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Integrated Education and Training:
Making Sense of a New Form of Vocationalism Impacting Adult ESL Learners

by

Maliheh Mansuripur Vafai

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Education

in the

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of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in Charge:

Professor Zeus Leonardo, Chair

Professor Bruce C. Fuller

Professor Kim Voss

Fall 2015

Integrated Education and Training:
Making Sense of a New Form of Vocationalism Impacting Adult ESL Learners

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by

Maliheh Mansuripur Vafai

Abstract

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Discussions of English language access and instruction continue to be framed by human capital perspectives that view English as a set of linguistic skills tied to employment opportunities. Integrated Education and Training (IET) is an example of the latest curricular approach to the 'mainstream' English as a second Language instruction at Adult Education agencies. It strives to complement the English curriculum with the so-called 'employability' skills to help learners adapt to the new language and culture of work in the United States. This dissertation examines IET's underpinning assumptions and its implications for adult immigrants of color from marginalized backgrounds, who comprise the majority of learners at these agencies.

First, it situates the IET development as an example of a vocational approach within the broader context of school-to-work reform efforts and explores its connections to the neoliberal ideological thinking. With close attention to the new job categories and the 21st century skills landscape, and drawing on historical parallels, it then examines the rise of IET in light of the realities of class, race, and the asymmetrical power relations that characterize the modern nation state. The analysis is based on an intersectional approach centering the way both race *and* class relations manifest in the educational experiences of people of color. Second, using a mixed method approach, the study analyzes data to illuminate students' uptake of the vocational discourse. While limited research on IET and similar models of curriculum and instruction has focused on the assessment of outcomes and effectiveness, there has been little scrutiny about the relevance to students' aspirations and pre-established goals. Specifically, research has not addressed the possibility of constraining impacts on students' aspirations.

Findings indicate that the learning module, implemented within an experimental framework, impacted IET participants differently and that the practices of 'realistic goal setting' along with the phenomena of 'social mirroring' were central to students' sense making. Analysis reveals that learners with greater educational capital in their country of origin seemed to have higher aspirations but were more readily influenced by the promise of IET. For these learners, IET succeeded in promoting minimal training and subsequent lower- grade employment options. Data further suggest that concepts such as 'stress and time management', 'prioritizing' and

‘multi-tasking’ took center stage, and once invoked by the teacher, were reified by students through engagement in typical classroom practices. This is consequential for learning, in that the deployment of such narratives in social interaction frames students’ opportunities to build identities as neoliberal subjects. It highlights critical issues that need to be taken into account in the design of ESL learning environments, especially for students of color from persistently marginalized backgrounds.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

“I know that it is difficult for immigrants to have better life in the U.S., but at the same time it is really important to have big dreams and studying hard. Speaking English is most important for me to get better life and job.”
-- Lupe Alvarado, ESL Student

“English is a World language and is very important for success. My teacher gives me a lot of knowledge. I think this center is a temple and my teachers are god for me.”
--Vanita Singh, ESL Student

First generation adult immigrants in the U.S. often face tremendous pressures to adjust to the social, cultural and economic norms of their host country. For those from marginalized backgrounds and with limited knowledge of English, learning the language is often the first and biggest obstacle they encounter in their journey towards full immersion and possibilities for upward social mobility. As the students’ anecdotes opening the chapter illustrate, these learners depend heavily on the ESL programs and teachers who provide the instruction often through the state-funded adult education agencies spread out in local communities. The instructional material and curriculum utilized by these programs have traditionally addressed a mostly functional use of English language to help learners with various everyday situations related to daily life or work. But while general job readiness skills are routinely addressed as part of the overall course offerings, since the turn of the 21st century, there have been strong efforts on the part of the agencies to build on the employment related aspect of instruction as a primary focus.

One such approach that attempts to incorporate career readiness and workforce skills within the mainstream English language instruction is called Integrated Education and Training (IET). IET strives to complement the English curriculum with the so-called ‘employability’ skills to help learners adapt to the new language and culture of work in the United States. It is the vocational nature of IET’s framework targeting adult immigrant learners and, consequently, the impact on their career trajectories, which constitute the subject matter of this dissertation and inform its core questions.

This introductory chapter provides some background knowledge, states the research questions and discusses the significance of the study. I first establish a context for IET and expand on the so-called ‘middle-skill’ career fields that are promoted and discussed in the course of IET instruction. After providing a brief background on adult schools and their vision for an integrated framework for ESL instruction, I focus on the complex motivational picture of students who may not aspire to accept jobs within the occupational categories that the model promotes. Without suggesting that boosting individuals’ job proficiency has no value, the study considers the likelihood of constraining students’ aspirations in favor of fulfilling labor market needs. Following a discussion on the significance of the study that highlights the interplay of agency and structure, I present the research questions centering on students’ aspirations and possible shifts in their orientation as a result of participating in a pilot course featuring IET.

By situating IET within the historical backdrop of the school-to-work reform efforts, I set the stage for exploring the structural factors, specifically in relation to the more recent neoliberal line of educational policies that impact adult and postsecondary education. An example and evidence of such policies will be discussed with respect to the City University of New York (CUNY), behind-the-scene forces that initiate the reform and the CUNY’s attempt to implement a new initiative. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the idea of curricular change

for immigrant English learners in anticipation of their future positions within the high-demand, fast growing service fields, and ponders the nature of emerging of partnerships between the adult education agencies and community colleges. But first, is a brief background on IET and adult centers where experimenting with IET is currently underway.

Background on Adult Education and IET

Adult schools in California and across the U.S. are locally situated, in many cases with state funded agencies operating under the auspices of local high school districts¹. These agencies offer community-based classes to some of the most disadvantaged adults ranging from the unemployed, people with disabilities, the elderly, ex-prisoners reentering the society, to immigrants learning English. Whether for the purposes of high school diploma completion, GED certification, vocational training, or language instruction, a marginalized segment of society utilizes these centers as primary sources of education providing a link to community colleges or in some cases to workplaces.

Since 2002 when the Office of Adult Education adopted the U.S. Department of Education's College and Career Transitions Initiative (CCTI), the schools were given the charge to work towards a 'Career Pathways' framework. The guidelines are designed to help learners gain employment within the 'middle-skill' category of jobs, projected to be in high demand with sustainable income and benefits but requiring only post-secondary credentials rather than four year college degrees (Strawn, 2011; Holzer & Lerman, 2009). Examples include associate degrees, vocational awards, apprenticeships, industry-based or institutionally granted certificates and technical diplomas (Hughes & Mechur-Karp, 2006). It is also recommended that programs provide counseling services and possibly childcare and transportation to help learners overcome personal barriers (Bedolla, 2010; Hughes & Karp, 2004; Liebowitz & Combes, 2004)², although, given the budgetary constraints, it remains far from clear how these services will be funded. Within the adult school system in California, which includes Adult Basic and Secondary Education, *English as a Second Language* (ESL) comprises the single largest division, providing instruction for more than two-thirds of all enrolled students. According to 2012-2013 figures, the state served one-fifth of the nation's adult enrollees in its divisions with close to 300,000 students in ESL programs alone.³ Nationwide, this rate is close to a million English learners, nearly half of all the students in state-funded adult education classes (Sherman & Lyall-Knusel, 2014). It is important to note that the overrepresentation of ESL learners within the system is linked to the history of the institution itself. As far removed as it might seem, the assimilation project of teaching English and civic education to newly arrived immigrants has its permanent roots in the century-old history of the Americanization movement since the early 1900s (Carlson, 1970, 1987; Kliebard, 2004). Although the movement, or the crusade as some have called it (Higham, 1955), had faded away by the early 1920s, its most lasting effect can be felt through the establishment of adult education programs (Hartmann, 1945; Higham, 1955). By offering language classes in the evenings it gave birth to the concept of 'night schools'.

I will have more to say on this topic in chapter 2, but with respect to past traditions, it is relevant to note that the curriculum for English learners has continued to reflect the dominant

¹ In some cases, agencies operate under local community college districts. However, as of 2013, planning is underway to create partnerships between all regional adult education entities and neighboring community colleges.

² Cited in Research Digest No. 10/Postsecondary Transitions-Published by California Department of Education

³ Still this number marks a significant decline from past 3 years due to budget cutbacks. See Under California Consortium: www.casas.org

discourse of assimilation to the American way of life and its culture. Adult education centers on “figuring out the most effective way to prepare members of a society to accommodate change and to best realize the society’s stated values and goals” (Merriam & Brockett, 2007, p. 24). This can mean ‘fitting in’ but it can also mean learning to challenge a social structure that does not reflect desired goals. It is not a pre-determined process but subject to the historical conditions that make it possible. That said, throughout its trajectory and regardless of shifts in approach to language acquisition, be it ‘grammar-based’ or ‘communicative’, the end goal of language instruction has clearly contained elements of indoctrination, especially geared to low-skill newly arrived immigrants (Carlson, 1970; Hartmann, 1945; Higham, 1955). Conformity to the dominant social norms, including immersion in the consumerist culture (Sokolik, 2007; Chun, 2013) and aspiring to achieve the ‘American dream,’ is a running theme in ESL materials.⁴

Also, judging by the content of textbooks, some have held the view that teaching skills for minimum functioning and ‘surviving’ in the new environment constitutes the core objective of the ESL curriculum (Auerbach & Burgess, 1985; Auerbach 1986; Pennycook, 2004). In their 1985 article *The Hidden Curriculum of Survival ESL*, Auerbach and Burgess elaborated on the underpinning assumptions and implications of the ‘survival’ or ‘life-skills’ trend, premised on the idea that learning for the adults should be ‘experience-centered’ and ‘reality based’. In other words, curricula should bring the students closer to the language of the ‘real’ world, vague as that may sound. After examining excerpts from the texts, they concluded that the choice of the increasingly popular survival textbooks designed for students with zero to intermediate language proficiency reflects a biased view of the social order as the materials “prepare students for subservient social roles and reinforce hierarchal relations within the classroom” (p. 475). It is noteworthy that such texts geared toward teaching a strictly functional use of language are still in circulation and used by practitioners today.

With this in mind, in light of the more recent developments concerning career preparation, the functional approach to instruction and a more general redefining of adult education along the lines of what English and Mayo (2012) call ‘the education of workers’, have intensified. The authors make this point with respect to the strong ‘vocationalisation’ in adult education policy reflecting a neoliberal approach that contributes to the efficiency of the market and the development of human resources (Merriam & Brockett, 2007). English and Mayo (2012) highlight the manner in which this neoliberal shift suits the interest of the employers “by rendering employees partly responsible for their professional upgrading and by relieving employers of part of the responsibility for the provision of training (p. 13). Indeed, such dynamics seem to be at work through the agenda of a new policy initiative called *Career Pathways*. *Pathways* calls for the infusion of career-readiness skills associated with specific service sector jobs within the mainstream ‘life-skill’- oriented ESL content. While functional literacy routinely touches on topics linked to common occupations and corresponding skills and the basics of job search and interview procedures, it is fair to say that the new approach advances a distinctly vocational agenda to bring job preparation into a sharper focus. Giroux and Searles Giroux (2004) are relevant with respect to the state of adult ESL curriculum when they assert that “faith in social amelioration and a sustainable future appears to be in short supply as neoliberal capitalism performs the dual task of using education to train workers for service sector jobs and produce lifelong consumers” (p. 22). Neoliberal advances, in this instance, denote the

⁴ Sokolik (2007), for instance, argues that the focus on money and shopping in grammatical examples ties into a socio-economic concept of creating a culture of desire: the desire to shop, go to malls, and to buy things.

intensification of previous patterns of vocationalism linking curricula to larger social and economic structures.

It is important to note that the move toward integration follows a wave of standards-driven curricular and instructional reform similar to what has swept over the k-12 education scene in recent decades. Some educational scholars have argued that policies that impact schools follow the logic of neoliberal economic measures in that they are best understood when framed by the priorities of privatization, market-influenced practices and greater accountability for individuals who participate in them (Apple, 2000; Lipman, 2002; Saltman, 2007; Apple & Pedroni, 2005; Pedroni, 2007; Scott et al., 2013). Conceivably, standardization by itself does not necessarily detract from a creative and imaginative practice that is the most valuable hallmark of all educational work. But in the context of “survival” English curriculum, given the utilitarian nature of the knowledge that is targeted and its dissemination in fragmented and decontextualized form, standards have imposed further limitations on what teachers are able to address in the course of instruction. More important, the resulting homogenization of knowledge has aided in creating a battery of assessment tools developed by private entities to measure the outcomes of practice through high-stakes testing. Along these efforts and consistent with the neoliberal agenda, the state financial structure for adult education, previously composed of basic aid to all districts based on student average daily attendance (ADA), is now reorganized in favor of making financial apportionment on the basis of students’ scores on standardized tests.

This also means that accountability measures have been in place for some time to establish compliance on the part of schools to enforce the move towards standardization. For the ESL curriculum, in particular, this change has meant a gradual reshaping of priorities and procedures around the same basic language content but within a task-based approach to foundational skills known as ‘competencies’. Since the goal is demonstrated mastery of the language associated with basic skills, performance indicators are associated with competencies so that students can be pre- and post-tested for mastery. With this groundwork laid, the more recent developments would require a far more pervasive round of curricular reform.

A significant aspect of the new phase of reform for ESL instruction involves modifications to survival skills (prevocational) and basic literacy (including reading, writing and computational skills) content to address language use in workplace settings. Proposed models are labeled as Integrated Education and Training (IET). Such models include Vocational ESL (VESL) wherein an ESL teacher and a career technical instructor teach together or alternate across hours or days of instruction, or Contextualized Workforce Skills (CWS) wherein a single ESL teacher embeds the language skills specific to certain fields of work in the existing curriculum content targeting English instruction for daily life. In theory, CWS is defined as instruction that connects to students’ lives and interests but prepares them for future employment through the cultivation of competencies that are ‘transferrable’ to the workplace (Emerson, 2010).⁵ But, as will be explained later in this Introduction, transitional resources directly promote language usage in the context of specific occupational categories such as childcare, in-home healthcare, restaurant/food, and lodging services.

Statement of the Problem, Study Objectives and Significance

This study is based on research at a Northern California adult education program. The school has a long history of providing mainstream ESL instruction but is currently experimenting with the IET model. Using the framework of Contextualized ESL as a pilot project for one of its

⁵ Published in CALPROGRESS, Journal of California Adult Literacy Professional Development, Vol. IX

mainstream courses, without advertising the class as such, the program plans on holding one or more fee-based VESL classes in the near future. VESL classes will primarily pull from participants in the pilot course but will also be open to all students who meet language proficiency requirements. The purpose is to serve cohorts of students interested in certain categories of work and provide a support system around their specific needs for either transferring to neighboring 2-year colleges or finding employment in the community.

This research looks into possible constraints of the proposed curricular model with respect to students' occupational aspirations. Given the large number of immigrant learners in these kinds of programs nationwide, the question around a differentiated curriculum with the potential of restricting or stifling learner achievement is the same pressing question raised by the critics of tracking. Carefully documented scholarship has shown how tracking – the system of grouping students for instruction on the basis of perceived ability-- reflects the class and racial inequalities of American society and helps to perpetuate them (Oakes, 2006; Darling- Hammond, 2010). Similarly, IET appears to promote jobs at the lower end of career fields targeted at the adult immigrant student population from minority racial and ethnic groups who have historically been marginalized. Considering that the policy assumes a great deal about students' past educational trajectories, aspirational patterns and projected paths to social mobility, the question then becomes whether or not students' aspirations are in conflict with IET's agenda and projected goals, and if so, does the IET project function to socialize students toward the targeted fields? Inherent in this line of inquiry is an engagement with students' sense of agency as they imagine or reimagine their place in the occupational landscape of their adopted country. It is an attempt to see if exposure to particular forms of work, normalized and deemed as 'realistic' options for the student population, minimizes their aspirations and constrains their self-determination (i.e., agency) in achieving desired goals.

It is also critical to remember that arriving at any kind of answer along these lines or explanation would necessarily require an interpretivist point of view using data that extends beyond 'here and now'. This approach, for instance, takes account of students' motivations and desires both prior to the experimentation and while they participate in the learning module. It attempts to gain an in-depth understanding of learners' intentions by enrolling in ESL classes and follows the trajectory of selected groups by taking account of participants' academic progress through the pre- and post standardized test results. The interpretivist approach also incorporates students' understanding of the proposed opportunity structure in light of their perceptions of the limitations they face in the given historical moment, what Freire (1970) calls 'perceptions of limit situations'. Freire characterizes limit situations as barriers imposed on the oppressed, which are then normalized. These perceived barriers prevent social actors from critically understanding the extent of their individual and collective agency.

The study documents the participants' meaning-making process and examines not only *what* constraining effects the instruction may have on students, but *how* it constrains. It examines what the practices of neoliberal governance, characterized by a primary concern for economic efficiency look like on the local and everyday practice level and how the participants react to them. This is a significant and timely undertaking as adult education programs (as well as community colleges) are increasingly changing the nature of ESL instruction for strategic purposes, particularly within a neoliberal restructuring of the opportunity structure.

Seen in this light, the important interplay between structure and agency is at the heart of this inquiry. The interplay constitutes a central concern of scholars in sociology including Giddens (1979) who elaborates on the 'mutual dependence' of the two forces as expressed by

“the *fundamentally* recursive character of social life” (p. 69; italics in original). By this he means that “the structural properties of social systems are both the medium and the outcome of practices that constitute those systems” (p. 69). Bourdieu (1979) agrees when he announces it necessary “to abandon all the theories which explicitly or implicitly treat practice as a mechanical reaction” (p. 75). Just as Giddens rejects the identification of structure with unlimited constraint (since it is both enabling and constraining), Bourdieu believes that rejecting mechanistic theories in no way implies that “we should reduce the objective intentions and constituted significations of actions and works to the conscious and deliberate intentions of their authors” (p. 75). As such, it is productive to study the conditions that govern the interconnections between the system and the agent. To start, one needs to know how participants understand their own situation before beginning to think about describing their behavior in more general terms.

Guiding Questions

Given the overview of the study aims above, my efforts are guided by the following questions:

1. What is the participants’ initial understanding of aims and purposes of language instruction offered through adult ESL programs?
2. What are the students’ aspirations and goals for future career paths?
3. Does participation in IET constrain these aspirations, and if so, how?

The next section will serve as an introduction to the political economy of IET and engages with some of the details and questions they reference relating to the most recent developments for adult and post-secondary education. I start with a brief genealogy of Career Pathways as a template for reform across various levels of public education and follow up in Chapter 2 with a more in-depth analysis of developments that emerged out of the globalization movement at the turn of the 21st century, further impacting the educational reform efforts.

The Roots of the Career Pathways Trend

Literature on Career Pathways demonstrates that the framework initially grew out of attempts in the last quarter of the 20th century to forge stronger links between secondary and post-secondary education as well as between education and work (Lewis, 2008). In fact, Career Education in the 1970s (Herr, 1976) and School-to-Work in the 1990s (Hughes, Bailey & Mechur, 2001) were two major federal initiatives. Both attempted to ‘improve’ education by emphasizing the relevance and utility of the knowledge and skills studied in school to students’ future careers. Neither had the impact on academic education that their proponents had hoped (Kazis & Pennington, 1999; Marland, 1971), but they helped to create the context from which Career Clusters/Career Pathways emerged (Lewis, 2008).⁶ Career Clusters are the accepted method of classification that has evolved into the primary way of organizing secondary vocational instruction (Ruffing, 2006). In 1999, the Office of Vocational and Adult Education adopted 16 clusters (e.g. healthcare, hospitality and tourism, architecture and construction)⁷ for use in funding and reporting Career and Technical programs. In essence, this adoption became the official federal policy and Career Pathways emerged as templates for the integration of

⁶ Lewis (2008) lists Tech Prep and Youth Apprenticeships as two other initiatives inspired by previous models

⁷ See www.careerclusters.org for the list of clusters and pathways associated with each

academic and technical content and the articulation of secondary and post-secondary instruction across specific career clusters (Stone, 2003).

Within the structure of this federal policy, states are urged to rethink the formation and focus of the educational pipeline, described as ‘fragmented and leaky’⁸, and reexamine the relationship between academic and applied courses as well as educational credentials and the labor market in order to create new pipelines that lead from high school to two- and four-year degrees or technical careers. In effect, by reconceptualizing education as a pathway spanning various levels of education articulated with the workplace, the initiative’s lofty agenda ultimately looks to the establishment of a P-16 (preschool through post-secondary) system that will presumably provide a smooth employment transition for all learners (National Governor’s Association Report, 2006). In this sense the Pathways approach presents a clear paradigm shift in the focus of schooling and school curricula towards an explicitly vocational orientation at all levels (Lazerson & Grubb, 2004). Special urgency is given to adult training and higher education since the immediate stake is today’s labor pool as opposed to the abstract projection of the future workforce.

The spotlight on community colleges and higher education is noteworthy since the acquisition of certification, degree completion and transfers to four year institutions are highly problematic. It is reported that across the U.S. more than half of the students who enroll in junior colleges, eventually leave without a credential (Bailey, Jenkins & Linebach, 2005). Transferring to four-year colleges is especially challenging (Alssid et al., 2002; Hughes & Mechur-Karp, 2006) due to the fact that students who earn credits at a community college cannot always apply all of them toward a bachelor’s degree. Hughes and Mechur-Karp (2006) maintain that this is especially true when aligning applied associate degrees with bachelor’s degrees since technical students have an even more difficult time when trying to apply previous college coursework toward a bachelor’s degree. “Many technical associate degrees”, they continue, “focus on discipline-specific coursework, while traditional liberal arts education usually includes general education in the first two years” (2006, p.3).

Controversy around this particular issue was at display in fall of 2013 when the City University of New York (CUNY) was scheduled to undertake the full implementation of its Pathway initiative. As an article published in *The Nation* reported, resistance to the project originated within the university’s organized unionized faculty who insist that:

Pathways will water down the mandatory core curriculum, reduces the number of classroom hours students receive in critical foundation courses, concentrates control of teaching and learning decisions in chancellor’s office, and undertake further cost-saving measures that have already crippled the system. These goals undermine student progress, and violate the principle of shared governance, but fit securely within the chancellor’s austerity approach to public education. (Busch, 2013, para. 2)⁹

Hence, CUNY opposition voiced its concern against a policy it perceived as firmly in line with a neoliberal education agenda promoting a market model for higher education. The faculty argued against the basic requirements for graduation, claiming that it ensures a second-class education

⁸ See March 2013 edition of CLASP newsletter (Policy Solutions that Work for Low-Income People, available at : <http://www.clasp.org/postsecondary/pages?id=0003>

⁹ Retrieved from: <http://www.thenation.com/blog/172243/what-cuny-pathways-means-undergraduates#>

for learners where intellectual nourishment and skills development are sacrificed in the name of efficiency. Even more to the point, faculty noted the alarming insight into how the chancellor's office views the student body: "lowering the barriers to graduation for students struggling to complete their college graduation suggests that the chancellor either believes the students to be incapable of meeting rigorous standards, or is simply unwilling to invest in the support structures which could help them do so" (Busch, 2013, para. 6).

