) Reviewed data and made sure it can be reported in a naturalistic way before providing analysis of findings to encourage readers' interpretation
- 2) Selected vignettes, mindful if these provided readers with an accurate representation of the field site and case.
- 3) Identified emergent themes
- 4) Coded a priori and emergent themes, looking for patterns in the data.
- 5) Deliberately tried to disconfirm findings when applicable to make sure the data is valid and reliable.

Phase 4: Report Findings

Purpose: To provide findings to readers so they can create their own naturalistic interpretation of the field site.

Procedure:

- 1) I organized findings by research question, as well as by salient themes I find while coding.
- 2) I included thick description and one vignette in the findings section to help the reader better understand the field site.
- 3) Finally, I incorporated these findings into the dissertation document, along with my focus group interview data and observation data.

Note: This table was primarily informed by Stake (1995; 2005; 2010). Other sources are cited accordingly

Table C4. Questioning Route for Student Focus Groups

Introduction	How would you describe Ascender to a student?
	How would you describe your literacy course to a student who was attending class for the first time?
Transition	Tell me how your literacy course.
	How does that compare to other courses you have taken?
Key	Tell me about an assignment or topic that you studied. How was that for you?
	How do the courses you're taking compare to experiences in your own life.
	Have things in your courses echoed your experiences? Your background? What kind of books have you read? Tell me about the people in them.
Ending	Our conversation is about to wrap up. Before we conclude, is there anything you feel we should have talked about in relation to your literacy course that we did not get to? Ascender program?
	Thank you for speaking with me today. To summarize what I think we've discussed... (2-minute member check/oral summary). Is there any discussion point I forgot to mention?

Table C5- Questioning Route for Faculty Interviews

Opening	Tell me about your experiences as a literacy instructor- keeping in mind, my study is....
Introduction	How would you describe your literacy course to a student who was attending class for the first time?
	Transition
Key	Tell me about an assignment or topic that you are passionate about in your literacy course. Why does this assignment resonate with you?
	Tell me about an assignment in developmental literacy where the students seemed particularly engaged. What do you think encouraged that level of engagement?
	If you had a magic wand that provided you with unlimited resources, what would you add to your literacy course? Why?
Ending	Our conversation is about to wrap up. Knowing what I'm studying.... What else should I have asked about your perceptions. Before we conclude, is there anything else you want to tell me about in relation to your literacy course that we did not get to?
	Thank you for speaking with me today. To summarize what I think we've discussed... (2-minute member check/oral summary). Is there any discussion point I forgot to mention?

Table C6

Overview of Instrumentation by Research Question

Research Question	Instrumentation Used
1) What are the perceptions and experiences of students enrolled in a community college learning community?	Focus Group Protocol (Krueger & Casey, 2015) Field Notebook for Observations (Stake 1995; 2005; 2010)
1A) Do students enrolled in a community college learning community perceive that their developmental literacy courses promote an inclusive culture? If so, how?	Focus Group Protocol (Krueger & Casey, 2015) Field Notebook for Observations (Stake 1995; 2005; 2010)
1B) Do students enrolled in a community college learning community perceive that there is a representation of their identities and language practices in their developmental literacy course? If so, how?	Focus Group Protocol (Krueger & Casey, 2015) Field Notebook for Observations (Stake 1995; 2005; 2010)
2) What are the perceptions and experiences of faculty in a community college learning community?	Interview Protocol (Stake, 1995; 2005; 2010) Field Notebook for Observations (Stake, 1995; 2005; 2010)
2A) Do faculty working in a community college learning community perceive their developmental literacy courses promote an inclusive culture? If so, how?	Interview Protocol (Stake, 1995; 2005; 2010) Field Notebook for Observations (Stake, 1995; 2005; 2010)
2B) Do faculty working in a community college learning community perceive that there is a representation of students' identities and language practices in their developmental literacy course? If so, how?	Interview Protocol (Stake, 1995; 2005; 2010) Field Notebook for Observations (Stake, 1995; 2005; 2010)

Appendix D- Demographics Pre-Interview Forms

Faculty Form:

You have been invited to participate in a research study to learn more about inclusive instruction in developmental literacy courses. The information gathered will be used describe how faculty working in developmental literacy courses perceive the inclusivity and representative curricular choices made in their classroom. This study's results will be used in conference presentations, my dissertation, and possible publication. All data will be anonymous and names will be removed.