The fact that the Pathways project is administered through the League for Innovation in the Community College is significant since the League, an organization self-described as 'dedicated to catalyzing the community college movement', is partnered with and funded through a number of corporations and foundations including W.K. Kellogg, the Exxon Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation of New York. It is also the case that the League's Executive Leadership Institute (ELI) prepares senior-level administrators for the community college presidency and features an array of community college CEOs and senior educators as faculty. It boasts the statistics that "since 1988, well over 700 participants have graduated from ELI, of which 43 percent have since become presidents of community colleges" (About the League, n.d., para. 22)¹⁰.

Whether or not the current CUNY chancellor is an ELI former participant, the focus of the Pathways model under implementation is aligned with ELI's mission to articulate the community college movement with the emphasis on efficiency. In other words, the 'watering down' of the core curriculum is tantamount to 'speeding up' the process of sub-baccalaureate degree completion for struggling students, many of whom are from low socio-economic and immigrant backgrounds, and have traditionally been poorly served by educational institutions and society (see Ogbu et al., 1998; Valenzuela, 1999; Trueba & Bartolome, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Research shows that in California, language minority students face significant barriers in both sub-baccalaureate degree completion and transfer to four-year institutions (Chapa & Schnick, 2006; Sengupta & Jepsen, 2006; Shulock & Moore, 2007). The transfer path is particularly long and bumpy for these learners. For instance, Solorzano et al. (2005) report that 71% of Latino students enter U.S. community colleges with a desire to transfer to 4-year institutions but only 7% to 20% are successful in doing so. Compared to this rate, more than one-third of white (37 %) and Asian Pacific Islander (35%) students and 26% of black students acquired a certificate or degree, or transferred (Shulock & Moore, 2007). Latinos are also shown to be overrepresented among those required to take non-credit basic skills (also called developmental) and ESL remedial courses (Sengupta & Jepsen, 2006; Bunch & Panayotova, 2008), prolonging or stalling their trajectory towards completion or transfer.

It remains to be seen whether or not the initiative will help encourage 'low-performing' students to complete their degrees and take jobs within the sub-baccalaureate labor market. Or will it instead exacerbate the existing dilemmas facing these learners by denying support structures necessary for transfer and thus push them out of the system? In either case, given the uncertainty of economic effects of many types of sub-baccalaureate education (Stern and Grubb, 1988; Grubb & McDonnell, 1991; Bragg et al., 2007; Grubb, 2002; 2010), emerging and future patterns of employment are likely to contribute to social divisions that have assumed a distinctly racial or ethnic character (Glenn, 1992; Anderson, 2000; Parrenas, 2001). In other words, the trend will reinforce and reproduce the current composition of the U.S. labor force and its distribution of occupations along racial lines.¹¹ I will have more to say on the topic later.

¹⁰ See www.league.org

¹¹ The segregation can be along 'gender' as well as 'race' lines.

Absent the deliberate resistance of teachers and students, the dynamics of Pathways developments at adult schools in California is very similar to those taking place at post-secondary institutions such as CUNY. At the structural level, one key aspect of this similarity involves the gradual move away from the general ESL core content areas and towards vocational subjects targeting certain categories of occupations. As I argue in chapter 2, and especially applied to low-skill adult immigrant learners, *Pathways* can be conceived as a forward-looking strategy to supply the in-person service labor pool projected to be in high demand in the near future. In the face of industrial restructuring, automation, offshoring, and hence a decreased need for workers in manufacturing jobs in the U.S. (Cowie, 1999; Reich, 2012), it is no surprise that in-person service labor (which cannot be outsourced, offshored, or automated) represents a sizable share of future job openings at the lower end of career clusters. This is especially true in light of the fact that services designed to be performed from person to person may only require minimal skill sharpening and vocational training potentially to lock individuals into a life-long line of work with limited prospects for social mobility. From this perspective, the emphasis on ‘career development’ as opposed to ‘job preparation’ is particularly salient due to the projected impact on the country’s most sensitive needs and its current and future economic vitality.

It is noteworthy that a new genre in ESL materials in the form of textbooks designed for transitioning adult English language learners to the workplace are currently used in the classrooms. These texts openly promote a broad set of skills within the two large career trajectories of hospitality and healthcare with occupations ranging from restaurant, food and lodging servers to in-home caregivers, certified nursing assistants and nursing aides. Most noticeably, the ‘value adding’ component of lessons is carefully designed to meet the criteria set by policy-makers for the 21st century workforce including the promotion of critical thinking, goal-setting, problem solving, and the spirit of teamwork, often grouped together as ‘soft skills’. Within the paradigm of 21st Century Workforce preparation, these skills are claimed to bolster analytical abilities and adaptability to change (e.g. Boyett & Conn, 1992; Peters, 1994; Champy, 1995; Friedman, 1999, 2005). But they are also linked to a higher sense of individual responsibility. More importantly, in conjunction with textbook publishing and, often taking place in consultation with prospective employers, competence in soft skills is, linked to the ideal of increased productivity.

Furthermore, based on employer expectation, proficiency in vocational English is significantly supplemented with proficiency in ‘emotion work’ or ‘affective labor’ (Hochschild, 2006) in the workplace as a skill necessary for career success. Although in some reasonable sense, having pleasant demeanors is a positive trait within the private as well as public sphere, according to Hochschild (2006), the emotion management by employers creates a situation in which the affective labor can be exchanged in the marketplace. Here again, we see that the shift from manufacturing to service-based economy has demanded that the student/workers learn to develop an emotional regulatory mechanism (Hochschild, 2006; Leidner, 1999; Reich, 1999) for specific job descriptions so that they are able to gain the trust of ‘customers’, ‘clients’, ‘patrons’, and ‘patients’.

In all, this shows that transitioning to work is at the heart of all restructuring efforts at the adult as well as the junior college level. In fact, while it appears that the ultimate responsibility for planning and implementing *Pathways* will reside with community colleges (Alssid et al, 2002), preparations are currently under way at adult schools in anticipation of their role in the near future as regional partners with community college districts in order to accelerate students’

progress toward their academic or career goals.¹² Although this partnership will most likely involve these schools as providers of non-credit, remedial academic and training services for the larger entities, the centrality of ‘transitions’ has made such institutions especially prominent, as some have called community colleges “the nexus of the educational system” (Hughes & Mechur-Karp, 2006: p. 3) in the 21st century.

That said, the observation and analysis of the inner workings of the system, curricular change and resource development for the purpose of transitioning ESL students to careers do not provide sufficient information to predict student outcomes. Clearly, it is neither reasonable to assume that such outcomes are seamlessly aligned with the policies’ intentions nor learners’ aspirations. In fact, depending on individual cases, there could be a variety of reactions to, interpretations of, and interaction with what the vocational aspect of instruction provides. It is precisely for this reason that, while keeping the larger picture in mind, this project seeks to understand learners’ views on the utility of IET and its material consequences. In the following chapter, I elaborate on this larger picture while taking account of the mediating role of students in the schooling contexts as part of the conceptual framework of the study and the literature that illuminates it.

¹² See AB86 Website <http://ab86.cccco.edu/> for information on regional consortia and collaboration between Community colleges and regional adult schools.

Chapter 2. Literature Overview/Conceptual Framework

A Chapter Map

The conceptual framework of this study relies largely on a critical reading of historical knowledge and the literature that examines this history. Together, they offer insights into the consequences of past mechanisms of schooling as part and product of power relations. They help unpack the structure and sources of the current educational inequities. Pursuant to the policy perspective in the Introduction and the account of *Pathways*' infrastructure and its roots, this chapter provides a bird's-eye view of the broader context out of which IET arises. It starts with an outline of the political economy of education influenced by neoliberalism, the economic developments on the global scene, and ways that immigrant workers are situated within the new skills landscape. It then zooms outwards to reflect on the origins of vocational education in the U.S. and the notion of a differentiated curriculum in the recent past. This is where the discourses of race/ethnicity and economic class and their intersection loomed large in establishing the legacy of an educational system that still lives with us. This conceptualization is essential for the analysis of sociological foundations that give shape to the current political landscape of public education and curricular change in the United States, within California, and at the adult education sites.

That said, while this narrative illuminates a great deal about the structure, it fails to acknowledge the dynamic, agentive and contingent nature of the classroom discourse (Baynham, 2006) and the viability of learners' active role in decision-making (Giroux, 1983; Apple, 2012). As such, the literature review also focuses on scholarship that sheds light on the structure-agency duality through the production of new subjectivities that may ultimately serve the students' self-interests. Data chapters are major sources for theory building on this front.

The Racio-Political Economy of Education in the U.S.

Education in the Age of Globalization

"If you used to urge your kids to eat his food because some kid in Africa is starving, now you need to urge him to do his homework because some kid in China wants his job."

--Thomas Friedman, The World is Flat (2007)

Over the past three decades, developments in U.S. educational policy, practice and research have featured a pronounced emphasis on a close alignment between school curricula with workforce training, a task believed to be of grave urgency at a time of rapidly globalizing economic competition. This view is primarily asserted on the grounds of the frenetic pace of change in the 21st century and the extent to which emerging jobs require new or adapted abilities of all individuals (Friedman, 2007; Goldin & Katz, 2008; Cowen, 2013). The dominant view today is of a world with a global knowledge-based economy where countries such as India, Korea and China are now able to join the supply chain for services and manufacturing and hence compete for the jobs of the 21st century. Many assume that workers need to develop stronger critical thinking, problem solving and collaboration skills to keep up with the pace of change (Champy, 2005; Friedman, 2007). Making the workforce more adaptable, they argue, will keep it more employable.

Indeed, it is indisputable and uncontroversial to argue that the world has changed qualitatively in the last four decades, and with it so has and the nature of learning and knowledge (Carnoy, 1993; Aronowitz & DiFazio, 1994; Drucker, 1993; Reich, 1992; Smith, 1995; Stiglitz, 2003). As early as in 1997, Gee et al. make a strong case for a ‘new work order’ emerging out of a global and a ‘faster’ version of capitalism wherein demand for applied knowledge of latest technologies and flexible learning to design, efficiently produce, market and transform products and services is much greater than before. Similar to the narrative presented by Friedman and others, Gee et al.’s account also highlights the fact that the big mass market –formerly controlled by the U.S. – has been fragmented into smaller pieces with intense competition over each piece. But whereas the writings on fast capitalism are fixated on the oft-celebrated notion of adaptive complexity (Senge, 1991; Peters, 1992) and ‘flat hierarchies’ based on a distributed system of management (Kelly, 1994), Gee et al. (1997) point to the construction of new hierarchies and the harsh realities that workers face in the new work order. In the U.S. context, these realities include the creation of a small number of big winners with a large number of losers (Frank & Cook, 1995; Hacker & Pierson, 2010), more stressful jobs for those who have ‘good’ jobs (Fantasia & Voss, 2004), a proliferation of low-paying and contract work (Parker, 1994)¹³, and of course numerous cases of people with no job at all (Wilson, 1996). Therefore, the big picture conveys a familiar pattern of a widening gap between the rich and poor, further focusing the emerging themes and practices on productive work and the economic ‘bottom line’ (Mishel et al., 2008).

The New Work Order and Inequalities

Perhaps it would be instructive to see the new work order and its accompanying patterns of inequality in light of Robert Reich's (1992) insights on new gradations of work emerging across nations in modern times. In *The Work of Nations* (1992), Reich points to three broad categories of occupations that account for almost all the paid work performed in new world economies. These are: 'routine production services', 'in-person services', and 'symbolic-analytic services'. The latter involves services that are delivered in the form of data, words, oral and visual representations and comprises “diverse problem-identifying, problem-solving, and strategic brokering activities” (p. 177). Considered ‘value-adding’ in today's knowledge economy, this type of work requires four-year college or university education or in some cases advanced graduate degrees. It includes a wide range of occupations from research scientists and engineers to investment bankers, lawyers, publishers, writers and editors, advertising executives, tax consultants and so forth. According to Reich (1992) the proportion of American workers who fit this category (majority white males) has increased substantially from only 8 percent in the 1950s to about 20 percent in the 1990s.

At the same time, the numbers have increased even more drastically for the ‘in-person services’, the second category of American jobs that like the first, ‘routine production services’, requires at most a high school diploma or its equivalent and some vocational training. In 1990, in-person service work accounted for over 30 percent of all jobs performed by Americans. Jobs in this category share some of the most routinized aspects of production work. They require punctuality, loyalty and the capacity to take directions as well as mastery of basic literacy skills. But as Reich explains, despite the similarities, they differ from jobs in the first category in one important respect: in-person service jobs have to be performed from person to person and thus cannot be sold worldwide. Put differently, they cannot be outsourced or offshored. Examples of

¹³ Manpower Inc. is reported to be the largest employer in the U.S.

occupations in this group are retail sales employees, hotel workers, cashiers, hairdressers, hospital workers, in-home care nursing aides, janitors, and house cleaners.¹⁴

Traditionally, due to gender stereotypes (e.g., women are perceived more fit for nurturing roles) the majority of in-person servers have been women. But it is also the case that increasingly many of these workers are foreign-born, or immigrants to the United States. Data that compares workforce characteristics of native-born and foreign-born employed women in 2012 show great disparity, especially in service occupations where 33.2 percent are foreign-born as opposed to 19.4 percent who are native-born. Moreover, within the category, employed native-born were more likely than foreign-born counterparts to be in sales and office occupations than in direct manual service jobs (Economic News Release, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012).

This development can be seen as a continuation and perhaps intensification of trends already present in 1980s and 1990s. While many scholars illuminated the employment trends and trajectory of job expansions at the close of the 20th century (e.g. Gottschalk, 1997; Morris & Western, 1999; Mishel et al., 2001), some (Rumbaut, 1996; Waters, 1996; Olin-Wright & Dwyer, 2003) focused on the new ‘hourglass segmentation’ in U.S. economy and emerging patterns of immigrant insertion into American life. Olin-Wright and Dwyer (2003) analyzed occupational categories in the post-industrial economy not only in terms of their overall distribution of the quality of jobs, but with regard to the highly polarized character of employment growth along racial lines. Their study showed the concentration of a racially differentiated pattern of job expansion in the bottom and middle of the employment structure, whereas, the percent of the job expansion filled by whites declined from over 90% in the 1960s, to around 11% in the 1990s.

The study pointed to an hourglass shaped economy where the middle class is further shrinking and the division between the top and bottom quintiles of the employment structure is becoming more pronounced. Comparing the patterns of expansion in the 1960s and 1990s, a key finding concluded that the significant part of the employment growth at the bottom of the job structure in the 90s was very likely *due to* immigration, especially Latinos. In other words, the growth appears to have been helped by the brisk pace of immigration and the availability of a labor supply willing to work in low-paying jobs¹⁵.

It is helpful in this discussion to consider Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco’s (2009a) observation that the uninterrupted immigration flow has created a significant demographic echo as the foreign-born population in the U.S. is surpassing the 40 million mark (as of 2009), more than the entire Canadian population (see also Tomas Jimenez, 2010, on the central issue of Mexican immigration). More to the point, these authors note that historians may one day sum up the primary achievement of the U.S. immigration policy enforced since the 1970s “as having guaranteed a steady replenishment of the immigrant-origin labor pool favored by employers and businesses in multiple sectors of the economy including agriculture, construction, health, manufacturing, services and technology (p. 328)”¹⁶.

¹⁴ Given the characteristics of the work involved, including the routinized nature of standardized curriculum, perhaps teachers are increasingly fitting into this category.

¹⁵ This finding is consistent with the *split labor market* approach, theorized by Edna Bonacich (1972) which explains the phenomenon of labor market segmentation by race/ethnicity and in terms of social structure and political power.

¹⁶ Alongside these economic developments, as Tomas Jimenez (2010) argues, the realities of a replenished labor pool has resulted in the creation of what he terms a ‘replenished ethnicity’ for some immigrant groups. His research into the lives of descendants of Mexican immigrants helps one understand how the uninterrupted immigration from

Related to the racial dynamics at play here, it is also important to note that within Reich's dichotomy of the first two categories of jobs on the one hand and the symbolic analysts on the other, the major point of distinction is the pattern and amount of income generation. In the latter category of work, incomes are not directly related to amount of time or quantity of work that is performed. Contrary to in-person service and routine production workers, symbolic analysts' career paths are neither linear nor hierarchical. In some cases, they can amass vast amounts of wealth in a rather short time due to the 'value adding' quality of their performance defined as conceptualizing the problem, devising a solution and planning execution. And it is mainly this factor that has contributed to the widening income gap between the haves and have-nots along racial lines.

Neoliberal Economic Policies and Immigration

While the pace of immigration that accounts for the growth of low-paying jobs, along with the 'value adding' qualities of high-paying jobs may have constituted the defining forces of the American 'top-heavy' inequality, it is imperative to factor in the context within which these forces have operated. In *Winner-Take-All Politics: How Washington Made the Rich Richer--And Turned Its Back on the Middle class*, Hacker and Pierson (2010) declare that "where the conventional wisdom confidently declares, 'it's the Economy', we find that it's actually the politics" (p. 52). The authors make the important point that those who have the most power in the markets may have the most power in the politics. For instance, the financial crisis of 2008 that triggered what many consider the worst crisis since the depression of 1930s (e.g. Krugman, 2009; Hetzel, 2012), was in fact rooted in the unleashing of a set of decisions known as 'neoliberal' reform policies from the 1970s onward. It was a period throughout which the U.S government emphasized the deregulation of the economy, trade liberalization, the dismantling of the public sector, and the predominance of the financial sector over production and commerce (Tabb, 2002; Harvey, 2005; Peet, 2009, 2011). It was a move that resulted in less oversight of activities and less disclosure of practices undertaken by banks and other evolving financial institutions with a direct effect on the U.S., and arguably on the global macroeconomy (Peet, 2009; 2011).¹⁷ Under such circumstances, the uphill flow of capital through predatory lending practices ultimately led to the bursting of the housing bubble in the U.S. in 2008, pushing many middle and working class Americans downhill to join the ranks of the poor (Krugman, 2009; Stiglitz, 2012).

The dynamics of developments resulting from the emergence of neoliberal economic policies, their implementation and the eventual financial impact, evolved out of a complex chain of events. Without suggesting that the above summary addresses at all adequately this complexity and nuances of events leading up to the 2008 crisis, two broad conclusions can be drawn from the outline of such developments. First, while all working Americans have been productive, income growth has accrued to the top of the income scale and inequalities have

Mexico for one hundred years has influenced the ethnic identity of later- generations of Mexican Americans and impacted their assimilation in profound ways.

¹⁷ Peet (2011) has argued that we now live in an era of global 'finance capitalism', replacing industrial capitalism, and governed by a 'policy regime'. Whereas industrial capitalism primarily exploits productive workers through the wage system, finance capitalism adds the exploitation of consumptive individuals via indebtedness. The idea is to have everything bought not with dollar bills or pound notes, but with maxed-out credit cards, so that purchases yield several years of interest at far-higher rates than banks pay on deposits (20 percent as compared with 2 percent). For detailed analysis see <http://monthlyreview.org/2011/12/01/contradictions-of-finance-capitalism>

persisted, in many cases by race and gender (Mishel et al., 2008; 2012). It is reported that from 1947 to 1979, the top sliver of wage earners made about 20 times that of the bottom 90%, but by 2006, that ratio had catapulted to 77 times more (Mishel et al., 2008). More specifically, the top 1 percent received 36 percent of all the income growth generated in the American economy, while the highest income 1/10th of 1 percent received nearly 20 percent (Hacker & Pierson, 2010). Clearly, while the symbolic analyst category spans the upper ranges of the diminishing middle class to the highest-paid category of occupations, the rate of return even within the highly-paid ‘value adding’ services provided by this group varies greatly, with the CEOs and CFOs at the top of the financial corporate ladder, earning the most.

Second, even with a rudimentary study of recent economic developments, we understand that the type of inequality that blocks living-standards growth for low- and middle-income Americans is a result of policies (Harvey, 2005; Evans & Sewell, 2013) or as some have suggested is part of a “policy regime” (Peet, 2011). Peet defines ‘policy regime’ as a set of laws that is devised and enforced through a “systematic approach to policy formation by a set of government or governance institutions which deal with a definable, limited range of issues over a historical period of time” (2011, p. 6). This means that in much the same way that government can help in controlling the distribution of wealth (as it did in the New Deal era of 1930s), it can intervene to redistribute or concentrate it through new policy formations.

In this discussion it is important to recognize that examples of such policy formations, both in the past and present, include the making of immigration laws as a dominant framework utilized by the state in response to both immediate and projected labor demands. Whether on a legal or an illegal basis¹⁸, in the U.S. the flow of low-skilled workers dislocated by the forces of globalization (Forrester, 1999; McLaren, 2000) has greatly benefited the political and economic elite, reflecting and at the same time constituting the realities of the economic landscape at the turn of the 21st century. Once again, as Olin Wright and Dwyer (2003) describe,

[A]n increasing proportion of the people at the bottom are engaged in providing personal services to the people at the top. While it would be a gross exaggeration to describe this as a transformation of the working class into a servant class, nevertheless aspects of the servant relation may become an increasing part of the cultural context of inequality. (p. 34)

In the second decade of the 21st century, material inequality is more noticeably marked by a division along racial lines where more and more of the in-person and routine production service workers of immigrant backgrounds are laboring in the lowest echelons of a deeply stratified U.S. economy (Mishel et al., 2012). It is true that the current economic and social policies have, in Michael Katz’ (1996) words, “stratified Americans into first- and second- class citizens”, splitting the social and labor structures of large cities into “two vastly unequal but intimately linked economies” (cited in Apple, 2012, pp. x-xi). Katz further explains that, “like corporations, affluent urbanites have outsourced their domestic tasks for much the same reasons of economy and flexibility and with much the same results” (cited in Apple, 2012, p. x). Clearly, the political economy of race constitutes another crucial link (a third) to the said economies as immigrant workers, perceived as inherently low-skill, continue to supply the labor force for this new

¹⁸ Interestingly, a report released by Migration Policy Institute (2013) claims that compared to legal immigration, illegal immigration is more responsive to the U.S. economic cycle (i.e., labor shortages)

‘service class’¹⁹, a trend anticipated to intensify as time passes. In an edited publication on perspectives on globalization and education, Suarez-Orozco and Sattin (2007) provide the following insights and predictions on likely future trends, worthy of quoting at length:

In the U.S. where immigration always generated deep ambivalence at present even as it is celebrated looking backwards, further immigration is likely to be needed in decades ahead because of a demographic predicament unfolding before our eyes, as the nearly 80 million baby boomers continue to retire in growing numbers in the next generation and this retirement will put unprecedented strain. As George Bush said, “by 2030, spending for Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid alone will be almost 60 percent of the entire federal budget, and that will present future congresses with impossible choices –staggering tax increases, immense deficits, or deep cuts in every category of spending.” By then the United States very likely will once more turn to immigration to deal with impossible choices, Immigrant workers will once again be summoned, this time to take care of retired citizens, to pay into social security system and to help the country to maintain its economic vitality. (p. 10)

In other words, despite the global scope of economies and the rise of deterritorialized production (i.e., certain jobs can be done nearly anywhere on earth), specific forms of in-person service jobs requiring the immigrant labor force will continue to be on demand locally in the U.S. It is this projected demand that explains the urgency behind training the so-called “basic skills deficient” population as explained in the Workforce Investment act of 1998²⁰ with the aim to consolidate, coordinate, and improve employment, training, literacy, and vocational rehabilitation for those with skills below the 8th grade level. Given the continued synergism between schooling and local socio-economic realities, not only immigration policies but also educational reform laws geared to low-skill immigrant population are created with consideration to labor need realities.