You are being asked to participate because you are a member of developmental literacy faculty who works in developmental literacy courses. You do not have to respond to any questions that you feel uncomfortable about answering.

Please bring this form to the interview, along with any materials from your course regarding inclusive literacy instruction.

Race or Ethnicity you identify as:

Gender you identify as:

Age at the time of this interview:

How long have you been teaching?

Have you been a part of a learning community before?

Student Form:

You have been invited to participate in a research study to learn more about inclusive instruction in developmental literacy courses. The information gathered will be used describe how students working in developmental literacy courses perceive the inclusivity and representative curricular choices made in their classroom. This study's results will be used in conference presentations, my dissertation, and possible publication. All data will be anonymous and names will be removed.

You are being asked to participate because you are a student enrolled in a learning community that has a developmental literacy component. Please answer the following demographic questions. You do not have to respond to any questions that you feel uncomfortable about answering.

Please bring this form to the focus group.

Race or Ethnicity you identify as:

Gender you identify as:

Age at the time of this interview:

How long have you enrolled in college?

Have you been a part of a learning community before?

Appendix E- Codebook

Codebook

Guided by Saldaña's (2016) Coding Manual

Valued Program Aspects Theme: Validation, Culturally Relevant Aspects, Familial Aspects

Short Description- Validation

Detailed Description- Validation can be seen as interpersonal or academic support that occurs from external agents, such as faculty and staff (Rendón, 1994), as well as support and encouragement. It can also recognize students' experiential knowledge (Padilla, 1999; Perez & Ceja, 2010).

Job Description- To highlight the times thoughts or actions are used to validate students
Inclusion Criteria- Instruction or conversations with students that empower students and validate what they know, structured lessons to highlight what students know, and provide meaningful feedback.

Exclusion Criteria- Faculty does not access prior knowledge, encourage students, or treat students as subordinates (Rendón, 1994).

Typical Exemplars- The video of the student graduating from local university, the final presentation in interview with Ms. Flores

Atypical Exemplars- Using what students know to teach process (interview with Dr. Hernandez regarding parent/grandparent job)

“Close, but no”- Perhaps shallow compliments as responses (good jobs and “atta-boys”)

Short Description- Culturally Relevant Aspects

Detailed Description- Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) is a pedagogical approach, which focuses on the acknowledgement of students' cultural practices (Ladson-Billings, 2014). This code looks at any conversation or pedagogical choice that acknowledges the cultural practices and experiences of students. I chose this phrase because it was an a priori code. The program and the faculty use the phrase “culturally relevant.”

Job Description- Highlights curricular elements or discussions that highlight the culture of students enrolled in courses

Inclusion Criteria- Curricular elements that are intended to connect to students' cultural background

Exclusion Criteria- Curricular elements that are not intended to connect to students' cultural background

Typical Exemplars- Ascender Assignments

Atypical Exemplars- Anglo examples (Interviews with Mr. Lopez and Dr. Hernandez)

“Close, but no”- Validating actions that aren't related to students' cultural background

Short Description- Familial Aspects

Detailed Description- Creating a sense of familia is defined as creating an environment that welcomes students, offering mentorship for underrepresented college students (Sáenz & Ponjuán, 2009; Solórzano et al., 2000) and providing an opportunity to help students navigate college and feel comfortable asking for help (Saenz, et al., 2018). A sense of familia includes a providing a level of comfort, which can be found when students learn in an environment with students and staff who share cultural identities or when students find their life experiences as part of the curriculum (Solorzano & Yosso, 2000).