Framed in the language of opportunity and prosperity for immigrant learners, *Pathways* is a prime contemporary expression of the dual historical patterns of racialized class tracking. While it is a modern phenomenon in terms of its mission of replenishing a new labor force and indeed in terms of its neoliberal tendencies, when examined for its core elements, its emergence is not an entirely new development. In fact, *Pathways*’ inception as a school-to-work pipeline can only be explained through the examination of conditions that popularized vocational education in the early 20th century. In what follows I expand on the context within which vocational education became, as Kliebard (2004) describes, “the most successful curricular innovation of the 20th century” (p. 123).

¹⁹ In this context, “immigrant workers” as a group is used to refer to those workers belonging to the subordinate status racial categories. I will expand on this concept in the Chapter 2.

²⁰ For a detailed description of the Workforce Investment Act, see <http://www.doleta.gov/regs/statutes/wialaw.txt>

New Immigrants and Vocational Education in the Progressive Era

*“Maybe if we’d season th’ immygrants a little or cook thim thurly, they’d go down Betther,” I says.....
“But what wud ye do with the’ offscourin’v Europe?” says he, “I’d scour thim some more, “ says I.”
-- Mr. Dooley²¹*

--Cited in Higham, 1963

Controversies over the social purposes of teaching and schooling and priorities of the American curriculum have raged on for most of the 20th century and into the 21st (Silver, 1983; Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Zimmerman, 2009; Kliebard, 2004; Lazerson & Grubb, 2004). Kliebard’s detailed account of this struggle between 1893 and 1958 documents this conflict and reports that at the turn of the 20th century, the “centrality of discipline in continuation of the role of the family in the 19th century schools was replaced by their role as a mediating instrument through which the ways and norms of surviving in the new industrial society would be conveyed” (2004, p. 25). Looking back, one learns that as the country rapidly expanded its industrial base, the Progressive era’s enthusiasm for social engineering required an engagement with the integration of masses of new workers –many of whom immigrants-- into the wage labor system (Korman, 1965; Bowles & Gintis, 2011, Apple, 2012). Broadly conceived, this meant that the social reality of class structure in the early years of the 20th century in the U.S. required new conceptualizations for curricular content and structure (Tyack, 1974) that required a differentiated mechanism sorting students into various curricular paths and vocations.

Vocational education came about as the result of such conceptualizations and although its earliest advocates had viewed manual training as complementary to academic studies and as a mechanism for achieving the ‘learning by doing’ ideal (Lazerson & Grubb, 1974), by 1917, it established itself as the appropriate alternative curriculum for students who were not college bound (Oakes, 1985). “With money, powerful lobby groups, energetic leadership in high places, and a sympathetic public” (Kliebard, 2004, p. 123), this major victory gave legitimacy to the social efficiency camp, led by Bobbitt (1918), who strived to eliminate waste in education through a direct alignment of the school curriculum with learners’ future productive roles.²²

In the meantime, as part of the ‘second great wave’ of American immigration, a record number of newcomers from southern and eastern European countries had settled in America -- 15 million of them by 1924. Mostly concentrated in newly industrialized urban centers, many of them did not speak the language, faced poverty and overpopulation, and found themselves competing for few jobs that mostly involved intolerable conditions. Historian, Eric Goldman (2001) has commented on their plight during this time:

The newest immigrants.... were finding that America was no longer in a come-one, come-all mood. Many of the older settlers feeling crowded and cornered had little welcome for any newcomers, and every prejudice in the American collection was roused by immigrants who were predominantly impoverished and unskilled, short and dark in appearance, Catholic or Jewish in religion. (p. 29)

²¹ Higham describes Mr. Dooley as the “comic sage of the Progressive of America” (p. 117).

²² Social Efficiency as a curriculum theory flourished between 1890 and 1932 and was almost at its zenith by 1918.

Historical accounts are replete with literature highlighting this pernicious pattern of nativism and cultural prejudice that targeted the newcomers who came to symbolize the social and economic ills during this period (e.g. Higham, 1963; Johnson, 1997; Galindo & Vigil, 2006). This was mostly due to the fact that the recent influx was composed of more ‘unfamiliar’ types. As hinted above, they had darker skin and their languages, religions and traditions were quite far removed from the ‘original stock’ with Anglo-Saxon and Protestant lineage. By virtue of these differences, the attitudes toward them were different as well. In his classic work, *Strangers in the Land*, Higham (1963) follows the movement of American nativism, defined as “intense opposition to an internal minority on the ground of its foreign (i.e., un-American) connections” (p. 4). His tightly knit narrative relates the distinct ebbs and flows of the ‘public opinion’ to a range of phenomena including political pressures, social organization and economic changes of the time. The study contains vivid descriptions of developments and circumstances that aroused nativist sentiments. For instance, it exposes the fact that Slavic coal miners’ sporadic but increasing involvement in labor unrest fed into the public impression of them simply as “foreigners par excellence: uncivilized, unruly and dangerous...[who] fill up with liquor and can’t be reasoned with” (p. 89). At one point, after a deadly walkout that involved a group of Polish and Hungarian strikers, the New York Tribune reports the following:

The sheriff, a former mine foreman, explained that the crowd consisted of ‘infuriated foreigners...like wild beasts.’ Other mine foremen agreed that if the strikers had been American-born no blood would have flowed. (cited in Higham, 1963, p. 90)

Rooted in similar conditions, hatred flared against other groups in rather similar ways. Most of it consisted of general anti-foreign attitudes refracted through specific national stereotypes. Consequently, as members of specific communities, these immigrants came to be known as ‘greedy Jews’, ‘blood thirsty Italians’, ‘furious Huns’, and so forth.

Thus the turn-of-the-century Americans, alarmed at the breakdown in the once accepted economic order, were also growing fearful of a breakdown in the established ‘moral’ order and the prospect that the newcomers were unable to fully assimilate into the American culture. The social construction of America, its land, its mission, and its Anglo-American people considered it to be founded by the ‘Americans’, who “thereby had title to the land and the mandate to mould the nation [and any immigrants who might enter it] in their own Anglo-Saxon, Protestant self-image” (Kaufmann, 1999, p. 4). So, when it came to educating the nation, this myth of exclusive genealogical descent provided the ideological arsenal to socialize the new immigrants to the ‘norms’ of the new land, while the use of Fredrick Taylor’s (1919) scientific management techniques lent an air of objectivity to the placement procedures that separated students for differentiated instruction.

Historically speaking, the criteria upon which this channeling of learners were imagined or exercised are of utmost importance as they reveal a great deal about the visions of social order (Ross, 1901) and the positioning of learners, including the immigrant newcomers, within its ranks. One would imagine that variables of intelligence, ability, interest, academic performance, and thus future potentials were central to determining an individual’s appropriate niche in the expanding capitalist division of labor (Prosser, 1915; Snedden, 1920; Prosser & Allen, 1925). But on a deeper level of analysis, tracking needs to be examined in light of the ideology that undergirded the grouping of immigrants on the grounds of their ‘perceived’ intelligence, interest, desirability and capacity to assimilate (see the Dillingham Commission Report, 1908). It is hence

critical to challenge the historical narratives of equal opportunity inherent in the public schooling system, as they provided the foundations upon which the contemporary system was built.

A case in point is Oakes' (2005) observation in tracing the historical origins of 'tracking' in the U.S. to the beliefs in differential intelligence held by eugenicists and education reformers in the early 1900s. She points to the attitudes toward the immigrant poor, which were compatible with the claims of social Darwinism²³, as these claims provided 'scientific' proof that suspicion of foreigners was warranted (Goldman, 2001). Oakes cites Elwood Cubberly²⁴, the prominent educator who describes the problems of his era with the arrival of Italians, Poles, and others:

The southern and eastern Europeans are of a very different type from the north Europeans who preceded them. Illiterate, docile, lacking in self-reliance and initiative, and not possessing the Anglo-Teutonic conceptions of law, order and government, their coming has served to dilute tremendously our national stock and to corrupt our civic life. (p. 53)

It is no surprise then to learn that, at first, students were openly classified into various tracks by their ethnic, racial and economic backgrounds. This procedure was considered scientific and efficient. It was even considered merit-based following the measurement movement and the advent of IQ testing.

Indeed and, given this context, the notion of meritocracy as it existed then and continues today, becomes highly contested. Curricular differentiation in practice has not only persisted but gained momentum during specific periods in its relatively short history in the U.S. Although within this time and space, ethnic and racial categories and their representational arrangement have dramatically changed (E. Park, 1920; Omi and Winant, 1994; Leonardo, 2013). This means that transformations have taken place within the conjuncture of race relations both in terms of what constitutes a racial/ethnic group, and the relationship of Whites to the racially constructed 'others'. Race scholars have argued that while White ethnic immigrants, previously racialized as 'other', have been included in the White racial classification (Roediger, 1991; Ignatiev, 2008), immigrants of color have become the new target of discrimination as the result of a new, yet always changing, racial formation'. Within this framework 'racial formation' is defined as a "sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed" (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 53). In fact, it is the understanding of this process and its fluid nature that attests to the centrality of race and racism²⁵ within the social structure in general (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; 2001; Omi & Winant, 1994), and as the constitutive elements of the educational system in particular (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Leonardo, 2005).

At a very fundamental and psychosocial level, the linkage between eugenicist ideas and tracking as a lingering pattern from the past can explain factors underlying the academic performance of low-achieving students (Ogbu & Simon, 1998; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2000b). At the same time, as I argue below, the dynamics of race and class relations and their consequences for education at the turn of 21st century are, in many respects, distinct from those

²³ This means the application of the theories of Charles Darwin to human society. For instance giving credence to concepts of 'natural selection' and survival of the fittest' in the social realm, making it plausible that social and economic power should be held by those who are 'more fit'.

²⁴ Dean of School of Education, Stanford University

²⁵ Despite the changing definition of racial groups, Blacks remain in opposition to the white

resulting from patterns of nativism and industrialization in the Progressive era at the turn of the 20th century.

Vocationalism in the 21st Century

Impelled by shifts in U.S. financial organization and arguably in a transitional era to post-industrialism, curricular reform gains steam once again at the turn of the 21st century. In fact, in view of a profound change in both the ‘order’ and ‘nature’ of jobs, and given the close articulation of schools with the world of work historically, a paradigm shift in curricular reform seems inevitable (Gardner, 2000; Grubb 2002; Grubb & Lazerson, 2004). Thus, almost a century later, an explicitly vocational education is presented once again not only as a mechanism for ‘learning to earn’, but one that also offers solutions to problems of international competitiveness (Friedman, 2007), poverty (Holzer & Lerman, 2009), and the integration of immigrants into the mainstream of society (Center for Migration Studies Report, 2013). As Marvin Lazerson comments on developments of the early 20th century, once more “education as *part* of the problem has become the *entire* problem” (cited in Kantor, 1986, p. 412; italics added). This was touched off with the alarmist rhetoric of *A Nation at Risk*, the presidential report of 1983 which by many accounts (Ravitch, 2011; Kumashiro, 2010; Lazerson & Grubb, 2004) marked the beginning of an era dominated by the discourse of failing schools “threatening our very future as a Nation and a people”.²⁶

Subsequent reports reaffirmed the calling of schools in turning back the economic threats. In 1999 the U.S. Department of Commerce weighed in with *21st Century Skills for 21st Century Jobs* validating challenges of international competition and claimed that “for America to compete in this new global economy, it can either create low-wage, low-skilled jobs or take full advantage of the Nation’s labor force and create high performance workplaces... And the United States has made its choice” (1999, p. 1).²⁷ Making a distinction between ‘Education’, generally referred to as skill enhancements received through formal schooling, and ‘Training’ as a process of skill development that occurs in vocational settings, this report clearly asked for the integration of the two in all school settings.

Although the need for more powerful learning focused on the demands of life, work, and citizenship is one area on which all scholars agree (see Gardner, 2000; Wagner, 2008; Giroux, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2010), the more recent shift is again drawn on the factory model of schooling with a renewed emphasis on standards. Here Taylorism reaches its logical conclusion in *No Child Left Behind*. The negative impact of this punitive approach on children’s education is the focus of countless scholarly works detailing the way that market-influenced educational policies lead to the intensification of tracking, thus promoting greater inequality and racial segregation (Novak & Fuller, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 2004, Kumashiro, 2004; Berliner, 2007; Leonardo, 2007; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). But little attention is paid to similar developments in adult and community education sites where many features inherent in the current educational orientation of these programs, including the IET model, resonate closely with ‘neoliberal’ economic policies. This is the gap in the literature that this study fills.

Neoliberal features of adult education include market-based policies and practices through which agencies’ success in obtaining funds is increasingly based on efficiency models, where secured funding is the new ‘bottom line’. Limited public funding has in fact encouraged many administrators to act as CEOs and run entrepreneurial experiments by offering fee-based

²⁶ *Nation at Risk*, Available at: <https://www2.ed.gov/pub/NatAtRisk/risk.html>

²⁷ SCANS, available at: <http://wdr.doleta.gov/SNANS/>

instruction, which makes issues of access problematic for all learners²⁸. Adult Education sites are also ‘high-stakes’ environments where quality is constantly quantified to comply with accountability measures and reported through the means of standardized testing (Black, 2008). Moreover, the business model calls for strong partnership between employers and academic programs for training purposes (Savas, 2000; Ball, 2007; Barrera-Osorio, 2007). Added to the mix of neoliberal features is the involvement of venture philanthropists with promises of creating opportunities for education and workforce development (Scott, 2009). A recent publication, titled *Adult Education for Work Guide* (2011)²⁹ summarizes the goals and purposes of the new policies as such:

The guide is about enabling employers to access and, when necessary to help transform our current adult education system in the United States. A system that meets employers’ needs for highly skilled workers. (p. 3)

In other words, behind the idea of training a highly skilled workforce for better-paying jobs and fulfilling careers, is the higher aim of fulfilling employers’ needs and expectations. By giving the employers indirect control over the curriculum and a decisive role in the future of adult education, policymakers directly align the function of education with corporate economic imperatives.

We also learn from past history (English and Mayo, 2012; Merriam & Brockett, 2007; Knowles, 1977) that shifts in the curriculum and instruction for learners are hardly new. According to Merriam and Brockett (2007), the ‘official’ founding of the adult education field in 1926 “was accompanied by a distinct social agenda that has since been subsumed [or co-opted] by the emphases on technical, job training and human resource development orientation in the late 20th century” (p. 79). Specifically, given the historical accounts described above, it can be argued that while the human capital approach to education is clearly emphasized across all levels, the ‘distinct social agenda’ at the adult level has always embodied, first and foremost, the ideal of ‘Americanism’ and the goal of assimilation for adult immigrant language learners, who, by virtue of their ‘non-English speaking’ immigrant status and racial minority identities, continue to make up the majority in modern day adult education sites. In fact, Edward Hartmann (1948) whose work, *The Movement to Americanize the Immigrant*, became the definitive history of the Americanization movement, called adult education its the greatest legacy. Arguably, this legacy will live on as long as the notion of ‘acculturation’ to the norms of a dominant society - idealized as a ‘melting pot’ – remains at the heart of language and civic instruction, a view that by default positions learners at the periphery and can only be explained through the assumptions that generate it. As I argue below, such processes of marginalization are actualized through the social, political and ideological relations that have constructed the English learners as low-status minority members of society.

²⁸ It is still considered out of compliance with the law to charge tuition, so administrators label these charges as ‘fees’.

²⁹ This publication is a call to local employers to collaborate with adult education directors and administrators on strategy development. Its content is based on research conducted by Research Development Strategies Group (WDSG), commissioned by NECC (National Center on Education and the Economy). The guide is developed by a consultant firm with a financial aid of a grant by Walmart Foundation.

Assimilation and Nativist Instincts

One prominent aspect of the assimilation ideology represented in the mission of language and civic education efforts and propounded by early Americanizers, was its paradoxical master narrative. On one hand, it operated under a general faith in the natural, inevitable melting of many people into one (Crevecoeur, 1782), a belief that the U.S. represents a nation of immigrants and offers shelter as well as democracy and freedom. On the other hand, its national policies sought to push the immigrant towards conformity to a specific (and perhaps fictive norm) that contradicted the very ideals of democracy and freedom (Gerstle, 1997). Hartmann (1948) used the advent of World War I to mark a distinction between Americanization as a 'positive program' of education to meet the 'problem' of immigration (before the war) and a 'negative', fearful and coercive focus on Americanization initiatives (during and after the war). But most scholarly work about this period in the history of the United States have described these two opposite strands as overlapping within the Americanization phenomenon: a liberal democratic movement driven by progressives emphasizing cohesion and integration; and alongside of it, a nativist drive that insisted on an impervious demand for 'one-mindedness' and '100 percent Americanism'³⁰ (Curti, 1946; Hartmann, 1948; Higham, 1963; Barrett, 1992; Gerstle, 1997). For instance, Higham (1963) depicts the two opposing attitudes driven by love, on one hand, and fear, on the other, one by a humanitarian faith in adaptation, change and preaching the doctrine of immigrant gifts, the other by rejection and opposition to an internal minority³¹. He states that "within the crusade for Americanization the struggle between nativistic and democratic instincts persisted" (p. 235).

This also meant that against the backdrop of cultural discrimination marked by a confidence in the fluid character of ethnic groups, and also marked by the division of labor during industrialization, early 20th century Americans relied on common schools to advance national unity. Special night school classes in English and sometimes civics for foreigners were no exception, although they operated on a very modest scale. Carlson (1970, 1977) chronicles a negative and coercive attitude that took hold amongst the Americanizers, including those in charge of curriculum design for English learners. One such case was inspired by John Commons, a political economist, who in 1907 emphasized the need to educate the immigrant and who distinguished between amalgamation (creation of a common racial stock) and assimilation (a union of minds and wills enabling common life and action). "To be great, a nation need not be of one blood, it must be of one mind...Race and heredity may be beyond our organized control; but the instrument of a common language is at hand for conscious improvement through education and social environment", Commons wrote (cited in Carlson, 1970, p. 447). His thinking soon began to find expression at the policy level.

By 1912 the goal of national 'one-mindedness' replaced the original social service motivation behind YMCA's Americanization programs. As Carlson (1970) writes, "the association's 1912 handbook warned that America seems to be the melting pot for all nations of the world but unless it really succeeds in melting, fusing and creating a more or less harmonized constituency – Christian American nation –the chaotic mixture may destroy the melting pot" (p. 457). The following excerpt from the handbook is worth quoting at length:

YMCA complained that the New Immigration was replacing the "wholesome, earnest,

³⁰ Although mostly true in the case of voluntary immigrants, one has to remember that there are some groups, such as 'Blacks' who were (and still are) considered 'unassimilable'.

³¹ Clearly the 'internal minority' in this context refers to the new immigrant population, as Blacks and Native American, also internal minority groups, were already in the country prior to the arrival of this population.

faithful citizens and nation builders” from England, Ireland, Germany, and Scandinavia with “masses of suspicious, clannish people from southern and southeastern Europe” who had “foreignized” the centers of congested American cities. It warned that “unless we can assimilate, develop, train and make good citizens out of them, they are certain to make ignorant, suspicious and un-Americanized citizens out of us. Unless we Americanize them, they will foreignize us”. And the YMCA assisted in the effort to assimilate or homogenize the immigrant into American society by providing classes in English and citizenship”. (cited in Carlson, 1970, p. 457)

Most noticeable in this passage is a ‘commonsensical’ understanding of the need for foreigners to leave behind their cultural traditions in order to embrace a vague American identity. It affirms Hartmann’s (1948) claim that a lack of definition underscored a common cultural identity shared by reformers and their audience, whereby the values of Americanism were taken for granted as self-evident norms³².

A critical point here is that ‘self-evident’ in this instance was a quality that rendered the values ‘unmarked’, putting in motion a process of ‘othering’ whereby foreigners’ identities were constructed and marked by their differences. The result was a ‘devaluing’ of immigrants’ values, and the construction of their individual and collective identities, which once essentialized, became ossified in collective thought. Although the YMCA handbook excerpt expresses an extreme sentiment, similar attitudes can be observed today in the way many ESL teachers, even those with good intentions, fall prey to “a paternalistic zeal to save their students from non-English speaker status” (Macedo et al., 2006, p. 10). In 1963, Higham eloquently explained that “Nativism as a habit of mind illuminates darkly some of the large contours of the American past: it has mirrored our anxieties and marked out the bounds of our tolerance” (p. xi). In the epilogue to his book’s new edition published in 2002, while acknowledging a change in American society on issues of race, national identity and nativism, Higham pointed to the continuities and observed that “an acrid odor of the 1920s is again in the air. It rises from vast fortunes accumulating...; from a grasping individualism...; from a growing demand for immigration restriction; and a deadlock in race relations” (p. 332). This insight also finds its more recent expression in Samuel Huntington’s work (2006) claiming that “culture and cultural identities, which at the broadest level are civilization identities, are shaping the patterns of cohesion, disintegration and conflict in the post-Cold War world” (p. 20). Elsewhere, Huntington (1996) theorized that under conditions of inequality, “economic growth increases material well-being at one rate but social frustration at a faster rate” (p. 50).

U.S. race scholars in general and Critical Whiteness Studies scholars, in particular, have argued that patterns of White Anglo-Saxon nativism, at first targeting Eastern and Southern European immigrants, underwent a change and transformed into a racist ideology towards different categories of immigrants today. As mentioned earlier, this process involved the inclusion of some previously excluded White ethnics, such as the Irish and Italians, into its whiteness (Roediger, 1991, 2005; Ignatiev, 2008). Thus yesterday’s ‘Americanism’ as a self-evident norm survives in its revised form, constantly creating new racial formations (Omi & Winant, 1994) while forging White racial identity as the ‘standard’ and through the undefined, unmarked and invisible force of ‘whiteness’ (McIntosh, 1989; Frankenberg, 1993; Leonardo, 2009, 2012). Naturally, against this formidable force, the lives of nonwhite others, material or

³² One needs to remember these are ethnic immigrants. For people of color, it also remains to be said whether adopting a new culture earns them American status if their bodies of color betray them as different.

otherwise, are perceived as ‘normal’ or ‘improved’ only in approximation to the standard white norm. Leonardo (2012) observes that “in assimilation studies, the test case for minority mobility is the extent to which its members achieve a modicum of whiteness” (p. 431).

It is critical at this point to distinguish between the assimilation process for white ethnics and immigrants of color. Sociologist Robert E. Park theorized in 1920 that the cycle of race-relations has four stages of contact, conflict, accommodation and assimilation. His thinking, based on the notion that this cycle of adaptation applies to all immigrants, was dominant for the greater part of the 20th century. But as Omi and Winant (1994) argue, the so called ‘immigrant analogy’, or the assumption that there are no essential long-term differences between the ‘third world’ or racial minorities and the European ethnic groups, is simply an erroneous one. According to them:

[this assumption] neglects the institutional and ideological nature of race in America and the systemic presence of racial dynamics in social spheres such as education, art social policy, law, religion, and science. Instead [it] focuses attention on racial dynamics as the irrational products of individual pathologies. (p. 10)

In the meantime, one needs to remember that examination of the historical mutation of race alongside its persistence as a social construct has also involved a close attention to the remaking of the white working class, often through the analysis of massive technical and economic upheavals. Forces that triggered change in the dynamics of race relations included workers aligning themselves with elite groups (Ignatiev, 1995; Roediger, 1991), but it also came in the form of power from above when employers pitted workers of one race or ethnicity against each other in managing labor. Edna Bonacich (1980) effectively advances the *split labor market approach* in which racial/ethnic conflicts between the traditional dominant (white) labor and cheap subordinate (black or immigrant) labor groups erupt when the former seeks to prevent the latter from bidding down the price of their labor. However, the limitation in her framework is that she racializes the working class, but not the capitalist class, which is largely white. Also, while her class-based analysis accounts for *some* of the exclusionist movements that arise as “the product of historical accident which produced a correlation between ethnicity and the price of labor” (Bonacich, 1980, p. 14), Omi and Winant (1994) convincingly argue that it fails to engage with complex politics and ideologies of race with respect to *all* racial conflicts. Roediger (2008) agrees when he observes that:

Because capital cares mostly about rational matters like efficiency, productivity and profit, it is therefore somehow an enemy to the irrationality of race-thinking and to color bars keeping people of color out of some jobs. From slavery and the fur trade forward, managers thought of the working bodies that they attempted to control as raced, not as abstract units of labor. (Online Interview)³³

Alongside racial dynamics, however, one also needs to remember that with the large number of immigrants from varying ethnic backgrounds flooding the cities due to the dizzying pace of industrialization, the American working-class population was transformed in the course of the early 20th century precisely because the economy and the nature of work itself were also being transformed (Braverman, 1974, Edwards, 1979; Barrett, 1992). As part of their training, fearful

³³ Retrieved from: <http://stuffwhitepeople.do.blogspot.com/2008/10/white-interview-david-roediger.html>

for stability of the economic order and aware of the limitations and shortcomings of services that evening classes offered for immigrant workers, industrial leaders during this time instead opted for holding Americanization classes, sponsored by YMCA, at their factory sites. Korman (1965) documents that after 1900 came more systematic safety, health, and welfare programs by companies like Illinois Steel, Allis-Chalmers, and International Harvester. Methods and materials for such programs were often designated to cope with the many languages and the alleged cultural and mental limitations of semiskilled and unskilled workers from Eastern and Southern Europe (Meyer, 1980; Barrett, 1992). They report that even during the initial phase of Americanization “classes concerned themselves primarily with only one sphere of the immigrant’s surrounding: factory life” (Korman, 1967, p. 404).

Generally speaking, a critical study of the relevance of race in education and the impact of racism has been possible since the inception of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in the mid-1990s (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Leonardo (2012, 2014) argues that while CRT scholarship has successfully illuminated ways in which “race and racism permeate the entire educational enterprise” (p. 429), it is imperative that a fundamental analysis of capital becomes part of race analysis. His ‘raceclass’ theory of education, an appropriation of Einstein’s collapsing of ‘spacetime’, is based on the close interrelationship between race and class as intertwining forces in shaping the current educational landscape. He argues that together, these forces succeed in reproducing patterns of privilege and marginalization along racial lines as part of a class project, and the division of labor as part of a race project. It is not far fetched to claim that circumstances surrounding the language and literacy education in factory life during the early 20th century, and current parallels in developments in the language education of immigrant students during the early 21st century, attest to the close proximity of these forces in shaping patterns of class privilege across racial lines. And since curriculum plays an important role in generating such patterns through the knowledge production processes that take place in educational sites (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Giroux, 1981; Apple, 2004, Bowles & Gintis, 2011), it is instructive to consider the function of education in relations of production and the reproduction of a new class of workers for the new racio-economic structure of the 21st century.

Social/Cultural Reproduction through Curriculum

If we consider that curriculum, as a body of selected knowledge, is fundamentally influenced and informed by the existing political discourse, social organization and economic structure (Apple, 1982), even at the marginal level of adult ESL, the analysis of its content and purposes will necessarily need to be situated within these contexts. At the K-12 level, a growing body of literature addresses the processes whereby a whole range of educational policies are justified on economic grounds and in articulation with neoliberal social and political agendas (e.g. Giroux, 1984; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985; Angus, 2004; Scott, 2011). And as discussed earlier, similar dynamics are at play for learners at adult schools or community colleges.

A look at this development from an early 20th century assimilationist point of view reveals striking parallels with the 21st century. Recall the two strands of positive and negative Americanization and Hartmann’s (1948) distinction between the two based on the liberal (integrative) and nativist (rejectionist) sentiments. It is important to mention that Carlson (1970), who also writes about the sense of ambivalence present in the Americanization movement, does not distinguish between confidence in integrating the new immigrants and rejecting them, but rather, between two different approaches to the Progressive Movement of the time: the *humanist* approach, and the move towards *order and efficiency*. As he explains, Lester Frank Ward’s

Sociocracy, printed in 1965, represents a new interpretation of social Darwinism, fueling the humanitarian (not to be equated with a humanist) approach. He rejected the belief that society should simply let the natural law work its 'will'. But rather, he insisted that "society should try to understand natural law and then take advantage of its knowledge to improve its lot. The day has come for society to take its affairs into its own hands and shape its own destinies" (Ward, 1965, p. 113). Jane Addams' efforts at the Hull House testify to such humanitarian aspirations. In fact John Dewey (1927) whose sense of democracy has broadened through association with Jane Addams, pleaded for "a unity created by drawing out and composing into a harmonious whole the best, the most characteristic, which each contributing race and people has to offer" (p. 76).

At the same time there was the other side of progressivism, the emphasis on order and efficiency, which resonates with Kliebard's (2004) account of one of the four 'interest groups' competing for control of the schools' curriculum. 'Social efficiency educators' believed in scientific management techniques of supervision, accountability, and precise measurement (i.e., Taylorism). Carlson's (1970) analysis makes it clear that it was largely out of this imperative that Americanization early in the 20th century began to shift in approach to meet the demands of conformity. Sociologist Edward A. Ross (1901) was the leading reform thinker and a proponent of the educational doctrine of social control as a means of 'building a better American society' (p. 178). Ross saw public education as the panacea. It would be "an economical system of police to stamp the individual into his society so that he himself would not desire to do things out of step with his society" (1901, p. 274). Thus not all who operated in a manner consistent with Ward's melioratist philosophy agreed with the humanist, individualized service concept of education.

The end of the 19th century marked the introduction of machinery that revolutionized production techniques, making prior craft skills obsolete and mightily raising productivity. But as Edwards (1979) explains, it was the Ford assembly line that, in controlling its workforce, brought the technical direction of work and its 'continuous-flow' production to its fullest potential. One factory observer reported that:

The foundry superintendent asserts that if an immigrant who has never seen the inside of a foundry before, cannot be made a first-class molder of one piece only in three days, he can never be any use on the floor; and two days is held to be ample time to be a first-class core maker of a man who has never before seen a core molding bench in his life. (cited in Edwards, 1979, p. 117)

In the same vein, language education for the immigrant worker had to be tailored to the fast-paced learning environment that asked for mastery of specific skills within a short period of time. Clearly, aside from the immigrant's personal aspirations and priorities, teaching the language was important for employers to the extent that it impacted productivity. Companies such as Ford, International Harvester and United States Steel Corporations instituted practices of English and civics instruction to teach, above all, discipline and work efficiency (Korman, 1967). Samples of a YMCA sponsored lesson include the following:

I hear the whistle. I must hurry.
I hear the five minute whistle.
It is time to go into the shop.
I take my check from the gate board and hang it on the department board

I change my clothes and get ready to go to work.
The starting whistle blows.
I eat my lunch.
It is forbidden to eat lunch before then.
The whistle blows at five minute starting time.
I get ready to go to work.
I work until the whistle blows to quit.
I leave my place nice and clean.
I put all my clothes in my locker.
I go home. (Korman, 1967, p. 410)

This example illustrates that the functional use of ESL for job training purposes has taken precedence over all other aspects of language education. ESL instruction, in this case, is explicitly framed by human capital perspectives with the end goal of social control.

Likewise, in the context of today's coalition building efforts impacting educational programs for immigrant adult English learners, it appears that instructional and curricular models built around workforce training needs, cater first and foremost to the labor force needs of the corporate sector. One major difference, however, is presented in the way this process takes shape through a proactive role that policy makers assume both at the state and federal level to facilitate tasks that previously fall within the purview of the private sector, a role that distinguishes the neoliberal state from its previous forms (Harvey, 2005; Hurst, 2006).

IET and Student Perceptions

For the most part, the argument has been made convincingly that as sites of cultural reproduction, schools deny the experiences of specific groups of students from subordinate linguistic and cultural backgrounds as legitimate forms of knowledge (e.g. Althusser, 1971; Bernstein, 1975; Bourdieu, 1977; Anyon, 1980; Lareau, 2003, 2003). This cultural exchange ensures national assimilation and preserves Western standards in the official curriculum. However, as Giroux (1983) theorizes, schools are not only sites of domination and reproduction, but also sites of struggle and contradiction. Distinguishing between a negative and positive sense of ideology, and advocating for a view of power, not simply as one of imposition but as a network of relations (see Foucault, 1981), Giroux insists that

it is essential to move from questions of social and cultural reproduction to issues of social and cultural production, from the question of how society gets reproduced in the interest of capital and its institutions to the question of how the 'excluded majorities have and can develop institutions, values and practices that serve their autonomous interest. (p. 235)

Thus it is crucial, in any educational setting to understand the meaning-making processes through which individuals respond either by accepting, negotiating or perhaps resisting certain forms of knowledge to exert their own 'will to power'. Likewise, with respect to IET, while it is important to identify incentives and persuasions behind the policy and mechanisms through which it is implemented, this research focuses on students' motivational patterns and their uptake of resources in line with those motivations. In other words, analysis takes into consideration the role of attitudes, practices, and most of all, purposeful human action that mediates between the

act of learning and what results from it (Willis, 1977; Giroux, 1981; Apple, 1982; MacLeod, 2009). After all, as Giddens (1977) reminds us “there can be no explanation of social need that does not presuppose some individual want as part of the causal explanation” (p. 67).

Specifically, in the context of second language learning which is, in this case, inseparable from learning the employability skills, one way of understanding the learners’ motivational patterns is in relation to their identity formation process. Bonny Norton-Peirce (1995, 1997), whose work expanded the scope of research on the relationship between language and identity addressed this process by introducing the concept of ‘investment’. Rather than motivation, investment in second language learning is described as “the socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language and their often ambivalent desire to learn and practice it (1997, p. 411). Norton-Peirce defines identity as the way people relate to the world and understand their future possibilities. By speaking a second language, she explains, learners are constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social and material world around them. Through the logic of this viewpoint, she 1) ties together the question of ‘who I am’, to ‘what I can do’ 2) links the task of language learning to the issues of individual and social agency and 3) characterizes identity as fluid and shifting in accordance with changing social and economic relations.

This view owes a great deal to the work of feminist theorist, Chris Weedon who, following Foucault, connects subjectivity with discursive practices and broader discursive formations. Weedon’s (1987) feminist poststructuralist theory insists on subjectivity as a site of conflict that assigns the individuals a sense of agency, although this agency cannot be conflated with ‘free will’. Nonetheless, it allows agents the ability to rewrite their personal experience in terms that give it social and contingent force. Clearly, Weedon’s definition of subjectivity is reflexively tied with social identity and positioning as well as social personae, status, roles, relationships, and institutional and other relevant community interpellations one may claim. Norton-Peirce takes up this extended notion of subjectivity to argue that learners ‘invest’ in learning a second language in order to fulfill goals that are tied to their sense of subjectivity and their changing social identity. This knowledge is necessary for analysis of opportunities for resistance and ultimately towards the goal of transforming the existing relations of power. Norton’s standpoint further highlights the fact that a focus on the ‘individual’ as well as the ‘system’ as the unit of analysis is essential even if it is insufficient.

On the empirical front, current research on IET at the adult education level is limited to a few pilot projects examining outcome rates of post-secondary credit gain or workforce training for participants (Jenkins et al. 2009; Emerson, 2010). But there are few, if any inquiries into the experiences, perceptions and ‘wants’ of students enrolled in such programs. This two-pronged study balances the focus on the system with an equally robust focus on the individuals. It relies on a mixed-methods approach to examine the trajectory of learners’ aspirations leading to intentions, and the alignment of these intentions with curricular goals. The identification of themes or categories of students’ perspectives and courses of action makes this research more exploratory than confirmatory. While it may be hard to postulate a causal explanation for the way learners take or shift their position in the labor force, the research design that I propose below helps in making explicit how adult immigrant students’ aspirations engaged in the act of learning and in relation to current labor market demands unfold. We turn to the study’s methodology next.

Chapter 3. Methodological Overview

The methodological approach utilized in this study addresses the research questions including the inquiry around learners' initial incentives for enrollment in the ESL program. The approach helps gain insight into the adult immigrant students' understanding of the utility of a work-oriented ESL curriculum and its relevance to their pre-established goals. It is shaped by an effort first to identify the individuals' occupational aspirations and motivations behind them, and then monitor any changes in students' viewpoints as a result of participation in the IET pilot course. I employ a case study of a group of immigrant adult students enrolled in the ESL program and analyze data gathered from August 2012 to August 2013 using mixed-methods. Below is a brief introduction to the community, the site of research and student demographics.

The Community/Westview

San Miguel³⁴ is a large city in California and one of the largest in the United States. It is noted for its booming technology industry and has experienced rapid population growth in recent years. Westview Adult Education serves several neighborhoods in city with a student population that is comprised predominantly of Latino/a, Filipino, Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Samoan, respectively in order of size. The diversity of population in the neighborhood plays a vital role in San Miguel's local politics. In the 1930s Cesar Chavez and his family moved into the neighborhood. It was in this area, where Chavez began his political actions, sparking the grape boycott at the neighborhood grocery store. More recently, the area made news when the Vietnamese community rallied to have a city zone named after a major city in Vietnam.

Research Site

The site is one of three adult centers that are part of a larger high school district in the area and draws working class students residing in the neighborhood. The school district has undergone a rapid demographic change in recent years. By the late 1980s, the Westview adult education program enrollee population was comprised of predominantly Asian (Vietnamese) immigrants, but since then and particularly within the past ten years, the district has experienced an increase in the Latino/a enrollment rate. In 2011-12, Latinos comprised 54.2%, and Asian, 44.9% of the total student body. District student demographics indicate an average age of 32.2 for ESL attendees with females making up more than 58 percent of the program's student population. Some statistics point to 11 years as the average highest year of education for students, completed, in most cases, in their country of origin.

While some of the female ESL students have childcare responsibilities and are unable to work, many of their male counterparts are concentrated in low-paying, labor-intensive jobs in domestic and personal services, unskilled, or low-skilled trades. With respect to the teaching staff's racial composition, the numbers point to over 70 percent White, 6 percent Asian and 9 percent Latino/a with the remaining fraction belonging to other racial groups.

ESL classes meet 5 weekday mornings or 4 evenings for 3 hours a session and a total of 15 hours for the morning and 12 hours for night classes per week. Five sequential levels of instruction are offered ranging from Beginning Low to Advanced Low. Students who complete the program often transition to the High School Diploma or GED program, or a community college to further their educational goals. Students may also be referred from the ESL program to the ABE (Adult Basic Literacy) program or transitional English classes to polish their reading,

³⁴ Acronyms are used for the city and the adult Education agency name.

writing and speaking skills. ESL students can also participate in Career Technical Education (CTE) that offers occupational courses concentrated in Business and Office Skills, as well as Medical Occupations. Students completing these courses earn certificates that list the competencies acquired. In addition, students who complete the Accounting Clerk classes can earn college credit at the neighboring community colleges.

I chose the school as the main site for my research for two reasons. First, I have an extended involvement with the center initially as an ESL instructor and more recently as the Curriculum and Professional Development chair for the ESL program. Through familiarity with the program and teachers in the department, I was able to gain access to the site easily and use my background knowledge to inform the study. Second, and more important, I chose the site because of its close fit with respect to features important to the research. The program offers a pilot project on Contextualized Workforce ESL Course as part of an IET module (Integrated Education and Training) with a promise of holding VESL (Vocational ESL) classes the following school year. In addition to a tradition of state-mandated standardized testing³⁵ implemented by teachers and staff, curriculum guidelines based on “SCANS”³⁶ principles and California State “Model Standards” are strongly established in this program. These features make the school an ideal site for the target area of research.

Data Sources and Analytic Methods

To answer the research questions, I draw on four data sources: 1) ESL program-wide student goal surveys, 2) two sets of pre- and post standardized assessment results, 3) semi-structured interviews with focal students and a one-time interview with the teacher, and 4) focus group discussions with focal students. Goal surveys were completed at the beginning of the school year and were used to obtain an overall sense of students’ short and long term goals articulated at the beginning of the study. As the instruction proceeded, the sets of pre-post assessment results were recorded to measure academic performance and progress for students in the target classroom. In addition, student interviews and focus group discussions comprising the qualitative part of the research provide data on students’ sense-making process and interpretation of messages with regard to the employability content of instruction.

The use of multiple data source combined with mixed- methods is appropriate since it results in more valid research findings. For instance, in answering the 3rd research question on IET’s possible limiting impacts on learner aspirations, focus on the qualitative portion provides a space to examine how social forces (e.g. race and class) intersect within the lives of focal students and how these dynamics can be internalized and manifest in their understanding of current or future occupational paths. On the other hand, the quantitative aspect of the study, such as analysis of program-wide goal surveys, helps generate reliable observations about a larger group of students with similar characteristics, resulting in increased generalizability of the findings.

That said, ‘convergence upon the truth’ is not the goal here. Relying on Mathison (1988) and her explication of convergence, inconsistency, and contradiction in multiple data sources, I

³⁵ Testing requirements are in line with CASAS (Comprehensive Adult Students Assessment System) representing a series of nationwide work-related criteria in areas where adult students need to show proficiency in order for the agency to receive funding from WIA (Worker’s Investment Act). Model Standards is a similar set of criteria for proficiency in language skills (with similar funding strings attached) but on a statewide level. As recently legislated, student ADA (average daily attendance) is no longer a criterion for apportionment.

³⁶ *Secretary of Labor Commission on Achievement of Necessary Skills*, published in 1991

utilize all three sets of findings in efforts to understand the complexity of the social phenomenon. The idea is to provide more and better evidence from which one can construct meaningful propositions about the way participants organize knowledge and perceive the world. This technique is also valuable because it generates explanations constructed from the contexts out of which they arise. Moreover, it allows for both data and methodological triangulations that increase the internal validity of the study (Light et al. 1990).

In assessing the qualitative data, I utilize a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Corbin & Strauss, 1990), an analysis strategy that allows themes, indeed theory, to emerge from data. The inductive aspect of this approach is especially useful since it allows one to remain open to all possible theoretical understanding. Included in the body of data are transcripts of interviews and focus group discussions. ‘Initial’ coding (Charmaz, 2001) or ‘open’ coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) is done at first through a sorting and categorizing process of the body of data based on relevant interests, literature, and perspectives. Building on this phase, I employ a second phase labeled ‘focused coding’ (Charmaz, 2006), which uses the most significant earlier codes and highlights thematic categories that make the most conceptual and analytical sense. Moving between the data, emerging codes and themes helps build a story that connects the categories while producing a set of theoretical propositions.

For example, a significant portion of the transcript data contained rich descriptive narratives of participants’ past experiences both in their country of origin and in the U.S. The initial open coding of a portion of this data and the resulting categorization of codes revealed a number of common themes including one that I labeled as *blaming*. Following this phase, I proceeded with focused coding and further grouping the codes based on the more refined categories of *blaming oneself*, *blaming others*, or *blaming the system*. By further grouping these codes under *feelings of powerlessness* (i.e., blaming others or the system) and *taking responsibility* (i.e., blaming oneself) I was able to make connections between events, their consequences, and the spaces within which they occur on one hand, and the perceived opportunity structure of the country of residence on the other.

Data Collection Instruments

Program-wide Student Goal Surveys

First round of this survey was conducted in August 2012 to provide information about short and long term objectives of all ESL students. Made available in four languages (Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese and English) surveys were designed through multiple-choice and open-ended questions to elicit information on current employment status, future employment and academic aspirations, as well as categories of work learners may (or may not) be pursuing. Additionally, surveys helped with a basic understanding of the reasons behind learners’ interest in attending ESL classes. Of a total of 1,320 forms distributed, a large proportion was completed and submitted (N=1045). Compiled data organized in an electronic database established a baseline of student objectives linked to participation in ESL instruction and long-term goals to pursue future occupational or academic interests. This data will establish a motivational level for all students in the program and their interest in employment-oriented instruction, and provides percentage figures of students whose objectives match those of the target instruction. For focal students this data source also yields preliminary information on the details of short and long-term objectives that will be checked against data from interviews and followed up in the course of focus group discussions.