Job Description- To show the connection in the learning community

Inclusion Criteria- Actions that go above and beyond to create a feeling of community

Exclusion Criteria- Actions that do not or do not intend to create a feeling of community

Typical Exemplars- Noche de Familia, Holiday Party

Atypical Exemplars- Hugs and handshakes at the end of the semester (interview with Ms. Flores)

“Close, but no”- Actions required by field site and experienced by all students, regardless of if s/he is a part of an learning community or not

**Epistemological Choices Theme:
Scaffolding, Discipline, Changes Regarding Acceleration**

Short Description- Scaffolding

Detailed Description- Literacy instruction that provides students with a process, knowing the shared goals, where students are gradually given more responsibility before completing the task on their own (Brownfield & Wilkinson, 2018). Although scaffolding is often discussed in K-12 curriculum (Brownfield & Wilkinson, 2018), the model’s gradual release of responsibility was observed in a more rigorous postsecondary context.

Job Description- To show the purposeful process to release responsibility to students

Inclusion Criteria- Actions or discussions focused on the gradual release of responsibility

Exclusion Criteria- Epistemological beliefs that are not related to a gradual release of responsibility

Typical Exemplars- Writing process

Atypical Exemplars- Interview with Ms. Flores regarding with shy student

“Close, but no”- Talking about a process that is not scaffolding

Short Description- High Expectations

Detailed Description- Faculty discussed having rigorous expectations, which often accompanied the scaffolding approach. This is defined as providing high expectations and pushing students to accomplish goals that potentially seem unobtainable.

Job Description- To show times instructors have high expectations for students.

Inclusion Criteria- Instructors pushing students using pedagogical choices or discussion.

Exclusion Criteria- Instructors’ pedagogical choices, which do not have high expectations.

Typical Exemplars- Interview with Dr. Hernandez- several examples
Atypical Exemplars- Interview with Ms. Flores about presentations
“Close, but no”- Expecting the norm (showing up to class)

Short Description- Changes Regarding Acceleration

Detailed Description- Acceleration is being defined as a mandate that encourages students to get into college-level courses as soon as possible. This code is included due to the mandate by the Texas Higher Education Board (THECB), who require “a corequisite model, which allows the student to enroll in the entry-level college course but requires co-enrollment in a developmental education course/intervention designed to support the student’s successful completion of the college-level course.” (THECB, 2018, p. 1). This mandate has changed the curriculum from an INRW course to an English 1301+ course with extra support.

Job Description- To highlight INRW changes that resulted from acceleration.

Inclusion Criteria- Any changes made because of time or 1301 requirements.

Exclusion Criteria- Pedagogical choices that seem to be a result of epistemological beliefs, not time.

Typical Exemplars- The English 1301+ requirements, which were not a factor when INRW was separate.

Atypical Exemplars- English 1301+ requires no fiction- so that changes reading selection

“Close, but no”- The lab set-up for interview with Mr. Lopez

Potential Stressors Theme:

Auxiliary Actions (Faculty), Student Stressors, Growth of Program

Short Description- Auxiliary Actions (Faculty)

Detailed Description- Faculty actions and conversations that indicate a decision to go above and beyond expectations for students.

Job Description- To highlight actions professors made that were above and beyond the requirement

Inclusion Criteria- Something that is not “required.”

Exclusion Criteria- Caring about students in a general way.

Typical Exemplars- Interview with Dr. Garcia

Atypical Exemplars- Interview with Mr. Lopez regarding observation

“Close, but no”- Interview with Dr. Hernandez talking about the interactions with students

Short Description- Student Stressors

Detailed Description- Student stressors include outside aspects, like work and family, as well as the academic task of navigating college life. Hispanic students need a campus they perceive as welcoming and supportive to adjust to college, which is dependent on relationships and social networks (Saenz, 2018). Hispanic students more likely to work while enrolled, which includes working longer hours and can sometimes lead to dropping

out (Saenz, 2018). Additionally, in spite of parents' aspirational capital, Hispanic students are still forced to navigate familial and life obligations while in college.