Standardized Assessment Tools

The fourth source of data is 2 sets of pre-post assessment results used in measuring focal students' academic progress. In the target ESL program, standardized tests are available across all instructional levels and administered twice a semester to assess learner proficiency in areas of Reading and Listening. Reading test booklets, titled 'life and work', contain a number of employment-related items that gauge specific work skills using level appropriate language and sometimes accompanied by picture prompts. Listening Tests also contain workforce skills-related vocabulary questions and students mark their answers by listening to the audio of excerpts or conversations, for instance in workplace settings. Tracking focal students' performance on integrated academic and occupational skills tests contributes to the understanding of patterns of involvement as learners take or move positions with respect to the target curriculum. Furthermore, imparting aspects of this involvement and seeking learners' input and reflections through the qualitative measures, illuminates the ways that learners incorporate their newly acquired knowledge and make use of it in determining occupational paths.

However, generally speaking, establishing ESL learner progress level in any content area, especially leveraging standardized multiple-choice assessment tools, is often a challenging task. When a student fails to produce the 'right answer' on a specific item, for instance, it is hard to determine whether this is due to difficulty in grasping the concept, or a function of facing a language barrier. Since IET focuses primarily on content areas and language related to work, a comparison between average learning gains of mainstream groups of students on employment-related items, and those earned by students enrolled in the target classroom, will help measure the extent that focal students' performance level on a given test is a valid indication of successful participation in the IET class. In contrasting target student population instructional outcome to learning gains earned by students in a mainstream classrooms, data will be analyzed only for students at the same instructional level (N=280+) since curriculum is most comparable and same tests are administered across the level program-wide. Once this correlation is established, my focus will be on the following 4 academic indicators for focal students:

- 1) Results from 2 sets of standardized *reading* tests
- 2) Results from 2 sets of standardized *listening* tests
- 3) Level completion as indicated by promotion to the Advanced ESL level after meeting program benchmarks including but not limited to previous two measures
- 4) Possible enrollment in community college or leaving the program as a result on finding employment.

It is important to note that even though students normally advance to higher ESL level class before leaving, there are no restrictions against missing adult school in the interest of work or post-secondary education.

Interviews/Focus Group Meetings/Participant Selection

Interviews were semi-structured, designed with an interpretivist perspective. Feinberg and Soltis (2009) explain that "for the interpretivist, meaning is not just something in someone's head...the interpretivist realizes that people engage in activities of social life with some *shared understanding* of the reasons for the activity" (pp. 88-89; italics in original). In other words the

object of the study is to find out what is going on in a specific social situation and to discover the meaning that it has for those who participate in it.

The interviews were conducted initially with focal students selected from the pool of participants in both the IET class and a mainstream class at the same level of instruction to provide variability. Again, since the idea is to draw comparisons in terms of features specific to IET, instructional level is held constant. Due to high attrition rate in the target program, I oversampled up to 18 students to gain a minimum sample of 9 by the end of the spring semester. To maximize variability and to capture a range representing a balance mix of student characteristics, I used student goal survey results to stratify based on learners' academic and occupational objectives, age, race, gender and educational background. Each row in the stratification chart below represents characteristics of 3 focal students.

Future Aspirations	Age	Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Educational Background
CC bound	Below 25	Latino	Male	Under HS
CC bound	Over 25	Asian	Female	HS or over
Employment seeking	Below 25	Other	Male	Under HS
Employment seeking	Over 25	Latino	Female	HS or over
Undecided	Below 25	Asian	Male	Under HS
Undecided	Over 25	Other	Female	HS or over

CC: bound: Community College bound HS: High school Diploma

Although portions of the research will have lower external validity due to small sample size, utilizing a stratification sampling approach (Light et al, 1990) allows for generalizability within the classrooms. Generalizability will be increased also with respect to the school-wide population. Since participants in the IET were placed only based on instructional level, we can assume that selection was naturally random.

To achieve the end goal of understanding how learners organize their newly acquired knowledge, in the interviews I utilized a combination of descriptive and structural questions (Spradley, 1976) relating to participants' personal, academic and occupational trajectories. Intersecting with their interpretation of new knowledge, this process illuminates students' perceptions derived from past histories and lived experiences that impacted the way they understand, interpret and make sense of their current circumstances. More important, this research strategy takes into account learners' past histories and lived experiences vis-a-vis the new circumstances of learning and living, with the advantage of affording both the participant and researcher invaluable insight and opportunity for reflection over the role of larger social and political forces that shape students' aspirational patterns.

In addition to interviews, I arranged for 1 focus group meeting of all focal students each semester. In forming focus groups and deciding on the logistics, I drew on Denzin (1978) to expand the notion of data triangulation that includes time and space. Denzin's strategy is based on the assumption that social phenomena require examination under a variety of conditions. Accordingly, I concluded that observing, interacting and reassessing students in different settings, e.g., a different timeframe (morning vs. noon time), varying spatial conditions (classroom vs. student lounge vs. conference room) allows for various levels of conversations and therefore provides a richer set of data. For instance, data obtained from the first focus group

meeting that took place inside the classroom and immediately after a class session (at noon time) contains detailed descriptions and nuanced interpretations of classroom procedures and activities. Conversations in these areas were followed up in more general terms during the second meeting in the school conference room, prior to class time and in the morning. In reference to the timing of this session, some participants also brought up topics relating to their morning chores such as dropping children off at school, stimulating a long discussion on parental responsibilities and the role they play in decision-making for future academic or career paths.

To Denzin's time and space, I add format (one-on-one *vs.* meeting), and venue (semi formal interview *vs.* talking casually over lunch), which widen the window of possibility for various comfort levels and taps into different domains of participant knowledge. Specifically, the collective nature of focus group provided a space for collaborative effort wherein, after first round of interviews, analysis could be co-constructed between researcher and the participants as they provided feedback on thematic categories and contributed their own interpretations of the data. Inspired by Patti Lather's (1986) framework of "research as praxis" (p. 260), I built into the research design an attempt to take the preliminary research findings back to the participants for further dialogue.

McDermott is quoted as saying "a proper unit of analysis for what people do together is what people do together" (cited in Feinberg & Soltis, 2009, p. 93). On a small scale (compared to ethnographic research), focus group meeting forms a unit as it allows scholars to see participants' response juxtaposed with other participants' responses. Guided by the following questions, the 'group work' approach was most productive in 'operationalizing' what I earlier called the meaning-making process:

- 1) How do focal students name themselves in terms of linguistic and cultural belonging, and how is this process linked to systems of domination?
- 2) What aspects of IET have salience in students' worldview', in the sense that they provide context for their lives and have structural meaning?
- 3) What are some limit-situations (Freire, 1970) students find themselves in, and by what means do they confront them?

Answers to these questions help answer the 3rd research question related to the impact of IET on student aspirations and ways in which learners interpret the prescribed curriculum and its usefulness for them. On the whole, the collection of data gathered at various levels, program-wide, target classroom-wide, by instructional level, by individual focal student, and by the pool of focal students, is meant to inform an understanding of the extent to which Integrated Education and Training impact the adult ESL learners' future life paths. The search for theory in this way grows out of context-embedded data, from both qualitative and quantitative sources. However, it must be emphasized that this is accomplished not in a way that automatically rejects a priori theory, but in a way that keeps preconceptions from distorting the logic of evidence. As Glaser and Strauss (1967) point out, "integration of the theory is best when it emerges, like the concepts. The theory should never just be put together, nor should a formal-theory model be applied to it until one is sure it will fit, and will not force the data" (p. 41).

A Glance at Teacher Preparation and Pilot Classroom Procedures

The following is a brief report on the training that the teacher received prior to her assignment with the pilot class. I will also present examples of the materials and resources

utilized and the type of instructional activities conducted in tandem with the principles of IET and the Contextualized Workforce Skills (CWS) format. Setting the stage in this fashion will help provide a context for analysis of how learners respond to the proposed curricular structure and negotiate their expectations vis-a-vis the occupational content.

First, it is important to mention that the CWS pilot course was taught by an enthusiastic and experienced ESL instructor, Ms. Brody³⁷, who had recently completed a training course labeled *Integrated and Contextualized Workforce Skills in the ESL Classroom*. The workshop, offered through a state-funded regional professional development project, drew from a select group of adult ESL educators who had expressed interest and were nominated by their programs to take part in the course. It is noteworthy that there was no prerequisite for Ms. Brody, to attend the training. She was in fact assigned to the project prior to her participation in the training; a selection made by the administrator based on Ms. Brody's extensive experience with teaching ESL as well as her receptive attitude towards curricular change that set her apart from most other instructors in the program. The instructor then elected to attend the *Contextualized ESL* workshop on her own volition in order to be better prepared and familiarized with new strategies she could utilize in the course of her instruction. According to her, the training was centered on preparing language learners to "tap into the large pool of available good-paying jobs and succeed in the workplace." It had identified characteristics of the labor force relevant to the ESL populations, what the employers say are essential skills and knowledge for prospective workers, and the benefits of integrating such skills in the ESL curriculum. Again according to the teacher, the workshop had made recommendations for devising activities for setting goals and pursuing timelines to achieve them, as well as classroom management techniques to promote student persistence by attending regularly. Also available were suggestions for strategies and lesson plans to connect the knowledge that learners gain in the ESL classroom and their application to the workplace. In addition to the training, Ms. Brody, had gone above and beyond and invested her own time to visit colleagues in different districts to observe their practice, exchange ideas, help out as a volunteer and gain first hand experience in conducting an experiment of this kind.

With this training and experience, the instructor utilized a multitude of approaches and resources geared to workplace preparedness in the target classroom. First, the standards-based ESL textbook, assigned as a core text in the program, was central to the curriculum in the pilot class as well. The text is especially designed within a '21st century skills' framework that focuses on transitions to careers or academic training leading to careers. In the target classroom, supplementary resources further reinforced this approach by providing reading, writing and communication skills in workplace settings. The set of course material incorporated workbooks specifically designed for entry-level restaurant employees or workers in the hospitality field. Titles for such resources include *Everyday English for Hospitality Professionals* and *English for restaurant Workers* geared to help future workers in these fields develop English vocabulary needed to interact with customers and colleagues. For hotel workers texts present essential language structures for such common functions as welcoming a guest, bringing luggage to a room, taking a meal order, and finding medical care for a guest. For restaurant workers, using a picture-based format, the texts target proficiency in language skills for waiters and waitresses as well as for workers in the catering industry. A software package called, *Hospitality English* was also available for classroom use. Moreover, the instructor utilized a variety of alternative resources (including two class sets, *Ventures Transitions* and *English in the Workplace*) to

³⁷ In order to protect the privacy of the individuals, pseudonyms are used for all individuals including student participants.

address other fields of occupations such as healthcare, clerical and office work, childcare, and jobs within the construction industry, primarily targeting the male student population.

During a conversation I had with Ms. Brody, it also came to light that ‘goal setting’ constituted a major aspect of CWS course curriculum in the very beginning. Students were encouraged early on to create profiles that reflected a targeted field of employment, the steps it requires them to take and a timeline to reach those objectives. Those who were pursuing the steps actively were also guided to keep track of their progress marking milestones along the way. In fact, future (hypothetical) employment fields often became the criteria upon which clusters of students were formed into groups (or pairs) to carry on conversations or work on certain course-related assignments as directed by the teacher. Since the early 1970s when communicative model and student-centered orientation became the gold standard for language teaching (Raimes, 1983; Taylor, 1983), conducting group activities have been routinely used by ESL practitioners, encouraging participants to complete classroom tasks collectively. As a pedagogical approach, this line of practice is promoted in order to encourage cooperation and help students learn from one another. Within this framework, variety in seating arrangements and grouping strategies are utilized to maximize interaction among all participants. However, in the CWS target class, student groups were primarily formed on the basis of occupational interest, such that learners in the same category of interest worked together and interacted. During such activities, students participated in discussions and practice of skill nuances, such as job search, filling out application forms, writing resumes and letters of interest, and reviewing interview protocols for specific fields of employment. It is also safe to assume that students engaged in a variety of other activities, from mechanical drill-and-practice to role-playing scenarios and of course to attend to periodic assessment routines.

Focal Students’ Profiles

Focal students were selected among learners in the target classroom utilizing IET curriculum and instruction as well as among learners in a mainstream classroom at the same level. The idea was to compare attitudes, motivations and performance outcomes among the two groups and interpret the ways that students’ ambitions and established plans were impacted by the vocational model. It is important to note that students in both classes were assigned randomly and on the basis of their language proficiency placement test outcomes. I used student goal survey results to stratify the focal student selection based on academic and occupational objectives, age, race, gender and educational background. Originally 16 students volunteered to participate but 5 (mainly males) dropped out of the study for various reasons. Below, I introduce the remaining group of students and briefly lay out their main characteristics in a profile that includes aspirations and future career/academic goals. The following 6 students were participants in the IET class.

Celia³⁸, a 28-year-old immigrant from Mexico was first brought to the U.S. by her mother, a single parent who struggled to make ends meet. Celia was 8 years old at the time but the family changed residence intermittently between Mexico and California until she was 18. The resulting disruption in family life and schooling was and is a source of great frustration for Celia who did not get a chance to master English. After earning her high school diploma from Mexico, she moved back to California, obtained a job and started a family. Highly motivated academically, Celia pursued English language education and was placed at the intermediate level of ESL. At

³⁸ Again, all participants’ names reflect pseudonyms in order to protect the privacy of the individuals.

the start of the fall semester, she was still undecided about her future occupational field but was determined to obtain a GED diploma and start looking into her options for further education. She lives with her husband and two children.

Angelica's story is in contrast to Celia's in many respects including her stable residence in Mexico and the completion of 15 years of schooling there. She obtained a high school diploma and a degree in the nursing field that allowed her to work as a nurse for one year prior to her immigration to the United States. At age 30, she has been living in the U.S. for 7 years, is married, and has a 21-month-old daughter. After completing the ESL coursework, she intends to enroll in the High School diploma program. Describing her dream as "being a nurse in the United States", she voices her ambitions to pursue further education in the medical field.

Martha, a 33-year-old recently arrived immigrant from Mexico is also interested in the nursing field. Her 16-year trajectory of schooling in her native country includes 4 years of college where she studied journalism. Martha has held a rewarding government job as a journalist while in Mexico but realizes that continuing on that path alone is not feasible in the States. However, since her previous career involved assignments at the health department, she has a sense of familiarity with the hospital environment and is determined to become a nurse while continuing with freelance writing for Spanish newspapers in the area. Martha is newly married and has no children.

Lan is a 45-year-old immigrant from a coastal city in China where she earned her high school diploma and a certificate in accounting. She has lived and worked in the U.S. for 6 years. Lan works as a part time employee in a nursing home for seniors but after learning more English, she is hoping to further her education in finance to establish and run a nursing home of her own. However, given the fact that her husband is out of work, she believes it is possible that her dream of owning a business may not prove realistic, in which case an alternative plan is to pursue a degree in nutrition and search for full time employment. Lan and her husband have two grown children who are also residents of the U.S.

Ramon is the youngest participant in the study and the only male respondent enrolled in the pilot course. At age 25, he expressed a grave sense of responsibility to find better employment especially because he supports family members in his native country of El Salvador. Since his immigration to the U.S. four years ago, he has held numerous part-time jobs but no stable employment. However, having earned a high school diploma and an associate degree in a technical field from El Salvador, he hopes to "attend college someday" and pursue a career in "computers and the information technology." Ramon's attendance in the ESL class was sporadic. He eventually dropped out of the course midway through the semester.

Lupe is a 38-year old immigrant from Mexico. She is a single mother of 2 daughters and is a part time employee of a floral arrangement shop. Lupe has been in the United States for 13 years but prior to immigration earned a paralegal degree from a university in Mexico. She is hardworking and highly motivated to continue the path by going back to school and earn a college degree in related fields. Her dream is to help people who cannot afford the high costs associated with the services that lawyers normally provide. After completing the ESL course of study, Lupe's goal is to pursue her GED certificate or High school diploma and look into

community college courses next.

It is important to keep in mind that these summaries are primarily compiled using transcripts of the initial interviews at the start of the semester. This means that the series of conversations took place during a time when the instructor was stressing on the importance of ‘goal setting’, a theme that clearly played out in the course of my dialogue with the individual students. Interestingly, learners in the mainstream classroom did not necessarily expand on their long-term future plans and were more intent on their immediate concerns with employment, language learning and family life. The following is a list of profiles of this group enrolled in the mainstream ESL classroom at the intermediate level.

Carla is a 47-year-old mother of 3 grown children. She also immigrated from Mexico and has lived in the U.S. for the past 20 years, a fact that makes her feel “embarrassed” about being in the ESL classroom. However, she is quick to add that since her arrival in the States and her marriage shortly afterwards, she has had to move in and out of English language learning environments due to her childcare responsibilities. Carla, who repeatedly expressed her love for children, works at a day care center but is passionate about becoming a preschool teacher, preferably working in bilingual educational contexts.

Teresita’s trajectory is different from Carla’s in that Teresita is a recent immigrant to the U.S. This 54-years-old native of Sri Lanka has earned a 4-year college degree and worked as a “land appraisal officer” for the government of Sri Lanka for many years. Teresita and her husband lived in the Los Angeles area where she worked as a bank clerk prior to their move to Northern California, prompted by her husband’s relocation of employment. She also has a pharmacy technician certificate. Teresita is a mother of 2 grown children, both of whom are professionals in the high-tech field. She seeks to improve her English in order to find a good job in her new area of residence.

Elias is a 28-year old Mexican student who works in the construction business and has lived in the U.S. for the last 7 years. Like most other participants in the study, Elias reports coming to the States “in search of the American dream.” He is single but supports his family (parents and 4 siblings) living in Mexico. Although he was frequently absent in his ESL class, due to unpredictable work schedule, Elias attached great importance to learning the language, especially to reach his long-term goal of becoming an independent business owner. He attended 9 years of school in Mexico but does not plan on further academic pursuits unless getting a high school diploma proves necessary for starting his own construction company.

Pedro, a friend of Elias, is also employed in the construction business. A native of El Salvador, he reports following his girlfriend to the U.S. more than 8 years ago. Having had 13 years of schooling (high school diploma with a certificate in accounting), the 27 years old has a background in finance and worked for a cable company in El Salvador. Like Elias, Pedro would like to become financially independent and establish a business of his own, but he is also interested in attending college.

Vanita is a newly arrived immigrant from India. She explains her family’s decision to immigrate to the States in terms of access to a better future for their 18- year old son who shows

great academic potentials. Vanita, a former school teacher in India, has had 18 years of education of her own in her native country. At 49 years of age, she would prefer to continue a career as an educator, but given the time it takes and family's present financial situation, she is now exploring options in the clerical or the medical assistant field.

This account of learner characteristics and aspirations will be useful for contextualization purposes and providing perspective as the following chapters engage with the data to answer the study's guiding questions. In chapter 4, the emphasis falls on students' expectations and on the central question of what it means to pursue language education in general and, more specifically, to learn English within the institutional confines of the ESL classrooms. I draw on a broad range of data and relevant theory to answer the first research question with respect to the learners' understanding of aims and purposes of language instruction offered through adult ESL programs

Chapter 4. Learner Expectations: Dreaming the American Dream

This chapter starts with an analysis of goal survey results to explore learners' explicit objectives and expectations vis-à-vis the program. How do immigrant learners understand the relationship between learning English and the opportunity dynamics of their host country? How do their identities as speakers of minority and low-status languages position them as racialized and classed minorities in relation to the native English speakers? And given this positionality, how do they conceptualize future possibilities, access to educational opportunities, and chances for upward social mobility over time? The analysis of qualitative data hones in on these questions that are, at the core, questions of social identity and ways that participants engage in the processes of imagining themselves and their location in their immediate familial environment, their local community, and the U.S. society at large. Informed, in part, by conceptual discussions in chapter 2, I explore learners' interpretations and understanding of the structure and their mediating role in the learning process of English as a second language. This approach not only takes account of the psychosocial dimensions involved in learning English as a dominant language but also sets the stage for examining students' sense making about the employability component of the IET instruction in the following chapter.

Student Motivations/Investments in ESL

As stated earlier, sequential levels of the standardized ESL curriculum available in the target program for this study include Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced levels. Many students enroll in classes intending to complete a course of study after the initial placement at the appropriate level but some attend classes to 'sample' English instruction because it is close home as well as affordable.³⁹ Learners who complete the advanced level have the option to transition internally to the High School diploma or GED programs, or enroll in neighboring community colleges to pursue other academic goals.

As open access institutions, adult schools are expected to accommodate a wide variety of students with varied individual characteristics and thus varied goals. In this, they are not radically different from public K-12 schools. For instance, younger female ESL learners may wish to improve their verbal fluency and brush up on literacy skills while their children attend school. In addition to being self-enriching, improvement in these areas helps these mothers participate in parent-teacher conferences and assist their children with homework. For some, this can be reason enough for expending efforts to attend classes but others may commit themselves to use the instruction as a means to advance their own academic goals. On the other hand, some younger learners may be primarily interested in enhancing their career prospects through the English language proficiency deemed integral to advancement on the job while older adults (many of them retired) tend to focus on the social aspects of the learning process, building on community relationships and forming friendships while practicing their language skills.

This is all to say that participants' interests are diverse. However, one should consider that these interests and orientations are not necessarily static and one-dimensional, so that a desire to communicate effectively across various social situations may incorporate a need to improve fluency in the context of the workplace, or when a goal centered on earning a college degree almost always overlaps with the expectation of achieving a career objective. It is also possible that the intersection of preoccupations or passions take on a somewhat competing form

³⁹ Traditionally classes have been offered free of charge but following the budget crisis of past few years, programs started to charge a minimal enrollment fee.

due to a learner's commitment to language education to fulfill conflictual roles as a parent, spouse, worker, student, and so forth. In fact, the notion of language learners' multiple desires or motives is in line with Norton-Peirce's (1995, 1997) idea around second language learner 'investment' in multiple identities. In this regard, her discussion on identity and modes of positioning is useful. As noted earlier, Norton-Peirce defines identity as the way people relate to the world and understand their future possibilities. She introduces the concept of *investment*, in contrast to the more traditional construct of *motivation*, as "the socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language" (1995, p. 17). More specifically she questions the notion of *instrumental motivation* (Gardner & Lambert, 1972) that references the students' desire to learn a second language for utilitarian purposes such as employment. Expanding on the distinction between the two, Norton-Pierce (1995) writes:

It is important to note that the notion of investment I am advocating is not equivalent to instrumental motivation. The conception of instrumental motivation generally presupposes a unitary, fixed, an ahistorical language learner who desires access to material resources that are the privilege of target language speakers. In this view motivation is the property of the language learner—a fixed personality trait. The notion of investment, on the other hand attempts to capture the relationship of the language learner to the changing social world. It conceives of the language learner as having a complex social identity and multiple desires. (p. 17)

Within this formulation, the learner's multiple identities, or alternative subject positions, are closely linked to the way in which she understands her relationship to the complex social world, a relationship constructed and negotiated across time and space.