Job Description- To highlight potential barriers to success that students navigate while enrolled

Inclusion Criteria- Outside stressors that can impact success outside of the classroom

Exclusion Criteria- Not stress about assignments, stress outside of class.

Typical Exemplars- Work, family

Atypical Exemplars- Young mother

“Close, but no”- Stressed about finals (typical college stressor)

Short Description- Growth of Program

Detailed Description- The learning community has grown over the years, which has resulted in changes in faculty, mentoring, academic structuring, and events.

Job Description- To show how the growth of the program has impacted the learning community

Inclusion Criteria- Changes due to enrollment numbers

Exclusion Criteria- Pedagogical changes unrelated to enrollment, changes due to acceleration

Typical Exemplars- Removal of mentors, staffing changes to accommodate numbers

Atypical Exemplars- The students discussing the 1302 courses filling up

“Close, but no”- Staffing changes unrelated to growth (hard for me to know)

Additional Focus Group Codes

This section contains any additional codes that were recorded during the holistic coding process and remained after the second round of coding. The guide for the codebook (Saldaña, 2016) is the same as the faculty codebook.

Valued Experiences Theme

Short Description- Valued Aspects of Learning Community

Detailed Description- Student participants often mentioned specific aspects of the learning community that they valued.

Job Description- The purpose of this code is to show a specific category of values, in relation to the learning community setting.

Inclusion Criteria- The code needs to have specific learning community aspects identified and student participants must explain how or why they valued it.

Exclusion Criteria- A learning community description that is not meaningful to the student.

Typical Exemplars- When student participants discussed the learning community events, learning community features, or the familia aspect, which they often valued.

Atypical Exemplars- Students discussing being a priority for course registration.

“Close, but no”- Examples where students value campus climate that is not related specifically to the learning community.

Short Description- Meaningful Instruction

Detailed Description- This code is for when students specifically describe how instruction in their learning community courses was meaningful to them.

Job Description- The purpose of this code is to show a specific category of values, in relation to the instruction students received.

Inclusion Criteria- The code needs to have specific instruction aspects identified and student participants must explain how or why they valued it.

Exclusion Criteria- A description of instruction that is not meaningful to the student.

Typical Exemplars- When students discussed the scaffolding approach or when students discussed the classroom climate.

Atypical Exemplars- There were not any exemplars that I found to be atypical.

“Close, but no”- something that could be mistakenly assigned

Valued Program Aspects Theme

Short Description- Future Goals

Detailed Description- Student participants often talked about goals beyond their current semester. This code is for when students specifically talk about those goals. I have placed this under program aspects/curriculum because one of the Ascender goals is for students to transfer to a 4-year institution (Catch the Next, 2019).

Job Description- The learning community visits 4-year institutions and students often talked about their future goals in relation to that conference.

Inclusion Criteria- When a student discussed their future goals related to educational or vocational aspirations.

Exclusion Criteria- When students talk about future goals that are not related to educational or vocational aspirations.

Typical Exemplars- When students talk about their goals for college or their future career.

Atypical Exemplars- When Victoria discussed her goals for her son’s education.

“Close, but no”- When a student talks about goals they had in the past

Appendix F- Overview of Previous Pilot Study

This qualitative case study was conducted in Fall 2017. The case study examined the lived experiences of six women working in developmental literacy who self-identified as allies with the LGBTQ+ community. Three of the participants taught Integrated Reading and Writing (INRW) courses and three participants worked in the university's writing center. My primary purpose of this study was to better understand participants' perceptions of campus culture in a four-year university in central Texas. Throughout interviews, I asked participants what prompted their allyship and what their lived experiences as allies entailed.

Themes I identified while coding included identifying as an ally, inclusive curriculum, safe(r) spaces, empathy through experience, requests for resources, intersectionality, marginalization of participant, awareness of heteronormativity, and sources of information. The most prevalent codes were identifying as an ally and safe(r) spaces. Additionally, codes showed patterns of overlap in certain research questions. Instrumentation for this study included an interview protocol, which was used as a template for the interview protocol in this current study.

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