Signaling her disagreement with the psychological notions of motivation, Norton-Pierce takes cues from Weedon's (1986) poststructuralist approach to the individual as subject to discourses that co-exist, at times as "competing ways of giving meaning to the world and of organizing social institutions and processes" (p. 34). According to Norton-Peirce, the language learner takes up different subject positions, some of which may be in conflict with others, but it is exactly this process that "can open up possibilities for students... to explore what might be desirable as well as appropriate uses of English (1997, p. 401). She argues that seen in this light, "the subject is not conceived as passive; he/she is conceived of as both subject of and subject to relations of power within a particular site, community, and society: The subject has human agency" (1995, p. 15). In other words, the return on investment in learning a second language translates into gains in the forms of the consciousness and awareness that in turn give the learner a voice in the social sphere. In this instance, language learning is an act of empowerment that provides the learners with the political clout and legitimacy.

It also appears that, conceptualized as such, Norton-Peirce's formulation is departing in some ways from Weedon's (1997) perspective on subjectivity as the site of "a battle in which the individual is an active *but not* sovereign protagonist" (p. 40; italics added). Weedon's emphasis on the lack of sovereignty (i.e., lack of free will) points to a ceiling for the potentials and the seemingly boundless agency that Norton-Peirce attributes to the individual learner. Nonetheless, in taking this stance, Norton-Peirce borrows economic metaphors from Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), arguing that learners *invest* in a second language to "acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources [and] . . . in turn increase the value of their cultural capital" (1995, p. 17), that is, the knowledge, disposition, skills and modes of thought that characterize different classes

and groups in relation to specific sets of social forms. This repertoire of knowledge and dispositions is then passed on from parents to children, within specific fields of contestation, providing the socioeconomic backbone and therefore the well-being of future generations. The idea is the creation of ‘habitus’, that is, the tailoring of self-concepts, aspirations and social class identification of future generations to the sets of social forms that have currency, a process that starts with investment in English on the part of first generation immigrants.

Using this conception with respect to the language learners in the study, along with the point of contrast to Weedon’s perspective could prove helpful for exploring the multiple subject positions the participants take up (e.g., of mother, immigrant, worker, or wife), and ways that these subjectivities impact their investment in language learning. Hence, ‘expectations’ represent what the students imagine to be the return on their investment by enrolling in the program and seeking instruction. The use of the survey tool in conjunction with qualitative data was, in part, inspired by a need to discern a pattern of ‘investment’ in second language learning in both its coherent and contradictory iterations, while also considering the changing character of motives/investments across time and space. These distinctions will have a significant place in discussions about the ambivalent ways in which students relate to the ‘employability’ content of the curriculum, as well as the possibility of shifting desires and motives as learners go through the course of instruction.

Program-wide Survey Results Analysis

As part of the study, I used results from a program-wide goal survey (N=1045) that aimed to collect information on students’ employment status, their initial motivations for seeking ESL instruction and the extent to which learner’s short- and long-term goals were oriented to college and/or careers. It also inquired into the participants’ interest in fields of occupations likely to be targeted by the student population. Framed in clear and simplified language and available in Vietnamese, Chinese, Spanish, and English, the survey was designed to help the program develop future classes to address the vocational needs of students. It was distributed among the cohort of students enrolled in the fall of 2012 (See appendix 1 for a sample).

Results showed participants’ employment status as follows:



Figure 1

Clearly, a large percentage of learners in the overall pool is either employed or looking for employment. Given the median age of 32.2 for the student population program wide, this finding is hardly surprising⁴⁰. High percentages of employment-related responses were also indicated in addressing the short-term goal inquiries. When questioning the primary short-term objective in relation to enrollment in ESL classes, survey choices were simply worded as: *get a job, improve job, go to college, help children with homework, and make new friends*⁴¹. The idea was to distinguish between ‘work-related’, ‘academic’, ‘literacy-centered’ and ‘self-enrichment’ aspects of instruction that motivated learners. When asked to choose only one option, a sizable group identified 1) upgrading an existing job, and 2) finding new employment as important reasons behind their decision to enroll. The chart also shows that ‘going to college’ ranked lower in the overall response pool. Below is a compiled table of all participants’ responses to the question of why they pursued English language instruction offered through the program:

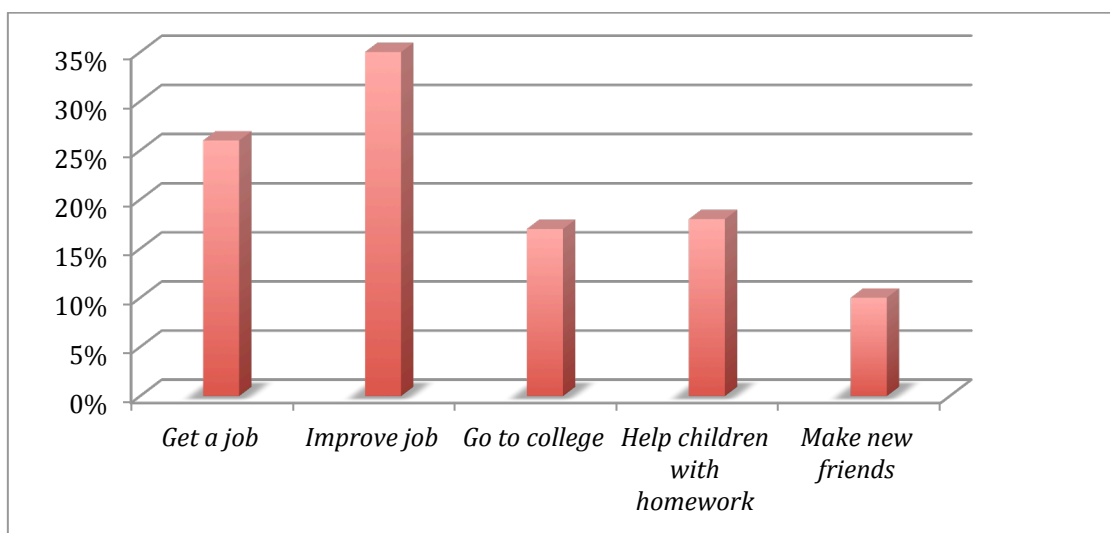


Figure 2

With job improvement earning the highest ranking, this chart shows that work-related incentives are indeed prioritized. Overall, high percentages for learners with ‘employed’ and ‘employment-seeking’ status (Figure 1), along with tabulated data on motivations for attending classes (Figure 2) signal the fact that acquiring a job and career advancement are positioned highly among learners’ priorities when pursuing English language education. This data also corroborates the finding that a significant number of respondents identified poor language skills as the main obstacle to meeting their career objectives. Listed below are sample direct quotations, which represent ideal type statements that students provided in addressing the question of what, in their estimation, constitutes “problems/difficulties” standing in the way of reaching their long-term career goals:

⁴⁰ Data on the gender related numbers was not produced. However given the fact the program demographics of 58 percent women, it is safe to infer that a large number of women are among the 77% who are either employed or looking for jobs..

⁴¹ Given the multi-dimensional nature of learners’ future goals and to get a sense of the primary reason behind participating in English language instruction, survey participants were asked to mark only one answer.

- My English skills are poor, so it's difficult to improve my job
- Problems are speaking and writing English
- My problem is I can't speak English well, because the grammar is difficult for me
- I like to do a job but I need to improve my English
- My difficulty is improving my communication ability in English
- I need to learn more English and go to college
- Problems the language and experiences
- If I don't know English, I don't know communicate

Through these statements, learners underscore the significance of language mastery as a crucial first step and a foundational skill to build upon in future job-related endeavors.

Furthermore, these comments shed light on learners' positions in terms of the type, or the 'genre' of language instruction they expect to receive by enrolling in the mainstream ESL classes offered through their local adult and community education program(s). Embedded in the broader assimilation project and the 'survival' context that adult ESL instruction operates within, a focus on literacy defined by a foundational knowledge and command of basic reading, writing and numeracy tasks represents part of what the programs have traditionally provided and what the learners have come to expect. This also applies to practice in listening and speaking areas of second language development and the emphasis on grammatical concepts either by teaching the mechanics separately or incorporating them within and across the standardized curriculum. Students' comments on their survey forms elucidate their expectations along these same lines and indirectly address the study's first research question.

Another fact worth considering is that despite the priority of employment-related incentives, a good number of survey respondents cited other reasons for pursuing English language instruction. While close to 60 percent are either employed but intend to improve their job prospects or currently looking for work, many attend classes for reasons other than employment. These reasons range from 'helping children with homework' to 'making friends', to personal edification after retirement⁴². Once again, this points to the unique challenge that ESL presents in shifting its focus from basic literacy and 'life skills' to 'employability', especially given students' diverse backgrounds in many areas including educational attainment level in the country of origin, age, immigration status, length of stay in the U.S., and various intersecting contexts, all of which affects language instruction. Therefore, one cannot assume that most ESL learners actually seek or are in a position to seek the opportunities that IET promises to facilitate.

Still, even among those adults interested in employment, due to diverse individual characteristics and life circumstances, it is unclear what proportion of students can benefit from IET. Finally and more importantly, one aspect of survey results that confounds the motivation picture and is especially relevant to the inquiry posed by the study, is a large proportion of younger learners expressing interest in attending 4-year college programs. It follows then that with students' motivations being as varied as they appear, any drastic change in curriculum design based on assumptions of employment priorities on the part of all learners may be at best misguided and at worst exclusionary for those needing language education for purposes other than employment.

⁴² In light of this fact, survey results also challenge the prevailing stereotype that immigrant adults have no interest in learning English and that they are not doing their part in assimilating into American culture.

On the other hand, taking all these considerations into account, it is also conceivable that being exposed to work-oriented English can open up ‘desirable’ new opportunities for students to explore. Federal and state funded ESL instruction is often the first formal opportunity for new immigrants to gain basic literacy skills in English. But as a language learning context, it also represents a fluid process whereby students are socialized into certain perspectives and norms (e.g. Lakoff & Johnson, 1988; Bucholtz & Hall, 2004; Ochs, 1993; 2002), ideologies (Fairclough, 1992; Pennycook, 2001) and identity discourses (Willet, 1985; Norton -Peirce, 1995; Kramsch, 2000) that may influence their life paths and occupational choices. It is certainly true that insofar as instruction helps learners organize and possibly change a sense of who they are and what they can do, it has the potential to increase their sense of agency and self-determination. However, issues surrounding the cultivation of narrow concepts of knowledge and curricular control (English & Mayo, 2012; Au, 2007; Apple, 1995; Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985) point to ceilings for said potentials if learners are led to align future goals with institutional agendas, in turn inscribed by sociopolitical and economic forces outside the school walls. In this sense, literacy and language studies must be situated within the ecology of a much larger context and understood as an integral part of the way people produce, generate, and struggle over social meaning (e.g. Freire, 1977; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Gee, 1990; Macedo, 2006). These considerations further illustrate the importance of an interpretivist approach that takes account of individual rationales, motivations and ultimately their voices.

Qualitative Data Analysis on Student Expectations

Learners’ expectations and priorities in favor of strengthening literacy skills and the central role they play in the participants’ decision to enroll in the ESL program are also evidenced by the analysis of qualitative data. This set of data illuminates nuances in students’ perspectives and helps explore the multiple, dynamic and often complex ways in which students conceptualize the utility of these skills in job-related contexts. I will later elaborate on the specific aspects of English proficiency that have salience in learners’ views and believed to maximize chances for career advancement. But broadly conceived, two conclusions can be drawn from participants’ views on the urgency of English language education for career pursuits.

The ‘English First’ Narrative

To begin, regardless of minor variations, students’ assertions generally reflect their understanding of a set of basic language skills they need to acquire, enhance or master *before* they can be expected to perform effectively at work. I coded data consistently for a category I named ‘English first’, meaning that participants signaled their priority for studying the language almost independent of the context of employment, even as this context gave them the incentive to attend classes. “ESL is the start”, said Carla, an immigrant from Mexico and a study participant with college aspirations who wanted to be a preschool teacher. She noted that she had “no definite steps to take” and wished to start with ESL because it made her “feel confident to speak and read”:

MV: But if you didn’t plan on going on to work, would you still be here
[in school]?

Carla: No, I like to do a job. But I need to improve my English.

After further questioning, it came to light that Carla’s decision to enroll was also informed by her

assessment of a projected financial situation that her family may face. Since her husband was injured and out of work (perhaps permanently), she confronted the possibility of becoming the sole income provider for the family. Her current job at the day care center was low-paying, so she hoped for a pre-school teacher position within a school district that offered secure employment and benefits. To achieve this position Carla knew she would need a college degree that required strong literacy skills, especially in reading and writing. Therefore, enrolling in the ESL program was a logical first move and an investment (Norton Peirce, 1995) in relation to her multiple subject positions not only as an immigrant, but as a breadwinner, a wife, a future college student/ teacher, and so forth. In this sense, Carla's language learner identity is contingent upon her other subject positions that demand access to certain symbolic and material resources (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Nonetheless, the task of learning English is prioritized in her mind as a first step toward reaching the end goal.

I am very proud of my school life. I remember first time when I came to America, I still needed my husband help to talk and say everything. Now he needs my help. I want to be a teacher with children education. Also if I can doing more, I will go to hospital to do community. I like to take care the child who is not have a family, play with them, teach them singing and reading story. If I speak English good, I am not afraid to saying wrong sentence and vocabulary. It make me feel stronger. If I can read and write English good, I can fill a form to application job, write a resume and do everything myself.

Although Carla's intrinsic motivation as a person passionate about children and interested in working and interacting with them (even on a volunteer basis) shines through in this excerpt, one can theorize that she leverages this area of personal interest to contribute to her sense of self-fulfillment at future job or volunteer work. This trend fits within the larger context of her investment in English.

As a generally relevant point, it is important to mention also that in their efforts to achieve English proficiency, Carla and her classmates particularly value instructional venues that are deemed 'formal' or 'academic' in a traditional sense. Immigrant learners in the study made a distinction between the processes of communicative knowledge of English that take place within familial, social and even professional contexts and such processes of knowing and learning through the conventional academic experiences. That is, while immersed in the language of their new land, they rely on the kind of explicit instruction provided in long-established schooling contexts that depend, for instance, upon receiving direction from a teacher, using textbooks, completing routine assignments, filling out practice worksheets, and so forth. Carla voiced a view about the importance of formal English language education that seemed to be emphatically shared by her classmates:

MV: But don't we pick up language as we go along doing daily chores, just being here in the country...listening and speaking to people, watching TV...?

Carla : Yes we live in America, we shop stores, go to doctor, dentist, go to community, talk everything in English. But we never come to school, we learn English outside. We need to learn the textbook

and writing good English.

Put differently, in comparison to daily practice implicit in interactions with fluent speakers of English and full exposure to the American mass media, formal ESL instruction is far more desirable and deemed more effective in facilitating the type of competence and language mastery that learners strive for. It is significant that although Carla was already employed in a day care center where she claimed to interact with staff regularly and was exposed to the parlance relevant to the profession, she still believed that ESL instruction was key to her improving the communicative and writing skills necessary for advancing towards her dream of becoming a preschool teacher. This characterized Carla's main drive behind enrolling in the ESL program.

Overall, taking Carla as an example, it is safe to claim that students' priorities for learning English were centered on achieving a desired level of competence with the expectation and understanding that it enables them to take charge of their own learning in future job-related situations. This interpretation also explains a phenomenon noted in the compiled data related to the open-ended portion of survey forms where participants were asked to note the type of desired work. It was noteworthy that a significant number of respondents entered more than one occupation or area of interest as the focus of their current or future job search. In some cases multiple fields of work, at times seemingly incompatible, were recorded. Again, it appears that learning English for work-related purposes is a priority (figure 2) regardless of projected requirements involved in future career choice(s). One of the students with a clear goal to 'improve job', formulated his priorities this way:

Learning English is first and then I check to other plans, I never think about the future. I would like to continue study and then decide.....I want to have my own business.

While conflicting impressions are evident in Elias' statements, it is clear that the proficiency level that he targets is established as a point of departure in a trajectory towards career advancement. This is true even before the specifics of the end goal are sufficiently conceptualized. Other responses representing this attitude include Lupe's insistence to work on her communication skills: "I don't speak good English to go check what plan I have". Here again we see a clear determination to master the language code, at some level, prior to considerations of conditions or preconditions in long-term occupational pursuits.

Unpacking the 'Perfectionist Attitude'

"Nobody is perfect! That's why me and my ESL friends are here to study English"

-- Martha, ESL Student

Although Lupe's larger narrative of short and long-term objective, as she elaborated later, also contained contradictory elements, her comment, "I don't speak good English to go check what plan I have", brings us to the second conclusion that can be reached through qualitative data analysis: With respect to the students' sense of urgency in seeking ESL instruction, the communicative purpose of language learning presents a clear priority. Recall that the centrality of communication skills also became evident in students' statements responding to the survey prompt on what they perceive as obstacles to reaching their long-term career goals. Likewise, in the course of the interviews and first focus group discussion, the imminence of 'communicative

competence' emerged as one of the most dominant themes. I use the phrase 'communicative competence' in the sense that Hymes (1966) coined it to refer to a language user's grammatical knowledge of syntax, morphology and phonology, as well as social knowledge about how and when to use utterances appropriately. It is different from 'performance' (its open manifestation) in that competence denotes a synthesis of an underlying dynamic and context-bound system of knowledge and skill needed for communication, even as it is observed and evaluated through performance (Savignon, 1972). The notion of 'competence', in other words, represents an in-depth knowledge of language structure that includes the rules of its use.

While Hymes' formulation was mainly developed in relation to first language acquisition, I found that its use is appropriate in the context of this project considering the aspects of the functional knowledge and control of the usage of the language. As Hymes observes:

[A normal child] acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner. In short, a child becomes able to accomplish a repertoire of speech acts, to take part in speech events, and to evaluate their accomplishments by other. (1972, p. 277)

Indeed, the knowledge of language at this 'intuitive' level is often what sets a first and second language apart, but it is somewhat surprising that among the study's participants the commitment to improve communicative proficiency was associated very closely with what I coded as a 'perfectionist attitude' to accomplish a native or 'near native' mastery of the skills they targeted. This notion of perfectionism was noticeably linked to feelings of 'accomplishment' and 'pride'.

Once more, linked to this expression is the dominant theme relating to the feelings of assurance and self-sufficiency as learners overwhelmingly cited 'confidence building' as a major drive behind their quest to learn English. This was the case for students attending for self-enrichment purposes as well as those with academic and career ambitions. For example, Celia, a Mexican immigrant of 10 years and one of the participants in the IET class, who exhibited a singular determination in obtaining her GED certificate, asserted her underlying reasons for attending classes in the following exchange:

Celia: Because I want to improve my English. I want to feel...uhm...
confident with myself when I speak English that if they ask me
do you speak English? I say, YES I know English

MV: So it's not only about GED...

Celia: No, it is not only about GED. It's feeling satisfaction that I
learn English and I learn it WELL. I can speak it, I can understand
it and I can write it and I can read it CORRECTLY. (Emphasis her own)

While this sense of learning-the-language-for-language's-sake gave Celia a special feeling of pride in her abilities and a desire to 'perform' flawlessly, her added emphasis underscores her resolve to establish a near native knowledge base of the skills. Celia seems to be aiming at creating a 'second language persona' akin to the concept of 'front stage persona' in Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical analysis of the presentation of self in society. Goffman believed that all participants in social interactions are engaged in certain practices mainly to maintain face, that is, to avoid being embarrassed. Simply put, 'back stage persona' is the private self whom people in the close circle, such as family members see, whereas 'front stage persona' is who the audience

sees and where the positive aspect of the ideas of the self and desired impressions are highlighted⁴³. The juxtaposition of ‘front and back stage persona’ and the idea of ‘maintaining face’ align well with Celia’s elaboration on her comfort level when interacting with native speakers:

Sometimes I practice English with my children at home. I feel comfortable because I can make mistakes...no care.. with my children, they understand. My daughter is patient, she corrects my grammar. Sometimes she explains in Spanish. I write her sentences and practice. But when I go to outside, post office, the children school, shopping... I embarrassed to make mistakes because they are not patient, they don’t speak Spanish. Only English.

The feelings expressed here are representative of the sensitivity experienced by a great majority of study participants, especially considering their projected desires being contingent upon a show of language mastery. As will be shown later in this chapter, lack of proficiency in English, anxiety, and fear of failure frequently become intertwined. Reflecting on Goffman’s central theme again with regard to the display of positive aspects of the sense of self, one could argue that while his rendition assigns a certain sense of agency to the ‘actor’, it can potentially limit the autonomy of the self, based on both the circumstances and terms of ‘acting’. For instance, a strong link to identity factors and to broader social structures can clearly be considered in Celia’s statement when she explains further:

Because I am living here, I need to communicate I want to be SOMEBODY.

The emphasis on ‘somebody’ could denote a functionalist use of her ‘second language’ or ‘front stage’ persona in service of achieving other non-specific objectives. Or, it can be interpreted as a marker for the status accorded to the English speaking others and specifically to the medium of language as the transmitter of that status. In either case Celia’s sense of agency is clearly relative to the circumstances of her ‘acting’ and to the terms that define English as dominant and indispensable to her full assimilation to the so called ‘mainstream norms’ of society.

Setting high personal standards to achieve communicative competence was hardly rare among other participants. The projected feeling of confidence by becoming a proficient English speaker in the future was often juxtaposed to the feelings of anxiety and even shame, regularly experienced by learners when making errors, such as when they “don’t say the correct word”. The terms ‘embarrassed’, ‘anxious’ and ‘nervous’ had high rates of frequency (12 and 15, and 14 times respectively) within the hour-long span of the first focus group and mostly in the context of describing the urgency for practicing listening, speaking and, especially, ‘near native’ pronunciation. Students heard, repeated and confirmed each other’s experiences of these emotions in a show of concerted understanding when it comes to the necessity of mastering these skills.

It is important to acknowledge that as a foreign language, English is certainly not unique in invoking feelings of apprehension and concern in language learners. For many years, scholars

⁴³ In this case parallels can also be drawn between Goffman’s ideas around the critical role of performance as captured in his construct of ‘front stage persona’ and Butler’s (1990) notion of competence essentially as ‘repeated performance’.

have considered the anxiety -provoking potential of learning a foreign language and factors that contribute to a fear of negative evaluation, text anxiety and communication apprehension (Horwitz, 2000, 1996; McIntyre & Gardner, 1994). For students of foreign languages across the world, communicating in a non-native language is often associated with such emotions. However, in the ESL classroom, fears of negative evaluation and less than-perfect communication with native speakers are present at a more intense level⁴⁴. As we saw in Celia's case, learning English as a second language can become intimately intertwined with issues of identity and personhood.

Such fears are further heightened under circumstances where language learners are assumed to belong to 'subordinate and lower- status' minority cultures (Macedo et al, 2006; Pennycook, 2003) setting in motion an ideological interpellation process through which learners self-identify as such (Althusser, 1971). The concept of 'interpellation' is based on Althusser's definition of ideology as a "representation of the imaginary relationship of the individuals to their real conditions of existence" (1971, p.162). In fact, research on stereotype threat seems relevant here. In the field of psychology, a body of research on stereotype threat (Steele, 1997) illustrates how racial narratives can affect learning. It shows that making participants aware of prevailing racial narratives that position them as less competent, induces anxieties (i.e., influencing their performance on tests) that stem from the fear of being seen as confirming the social narrative about their group (Steele and Aronson, 1995; Steele, 1997). Even the simple act of making their identity salient to an evaluative situation primes their anxiety of the threat. An added dimension to Steele's findings is that stereotype threat is more acute with people who are domain identified, such as students who excel at math and other subjects. It seems reasonable to draw parallels in this case and theorize that the self-identification of ESL learners like Celia, as subordinate and low status members of the society, poses a constant threat to their sense of self-worth. This can very well contribute to anxieties and communication apprehension not necessarily in the context of testing, but on a daily basis and in contact with native speakers as Celia disclosed and was cited earlier. Significantly, many learners used the word 'scared' when expressing their fears of communicating with native speakers, which attests to the intensity of emotions experienced.

This is all to say that Celia's perfectionist attitude highlights a major difference between a foreign language learning situation and an ESL learning situation, wherein students are expected to assimilate into the established norms and standards set by and for native speakers. Under such conditions, learners are forced to create a persona that is closest to the 'native speaker persona'. Furthermore, given the extended discussions in chapter 2 on the historical evolution of race, stakes can be extremely high for students from persistently marginalized racial backgrounds who feel the need to align themselves with the expectations of the host society.

But what are the expectations of the host society as conceptualized by respondents? And how do the new immigrants come to internalize these expectations and harmonize their actions in accordance with them? To answer these questions, one needs to pay close attention to a common thread running through the data when linking discourses that correspond to 1) learners' display of positive aspects of the self and the association with perfectionism, 2) the success in near-native language proficiency, and 3) the resulting feelings of confidence and self-sufficiency. Data analysis shows that this foundational array of relationships, themes or discourses was

⁴⁴ Test anxieties are relevant but perhaps not to the degree that high-stake test are in K-12 and community college contexts. While test results are given out at adult schools and used for further placement purposes, students are not issued grades.

mainly framed in what I call a meta-discourse of achievement built upon the principles of the ‘American Dream’ ideology. By meta-discourse, I mean a dominant social narrative that shapes human thought and activity.

Throughout my conversations with the students, it became evident that the word ‘dream’ resonated well with the respondents as they routinely used it in reference to future possibilities. But specifically, the ‘American’ Dream, its corresponding ideology and a strong belief in its efficacy constituted a primary theme among their narratives. In what follows, I rely on the data to argue that the learners’ understanding of U.S. expectations of new immigrants, greatly hinges on their interpretation of its opportunity structure and the stronghold that the ‘American Dream’ ideology has maintained on the immigrant imagination. What I hope to show is that their attempts at aligning themselves with the desired image is informed by their knowledge or perception of the system as inherently fair in demanding their full assimilation in exchange for upward social mobility.

Defining the American Dream Ideology

Research on immigration has documented the immigrants’ belief in the U.S. as an open system for mobility. It is a vision well established and known in the literature as the Opportunity Narrative that warrants significant sacrifice and investment on the part of individuals to reach their dreams (Lopez, 2001; Hills & Torres, 2010; Bartlett, 2007). But a general survey of the tenets of this narrative is helpful in our discussion about immigrant learner expectations and the extent of investments they are willing to make. The Dream ideology encompasses several interconnected tenets. First is the firm belief that the United States is the land of boundless opportunities and, second, that these opportunities are available to everyone regardless of race, skin color, ethnic background, or any other marker of difference. In other words, people from all walks of life are free to participate in the system and anyone who has the desire is able to pursue the dream because no obstacles block anyone from attaining success (Hochschild, 1996). Threaded throughout their stories, all respondents in the study thoroughly believed in these principles. They mostly leveraged their home country knowledge of life in the United States to explain their views on their chances for advancement in the United States. Examples are the following narratives provided by two learners who expanded on their definition of the American Dream and the key role of learning English in realizing it:

Lan: When I still lived in China, I heard that everyone talked about the American Dream. That is a dream which people can find many jobs, day shift, night shift, work in factory, work in business... People will be [treated]fairly and they will be successful if they try their best. As the most people of first time, I attended English classroom, as you know English is the key of everything. I am shy person. I feel uncomfortable in communicate but reading and writing better. I know my weak points, so I study a lot of vocabulary every night. Also I go to the library to read books which I love them. My dream is to be owner of a nursing home.

Teresita: I have lived in the U.S. for six years. In my country of Sri Lanka, people say there is more opportunity here than in my country. Sri Lanka is a beautiful country, very nice, very beautiful nature but there, it is limited facilities. Over there education is good but free, so they don’t have enough for everybody and the government can’t provide for every-

body. It is very competitive. This country provide the dream of students and everybody come true. In USA also, opportunities for work are many... many. People can do many jobs, some with education, some no education. But all people can do it. Only the adults need to improve their English background. That is why I enroll in the ESL program. I love English very much because English is the most important language in the world.

In other words, a belief in the 'fairness' of the system and equal opportunity for all is part of the vocabulary with which they express not only their awareness of the central component of the American Dream but their need for learning the language for complete assimilation and the realization of this dream.

For some of the participants like Lan, their knowledge of the American Dream prior to their arrival in the country included the importance of the third tenet of the ideology: that one achieves the dream as long as one works hard. This was a point that many made emphatically with repeated reference to 'effort' and 'working or studying long hours.' But for a few respondents including Pedro, a native of El Salvador who came to the United States at the age of 19, the amount and intensity of work that is required for prospects of "a better future" was a rude awakening:

MV: Did you have anyone from your family with you, or anyone here in the States?

Pedro: No, I came myself. I came alone.

MV: Seems like you were quite young when you immigrated. What was the reason?

Pedro: Like all the people I know, the American dream (laughter)....

MV: Hmm..tell me about the American dream...What does it mean to you?

Pedro: I think..it's so easy money..the life that is easy (laughter) with money.

But... eh...no!

MV: Are you saying it is different from what you expected?

Pedro: Uhm.....Yes, a lot of work..hard work. The money is okay, but much hard work (shaking head)

MV: I can imagine. Construction is heavy-duty work. Your previous job at the cable company [in El Salvador] was probably not nearly as hard. Are you still happy to be here?

Pedro: Oh yes, money is okay. I work and save little money to send to family. ..but sometimes, I am tired (laughter).

MV: Of course. So saving the money and sending home is what makes you stay.

Pedro: Yes. But I want to have my own business...in America I see many opportunities to start a business, if I learn the American business and English.

Here, as in the previous statements, we can sense the presumption of an overall fairness in the system even in the face of its harsh realities. There is also a great deal of optimism about the conditions in the United States fueled by a strong faith in the availability of middle class job opportunities despite the many strings attached to them.

One should keep in mind that this belief in mobility is certainly true relative to the opportunities, or lack thereof, in the home country. So it is not misguided of them to believe that mobility is more open in the U.S. As was the case with Pedro and many other participants,

narratives about the native country and the journey to a life in the U.S. were filled with hardships and the poverty. The comparison was a positive one because they see more opportunities in the U.S. than in their countries of origin. Ogbu (1991) claimed that voluntary immigrants⁴⁵ tend to overcome difficulties experienced in their host country because their cultural frame of reference is their home country, where they often faced harsher environments than in their destination. As such, they are willing to accommodate and to accept less than equal treatment in order to improve their chances for economic success (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Data demonstrates participants' willingness to do so by taking responsibility for own progress. Above all, students believed that what makes a person successful in the U.S. is personal dedication, merit and sustained effort, whereas back home a person succeeds through "knowing the right people", that is, friends, neighbors, and relatives who provide connection to contacts for employment, education, and so forth.

Seen in this light and given the dual frame of reference, it makes sense that the optimistic outlook is especially relevant to first generation immigrant population. Many minorities who have lived in the U.S. for many generations are disillusioned with the prospects of upward social mobility because of their real experiences with discrimination. But study participants, all first generation immigrant learners, viewed their American lives in a positive light, an outlook they then translate into high expectations. They firmly embraced the idea that determination and hard work are the only factors guaranteeing results and if one works hard, there is every reason to expect that she/he will succeed.

This notion of personal responsibility also corroborates Merenstein's (2008) account when she explains:

The idea that the United States is still the 'land of opportunity' has not dissipated much in the last two hundred years. Believing in that idea means believing in it for everyone; its corollary is that failure to succeed places the blame squarely on the individuals themselves. (p. 78)

Also, by this account and the standards that the immigrants set for themselves, stakes are extraordinarily high for English learners who see language mastery as their only obstacle to attain assimilation and a shot at success. Hence, Lupe elaborates on her interpretation of the American Dream and its corollary in the following exchange.

Lupe: In this country you can be anything. You can go to college, get good job buy good food, have free school for children. I believe in that because only you need constant...you know constant....dreams coming true..

MV : What do you mean by constant?

Lupe: It is one example: I go to school, but I go to school only one day, not four days. You have to go every day. If you are..uhm...lazy, you have no education, and no dream coming true. I have one friend who clean buildings in down town in the night. She is janitor in San Miguel. I tell

⁴⁵ Ogbu ecological theory makes a distinction between voluntary minorities (immigrants who have more or less willingly moved to the U.S. because they expect better opportunities) and involuntary minorities as those who have been conquered (e.g., American Indians), colonized (e.g., native Porto Ricans) and enslaved (e.g., Black Americans) In other words, they have been made to be a part of the U.S. society against their will.

[her] you can come to school more days. But she always complain she's tired..... I say to my friend: No school, no English, no success, no money (laugh).

It seems ironic that despite the friend's challenging schedule and hard physical labor in janitorial services, Lupe frames the inability to attend classes in a language that implicates laziness and aversion to hard work. In this instance, failure to attend is equated with lack of personal responsibility and with consequences that can be solely placed on the immigrant worker herself. Furthermore, success is not only equated with mastering the English language but with financial gain, another hallmark of the American Dream ideology and the idea of not only 'making it', but 'making it big' through a dogged sense of purpose and with ascetic persistence. Aspiring to great financial success is clearly an important aspect of the U.S. capitalist culture and assimilating to the 'norms' of the society naturally includes internalizing its top priorities.⁴⁶

Still another corollary to this meta-discourse of achievement in the U.S. is the learner's denial of facing any form of racism and discrimination. The equal opportunity framework is inherently antithetical to patterns of discrimination and, therefore, thinking about it in these terms enhances our understanding of why all but one of the respondents in the study denied the existence of racism -- or in the case of Latinos, the new iterations of nativism (Huber-Perez, 2009; Galindo & Vigil, 2006; Higham, 1963). A long-term resident of the U.S., Carla was the sole participant who acknowledged the prevalence of discrimination against the Latinos, but she did not believe it was a significant problem:

Carla: I think there is discrimination with Latino people. I tell my daughters -- they go to college, "be careful". They say, "I ignore it. I am good student. I am proud of myself".

MV: What about you? Do you ignore it?

Carla: I think there is discrimination in every place. We just have to do our best at our jobs.

The importance of personal hard work, perseverance and studiousness is once again reiterated in this interview excerpt. Here we can see the power of the meta-discourse of achievement ideology, a foundational concept that has produced knowledge (i.e., a system of meaning) about the structure of a meritocracy, normalizing certain ways of thinking and acting (Foucault, 1972; Hall, 1996; Weedon, 1997). In other words, by staking a claim to truth (Foucault, 1972) the ideology, based on the principles of hard work and determination has centered itself and is taken up as self-evident and 'common sense'. For Carla and her daughters, this is the case despite a serious challenge (such as racial discrimination) to the ideology's core principle of equality.

Discourses of Power/the Blaming Game

I have argued thus far that the ever-present American Dream ideology has provided a lens through which participants in the study see themselves (as reflections of the society's expectation of them) and their world. They have thus constructed their chances for career development and social mobility based on the image provided to them. This also results in the internalization of a

⁴⁶ It is interesting that a good number of participants identified entrepreneurship as a career choice and made reference to the importance of "making money fast".

sense of responsibility for achievements (taking credit for being hard workers) and, by the same token, taking responsibility for failures (blaming oneself for the consequences). In fact, within the meta-discourse of the Dream ideology that immigrants devotedly believe in, the concept of 'personal responsibility' has special significance as it connotes a valued sense of 'individualism'. In essence, it implicates a feeling of independence and power on the part of the individual for having the unalienable freedom to think, make choices, and act accordingly. From casual every day dealings to selections of fields of study or work, it was evident from the respondents' expressions that they were grateful for having many options to choose from in their new country of residence compared to their native land. In fact, in many cases, learners' views of the U.S. social structure and its opportunity framework became manifest through their narratives and the portrayal of the system in their country of origin in sharp contrast to the system in the United States. For example, like many others from Mexico, Angelica blamed the country's overall economic system and schooling as the reasons for leaving home, describing it as restrictive and unfair:

- Angelica: In Mexico people cannot improve their education to have better jobs and better future.not all people. Some people don't have the capacity to learn, some people don't have the money....
- MV: But aren't schools free over there?
- Angelica: Yes, but some people don't have the money to travel to school.
- MV: I see. Did you have to travel to a different area for your schooling?
- Angelica: Yes, I don't [didn't] have money, but I had another family in the other place, so I didn't have to pay. But some people have money, not fair like here. Here everybody have many things to choose.
- MV: It is hard to have to travel long distance to attend primary school, why do you think there are so few schools?
- Angelica: Mexico is not the United States. It is poor country, many people have no money, but the people..important...how do you say? People that have important position get all the money for them and their family.
- MV: You're talking about the people high in government positions?
- Angelica: No only government, but maybe illegal business people.

In other words, the understanding is that resources in Mexico are controlled by a handful of powerful individuals and this is contrary to the case in the U.S. Similar ideas about the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few were expressed by other respondents like Elias who blamed the Mexican government for subjecting its people to poverty and hardship:

- MV: Whose fault is it you think that these problems exist? What caused it all?
- Elias: I think it is the government. I think it's too much....eh..steal..
- MV: Corruption?
- Elias: Yes! Corruption. It's very difficult. A lot of people get easy money in my country, they give it some family--so nobody else can get it.
- MV: Do you think there maybe corruption in the U.S. too?
- Elias: There is more in Mexico. Here, there is opportunities, people always can work.

Barring variations in the ways that a government fails its people, Elias' account is in agreement

with most participants' understanding of the overall political and economic structure of their native countries as faulty and responsible for the plight of people. With the exception of Vanita who called 'India' an "advanced country" that she "liked best", all respondents had negative views about their home countries' overall structure, believing that it deserved all the blame for individuals' failures. Their critique, therefore, targeted a structure that renders the individual 'powerless'. By default and as pointed out earlier, this contrasts with the interpretation that in the U.S. the person is free to choose a path and the consequent actions, where failure can only be blamed on the individual, constructed as an 'agent' and thus inherently in a position of power over her/his destiny.

It is also important to think about Elias' remark in the last line of the previous citation regarding corruption in both countries. He seems to acknowledge similar issues in the U.S., but in a sense legitimates the case and qualifies it by the opportunities that the system makes available to the individual despite possible deficiencies. Given our previous discussion on 'powerlessness' in the context of home countries, this perspective highlights an obvious link between the availability of job opportunities and the discourse of individual agency and personal 'power' in the United States. To the extent that this is true, immigrant learners see themselves in complete control of their destinies, with the corollary implication that the main obstacle standing in their way of reaching their goal is learning the language. As one learner declared:

This class is like a connection between me and U.S.A. When I came to here, I feel like a newborn because I don't know everything. How can I stay? How can I speak? How do I do everything? I tried to study hard, more and more to reach my dream come true. I will get to college and I will look for a good job in the future.

Clearly, the centrality of learning English to all future projects makes the task highly consequential for the immigrant students.

In some ways, we can argue that access to the discourse of power through the mastery of language code is similar to the concept of 'investment' as discussed previously. In this sense, learning English signifies the pursuit of the American dream and participation in a system that is perceived to be inherently fair in the distribution of resources and opportunities. As a level playing field that encourages participation, English mastery allows learners to invest in the hopes and dreams of upward social mobility for themselves, their families, and for future generations. For the immigrant language learners, the pursuit of perfect communication skills is the pursuit of this status (a symbolic resource) in the hopes of gaining access to the material resources it provides. They clearly communicate a desire to invest in the kind of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977) that helps them achieve the American dream, and seeking ESL instruction is the first step in that direction. Once again, this formulation helps explain the 'perfectionist' disposition of students towards language learning. In the end, learners are cognizant of the role of English as the language of power, money and ultimately prestige; and their enthusiasm for learning it is inspired by their ability to access this lingua franca. They are also aware that failure to do so would have grave consequences for which they only have themselves to blame.

The Hegemony of English/Internalized Inferiorities

Perhaps this means that in some ways English is placed in a unique position compared to other foreign or even second languages to be studied around the world. There is little doubt that

the cultural and political implications of the spread of English, what Pennycook (2014) calls the ‘worldliness of English’, has established it as a dominant language worldwide (see Phillipson, 1992 on his theory of Linguistic Imperial). In light of this continued dominance, it is reasonable to claim that the very act of studying English not only as the language of ‘opportunity and success’ but by ‘necessity’, constructs other languages as ‘subordinate and minority’ in status. Therefore, by extension, speakers of these minority languages are typecast as such (subordinate and low status) since languages represent the cultures that produce them (Macedo et al., 2006; Pennycook, 1989, 2003). On the topic of language policy in the U.S., Macedo et al. (2006) argue that, similar to colonial practices, a dual mechanism of linguistic and cultural oppression is at play since language is always intertwined with culture. They cite Freire (1985) as suggesting:

For cultural invasion to succeed, it is essential that those invaded become convinced of their intrinsic inferiority...the more invasion is accentuated and those invade are alienated from the spirit of their own culture and from themselves, the more the latter want to be like the invaders: to walk like them, talk like them. (p. 34)

They also contend that the ideology that systematically positions ESL learners at a disadvantage works in part through the process of naming by labeling them as ‘limited-English proficient’ (LEPs) or non-English speakers, conjuring up negative attributes through a deficit perspective.

Taking this argument one logical step further, and given the need for integration into dominant norms of social order and the relationship between a desire to succeed and existing material relations of power (West, 1992), it is possible to see in motion an ‘interpellation’ process (Althusser, 1971). It is through this process that learners self-identify as speakers of low-status languages (belonging to low-status cultures). Althusser’s theory of ideology takes an affective turn as a “representation of the imaginary relationship of the individuals to their real conditions of existence” (1971, p.162). He argues that ideology has the primary function of constituting concrete individuals as social subjects, and illustrates this process of ideological interpellation with an example of a person responding to a policeman’s hailing ‘hey, you!’, and the citizen subsequently turning around. This involuntary response to a non-specific hailing, Althusser argues, is a model of how individuals are called into a subject position in a particular social formation. Thus one is assigned to a name, a gender, a race/ethnicity, nationality, a class status, and so forth, but the important point is that most of these assignments are more or less accepted without any conscious choice on the part of the subject. Interpellation, therefore, is the ‘recognition’ function of ideology that is at the same time a function of ‘misrecognition’ (p. 172), since the individual wrongly recognizes him/herself as an autonomous subject in this social process. It is also a form of misrecognition in a second sense because the subject mistakes this hailing as constituting the essence of his identity rather than an identity for the purposes of social stratification, which for Althusser meant being inserted into capitalist relations (cf. Leonardo on interpellation and race, 2010).

A consequence of this process of self- misrecognition for ESL students, as low-status minority members of society, can be the internalization of a sense of inferiority that limits’ one’s ability. It will be, in fact, more appropriate to call such conditions ‘perceptions of limit-situations’ as Freire (1970) theorizes, since they are defined by their very nature as “*perceived* by men and women at a given historical moment” (1979, p. 99; italics added), and not as impassible boundaries where possibilities for control and power end. Once again, Macedo et al. (2006) situate the existing power asymmetry at the very heart of a ‘hegemonic’ relationship:

[E]ven if non-English-speaking students are able to meet the needs of U.S. linguistic market (in terms of mastering enough English to simply communicate'...), they will still be identified as the 'other'. Their language will always be marked by color, race, ethnicity and class and constructed within a politics of identity that situates subjects within an assimilation grid. (p. 30)

This is an example *par excellence* of how the pedagogical is intimately linked to the social, cultural and ultimately, political (Freire, 2000). It points to a process whereby the prevailing power dynamics of the contemporary world order, language education comes to have little to do with the 'language' per se but instead stands in for a socio-political agenda. This instance of language politics also exposes forms of institutionalized discrimination as a result of the constant pressure to assimilate that immigrants face. In other words, the issue is not whether or not students succeed in learning the subject, in fact many do. As such, one does not receive the picture that schools are 'failing', a trope so dominant in mainstream school reform debates. Instead, one questions whether the system 'succeeds' in reinforcing a pattern of subordination and inferiority in learners who come to believe that their linguistic and racial identity is a liability. Furthermore, this process raises the important question of whether or not confronted with a linguistic and cultural drama, adult immigrant English learners are forced to make imposed choices that in the end represent what Memmi (1991) calls "choiceless choices".

Therefore in discussions of learning and teaching English, the center-periphery relationship is often implicated. The global discourse of English domination may be instantiated to varying degrees locally by many community members in the periphery, but as Caranagarajah (1998) observes, in such communities "in opting to learn and use English, students are making complex ideological and social choices" (p. 58). It is fair to say, however, that for many immigrant English learners in the U.S. (who remain at the periphery) such choices are necessarily limited because 1) naturally, opting out is not an option, and 2) the learner's desire (or obligation) to acquire English is intimately linked to her/his chances for upward social mobility.

At the same time, it is important to highlight the fact that speaking English-- perfect or otherwise, does not protect one from discrimination or guarantee one's integration into the system. In his critical writings on the psychoanalysis of race and colonial subject formation attached "a fundamental importance to the phenomenon of language" (1952, p.1), Fanon examined his own position as a self-staged francophone writer, psychiatrist and intellectual in the margins of French society and its colonies. In fact, he invoked language as a key dimension of the colonized existence for the other, honoring it with the leading chapter in *Black Skin, White Masks*, titled "The Negro and Language". Exploring in depth the alienation experienced by the black man, Fanon conveys a brute subjective reality: that speaking French for the Antillean is ultimately betrayed by the Antillean corporeal black body. Macedo et al., (2006) say as much in the context of learning English in the U.S., pointing to an obvious example where mastery of the dominant language fails to erase the markings of color, race and class:

The fact that approximately 30 million African-Americans speak English as their mother tongue did not prevent the vast majority of them from being relegated to ghetto existence, economic deprivation and, in some cases, to the status of sub-humans. It is most naïve to think that the un-critical acquisition of English will always be a great benefit. (p.16)

The key word here seems to be ‘uncritical’, since after all there is no denying that a ‘critical’ mastery of the language (of power) affords remarkable power⁴⁷. As Fanon explains: “it should be understood that historically the black man wants to speak French, since it is the key to open doors which only fifty years ago still remained closed to him” (1952, p .21). Still, a sense of inadequacy, on the part of the colonized, appears to be inevitably intertwined with accessing this power discourse and the status associated with it. For Fanon is quick to add that “the Antillean...goes out of his way to seek the subtleties and rarities of the language – a way of proving to himself that he is culturally adequate” (p. 21). The ‘white mask’, within this interpretation, is a reference to his mastery and use of ‘perfect’ French that protects him from the betrayal by the black skin, which is an illusion.

Although learning French and circumstances surrounding the phenomenon for the Antillean émigrés to France is not fully commensurate with the experiences facing the immigrant learners of English in the study, parallels can be drawn between the two cases insofar as the racialized nature of the relationships and therefore the search for mastering the subtleties of language, cultural adequacy and the attainment of respect are concerned. A case in point, in the course of a focus group discussion one student expanded on the significance of ‘near native’ pronunciation saying that she wants the teacher to help her “practice correct pronunciation because American accent is the ‘perfect’ accent that everybody will respect”. The following exchange ensued and is worth quoting at length since it elucidates some of the nuances of her thinking and other students’ views in reacting to the topic at hand:

- MV: Okay..but why is that the case you think? First, what do you mean by perfect pronunciation?
- Lan: Uhm.. I think when you don’t make mistakes. Everybody understand you.
- MV: Okay then, it has to do with clarity; you want to be ‘clear’.
- Lan: [Nodding] yes, yes. We want to be CORRECT. So we are not embarrassed.
[Everyone nodding]
- MV: Okay, but what about accent. Because that’s a little different, right?
- Ramon: That... I think when somebody born here. They speak no problem. They have American accent.
- MV: I see, is it important to have American accent?
- Celia: When you have good accent, you get good jobs....have everything nice. American friends...American dream..
- MV: Oh..Let’s see then. Do we know of some people who were not born here, meaning they were immigrants, but they did well, like you said, have good jobs, can have good things..American friends, etc,. anybody we may know, some public figures, among celebrities perhaps?
- Ramon: Oh..yes yes, the big guy from the movie, Terminator...[gestures pumping iron]
[laughter]
- MV: You mean..what’s his name..Arnold Schwarzenegger?
- Ramon: [laughter] Yes, Yes.
- Angelica: But he is American.
- Ramon: NO

⁴⁷ ‘Criticality’ in this instance, implies the acquisition of language without sacrificing the sense of individuality, or in the case of immigrants, without devaluing one’s native language and the culture that it represents.

- MV: I believe he is originally from Europe, Austria somewhere but that's a good example. Did you know he actually was the governor of California?
- Ramon: Yes. Yes. I know that, lots of stories on the news talk about him.
- MV: Interesting.. because you were just talking about the American dream, and here is someone who became a governor and all and he speaks with an accent!
- Martha: But he was born in Europe. His pronunciation different, he speak clear.

Here we see that the clarity of speech, mostly embodied in a native or near-native accent, is conflated with 'Europeanness' or 'Americanness' acting as proxies for whiteness and the status that it represents. As discussed in chapter 2, it is critically important to implicate the ESL learning process with the students' experiences as racialized subjects in the United States. Whiteness is defined as an ideology that centers whites as the standard that other racial groups should aspire toward (Frankenberg, 1993; Leonardo, 2004, 2009), but this exchange is primarily significant in that it exemplifies, again, the internalization of this ideology by the immigrant language learners who come to see themselves through racial categories (Goldberg, 1993).

To be clear, I am not proposing that the connection students make between clear speech and communicative competence is an illogical one. It is certainly advantageous, even critical, to be understood by others, just as it is important to express thoughts and feeling with clarity and accuracy, using words and pronunciation that convey the meaning successfully. I'm alluding to the way in which, over time, the concept of native or near--native pronunciation has been imbued with connotations of respect, virtue, beauty, and ultimately legitimacy. In a unique way, the above exchange references not only the significance of English as a dominant language, but the particular variations in which it is spoken that denotes 'Americanness', or more specifically 'Europeanness'. Such interpretations are associated with the historical trends and preferential treatment of a select group of people and their way of speaking, here identified as 'respectable' and even 'superior'.

Pennycook (2004) attempts to "readdress the relations between simple pasts and complex presents" (p. 93), suggesting that colonialism and postcolonial struggles have been central to world history over the last two centuries. He argues that they are:

the ground on which European/Western images of the Self and Other have been constructed, the place where constructions of Superiority and Inferiority were produced. ...The history of the ties between ELT [English Language teaching] and colonialism has produced images of the Self and Other, understandings of English and of other languages and cultures that still play a major role in how English language teaching is constructed and practiced: from the native speaker/non-native speaker dichotomy to the images constructed around English as a global language and the assumptions about learners' cultures, much of ELT echoes with the cultural constructions of colonialism. (p.19)

As discussed earlier, in the U.S. context these cultural constructions were produced and reinforced through efforts and orientations such as the Americanization movement and what it exemplified (Carlson, 1975, Hartmann, 1948).

In light of this formulation, to return once more to the students' exchange, we can't help but observe the notion of a status differential between the Euro-American accents and other accents of varying prestige. One could argue that as in all relations of opposition, the dialectical

process of construction means that the creation of the category ‘superior’ involves the creation of the category ‘inferior’. Therefore, not only have whiteness and native accent become interwoven into the fabric of how immigrants in the U.S. understand what it means to do and learn ESL, but their own languages and therefore cultures are marked by color, race and ethnicity. As such, learners self-identify with being ‘inferior’ through “ a politics of identity that situates subjects within an assimilation grid. We can see here that ‘native accent’, here equated with clear, ‘unaccented’ (i.e., unmarked) English, offers an especially fruitful context for studying issues of race, since it becomes a subject with a racial narrative attached to it and American or European accent becomes: “An accent everybody will respect.” This is also the reason that the concept of ‘native accent’ is a particularly illusive and ambiguous one as some people are imagined always and perpetually to have an ‘accent’ even when they don’t, as in the case of Asians born in the U.S. whose only language has been English but imagined to be speakers of another language or ‘complimented’ for their ‘good English’.

Social Mirroring/Immigrant Psychosocial Development

Another way of looking at the problematic of internalized inferiorities is through the lens of social identity formation that is also psychological. In the context of the education of immigrant children of color, Cummins (1996) observes that many learners who lack proficiency in English are subjects not only to judgments about their language abilities but also about their significance as individuals. That is, identity, language status and notions of self-worth are intricately connected. This is not unlike what Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco (2000) have labeled ‘social mirroring’, the results of an imposed assimilation process that embodies the markings of unequal power relations, promoting a negative sense of self. Their argument, which is developed in relation to the shaping of the self-other relationship in immigrant children, is inspired by a psychoanalytic theory of ‘mirroring’ advanced by D.W. Winnicott (1971). Winnicott focused much of his writing on the relationship between the mother and infant adding to the understanding of the formation of identity and the ‘sense of self’. According to him, “the mother functions as a mirror, providing the infant with a precise reflection of his own experience and gestures... Imperfections in the reflected rendition mar and inhibit the child’s capacity for self-experience and integration” (cited in Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983, pp.192-93). Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2000) draw on this theory, essentially an older theory of ‘recognition’ from Hegel, but argue that the ‘mirroring’ function is by no means the exclusive domain of maternal figures (p. 27), since all human beings are dependent on the reflection of themselves mirrored back to them by others. These others mirrors, include nonparental relatives, adult caretakers, siblings, teachers, peers, employers, people on the street, and even media. They continue:

When the reflected opinion is generally positive, the individual (adult or child) will be able to feel that he or she is worthwhile and competent. When the reflection is generally negative, it is extremely difficult to maintain an unblemished sense of self-worth for very long. (2000, p. 27)

Once again, this shows the psychosocial impact on the individual’s sense of self and autonomy resulting from negative attitudes. Extending the concept of ‘mirroring’ therefore can help explain the identity formation of marginalized adults, as their language and culture are constantly derogated as part of assimilation to the social norm, what Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) call the “cultural arbitrary” turned into a universal. In this sense, negative social attitudes and structural

exclusions play a damaging role in the lives of immigrant adults of color and prove detrimental to their ability to participate in the opportunity structure of their new home society.

Such psychosocial processes are also historical processes where the global dominance of English encourages immigrants to think less of themselves and become participants in their own subordination as they become immersed in the dominant racial ideology. Deploying the ‘social mirroring’ concept helps understand how the prevailing judgments about the significance of individuals rooted in prevailing racial narratives can be internalized by immigrant children as well as adult learners who come to believe in their language abilities from the same deficit perspective that targets them. Teresita, a former bank clerk and a pharmacy technician from Sri Lanka was primarily interested in learning English in order to find a job. So I asked her about it:

MV: Have you recently looked for a job?

Teresita: Yes, but I need to learn better English.

MV: Is that what the employers told you?

Teresita: No. That’s what I think. I think my first big problem is not enough English knowledge.

It is significant that when I reminded Teresita of her prior work experience and good command of English to start a job, her response echoed the all too familiar ‘perfectionist’ view:

Yes, I think I have good English knowledge, no any problem. I can manage everything, but if I have very small weakness, they [employers or other employees] try to get opportunity to use that weak point.

Teresita’s narrative is another example of what Freire (1970) calls ‘perceptions of limit-situations’, that is, situations that are *perceived* as barriers and normalized as such by the person who self-identifies with a marginal status.

But it is critical to point out that extrapolating as such is far from implying that the barriers are in the heads of marginalized people rather than originating in their social conditions. For while highlighting the individual’s ‘perceptions’ of limitations, Teresita’s narrative is also a good example of a case of ‘internalized racism’ (Tatum, 1997; Allen, 2005), that is, when people of color come to believe in the stereotypes imposed on their group and the categorizations that have formed the basis of prejudice in the first place. As Tatum (1997) explains:

People of color as well as Whites develop these categorizations. Even a member of the stereotyped group may internalize the stereotypical categories of his or her group. In fact this process happens so frequently that it has its own name, *internalized oppression* (p. 6; italics in original).

In other words, narratives of inferiority are first produced through the construction of powerful myths that as Allen (2005) describes, “cast people of color as fundamentally inept participants in an allegedly just, fair and meritocratic society based on individual competition and reward” (p. 59). These myths of inferiority and the social experiences they create may then form the basis of a belief system by the people of color that can only perpetuate the oppressive conditions. For Teresita, a deficit-oriented outlook to her own language proficiency and potentiality is not only consequential in terms of access to job opportunities, but induce anxieties that may prevent her

from gaining full language proficiency.

Examples of social mirroring were also provided by at least 2 Latino participants who echoed a familiar negative stereotype about Latinos and their views on education and English language mastery. Below is a portion of transcripts of a conversation with Celia about the circumstances of her schooling:

- MV: So, you spent part of your junior high school years in English speaking schools.
- Celia: Yeah .. uhm.. I think I didn't improve my English. I didn't learn it well. like in one year my mom put me in like 3 different schools, they like change me a lot.
- MV: What was the reason for change?
- Celia: Because of..they moved to another house, they have to change me and then they moved to another city in California, they had to change me [starts crying]
- MV: Yes, I'm sorry, that is very hard.
- Celia: And sometimes... I understand my mom, because she was mother and father for me and she was not prepared. Like have education preparation and sometimes, like Hispanics people they don't like uh..give important .. like important for education.

Here Celia seems to be attributing the negative stereotype that Latinos exhibit little sense of priority for education (see Valenzuela for a counterpoint, 1999) although she later expressed a grave concern for her own children's education, declaring that she did not wish to be like her mother.

I will revisit Celia, Teresita and other learners' stories in the following pages. Chapters 4 and 5 addressed the study's research question in terms of student's expectations and the primacy of ESL instruction for adult immigrant students at the research site. The analysis served to look at a portion of the quantitative as well as qualitative data in framing learner motivation and concluded that access to better employment opportunities, either in the short- or long- term, provided the major incentive for learners in enrolling in the ESL program. In doing so, the chapters expanded on the participants' views about the structural forces of U.S. society and how learning the language will help them take the initiative and tap into the pool of opportunities available through this structure. In this relation, the concept of 'investment in English' (Norton Pierce, 1995) was introduced and explained as an alternative term to 'motivation'. However, I also discussed the limitations associated with the social structures and their impact on the immigrant learners resulting from the processes of social mirroring and internalization of oppressions that create the ceiling for learners' potentials. Mainly, the chapter laid the groundwork for further analysis of learner interaction with the IET curriculum and its bearing on student aspirations that will be taken up next.

Chapter 5. Making Sense of Students' Sensemaking

This chapter focuses closely on analyzing themes regarding learners' stance on IET and the extent of its impact on their career related decisions. It interprets data and relevant literature to conduct three lines of empirical inquiry. First, it explores participants' diverse backgrounds and views on what in fact constitutes the higher tiers of employment and their own chances for job improvement. Second, it highlights the dominant discourse and practice of goal setting and emergent themes of efficiency and self-improvement linked to students' uptake of the practice. Third, the chapter considers the broader contextual forces and circumstances under which learners enthusiastically engage, albeit to varying degrees, in a process of self-making and being-made by power relations (Foucault, 1977, 1991). These three strands of analysis dovetail with the conceptual considerations in chapter 2 that outline the evolution of new forms of work along with their so called 'value-adding' components. It also follows previous chapters in exploring the question of what it means for the historically 'racialized' as well as 'classed' immigrant workers to negotiate particular experiences of marginality and the structural conditions to which they point. But first is a descriptive overview of statistics linked to work status and motivational patterns for learners in the target classroom and the control group of students, both at the intermediate level of ESL.

Classroom Survey Results

Survey data analysis in chapter 4 reported the centrality of work and motives associated with employment. Specifically, program-wide results highlighted the importance of job improvement as the primary incentive for seeking English instruction. However, it appears that when checking these results against survey data obtained from the two intermediate level classrooms, a somewhat different pattern of distribution emerges. Below are comparison charts linked to employment status and motivational values across both data sets:

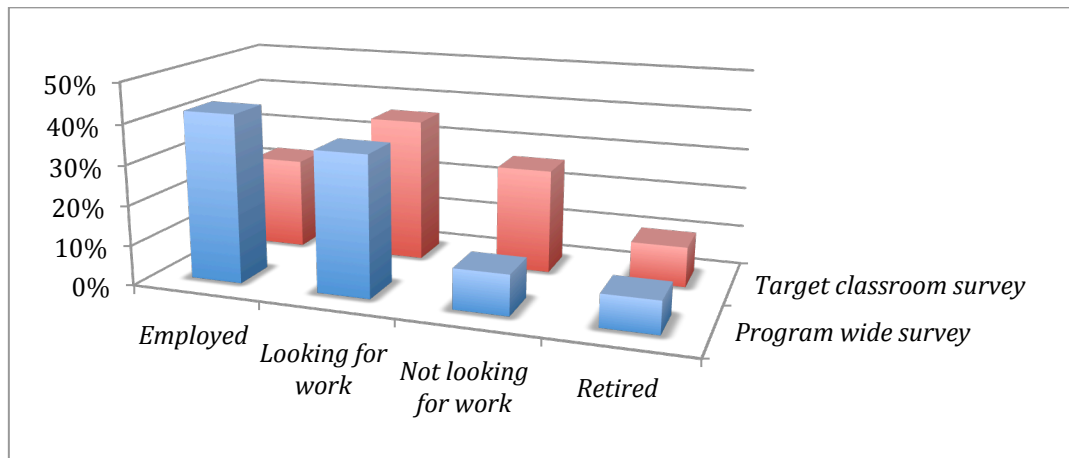


Figure 3

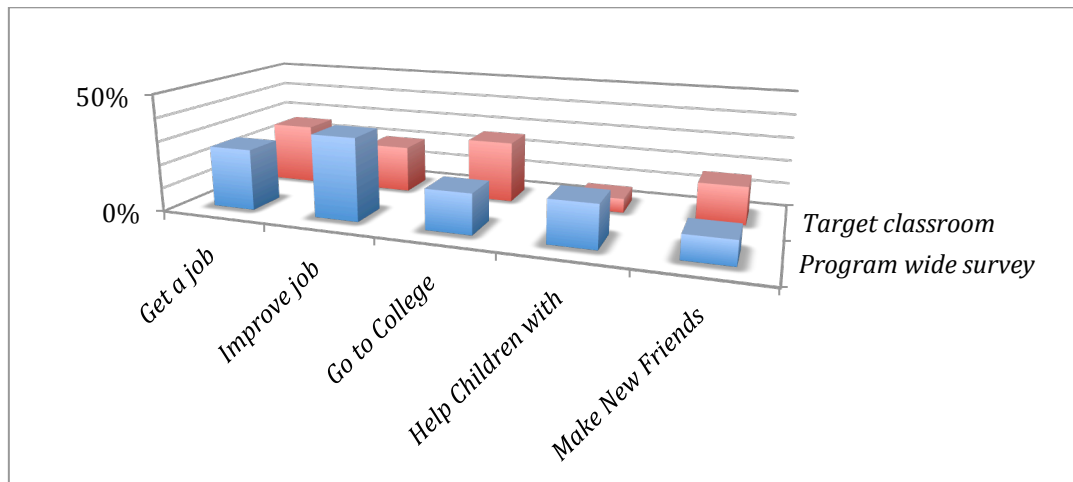


Figure 4

First, the comparison reveals a smaller number of students who are employed in the two intermediate classrooms whereas a slightly greater number is specified as ‘looking for work’. This can be due, in part, to the timing of these classes in the mornings rather than evenings since they potentially pull from the non-working student population available during the daytime⁴⁸. But more important, the comparison also indicates a greater number of students with college aspirations at the higher level of instruction. Although this small sample is not significant enough to warrant the conclusion that subgroups exist within the program, it does point to the possibility that learner characteristics could vary depending on the instructional level. While district demographics indicate 11 years as the average highest year of education for adult ESL students, more than 70 percent of learners in the target group are reported as having either a high school diploma or some form of postsecondary education, with 6 percent of students holding a bachelor’s degree. Perhaps not surprisingly, the latter group was overrepresented among volunteer participants in the study, a fact that admittedly limits the generalizability of this research.

Expanded years of schooling in the native country coupled with previous exposure to English instruction may indeed explain the reason why participants landed in the higher language proficiency class in the first place. But as far as their aspirations are concerned, qualitative data analysis confirms that, for the most part, educational trajectory in the country of origin emerges as a major determinant of academic and professional ambitions. This finding aligns with Chiswick and DebBurman’s (2003) analysis of total schooling acquisition of immigrants. While much of research on the educational aspect of the assimilation process relates to post-migration ambitions and achievements of immigrant generations, (e.g. Kao, Tienda, and Schneider, 1996; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001), Chiswick and DebBurman (2003) claim that economists have made significant contributions focusing on both pre and post-migration schooling patterns of first generation immigrants. Relying on this literature (e.g. Khan, 1997; Hashmi, 1987), the authors argued that pre-migration educational attainment correlates to the first generation immigrants’ investment in education in the host country. Moreover, Chiswick’s (1978) earlier research reported that immigrants tend to make their largest human capital investment within the first few

⁴⁸ It is important to also consider that a good number of ESL students who attend daytime classes in the target program, work in the evenings.

years of arriving in the U. S. He concluded that lower (adult) age at immigration often coupled with duration of residence is a primary determinant of positive investment in schooling. Correspondingly, it is the IET's younger participants and more recent immigrants who seemed to exhibit a higher demand for educational investments specific to the U.S. They were eager to make strategic choices in entering a new culture and in learning the ropes of its social and economic hierarchy.

That said, interview and focus group data also reveal that beyond a reflection of participants' desire to continue and build on past academic experiences, and beyond the purely economic incentives, the linkage between higher number of years of schooling and higher academic aspirations is multifaceted and interact with a number of other factors. In fact, this topic takes us back to the discussion on multiple identities to which we turn next.

Qualitative Data Analysis on Student Aspirations

"I think I'm ambitious lady, I want to do more."

--Lupe Alvarado, ESL student

Located at the two contrastive poles of educational achievement (albeit within a very small data set) were Martha who has a university degree and Elias who stopped short of graduating high school. Looking at their educational trajectory influenced, in large part, by their socio-economic status, one could see that they targeted a distinct set of goals that reflected their divergent histories as well as different levels of investment in learning and proficiency with language. I start with Martha who aspired to pursue further academic goals and was enrolled in the target classroom utilizing the IET approach. She struck me as a sophisticated young woman with a great sense of independence and determination. A newly arrived, newly married immigrant with a college degree and work history in her field of Journalism, she reported having a relatively comfortable childhood in her native country of Mexico where her father worked for the public sector and had a steady job. She attended schools and college regularly, with a seemingly studious disposition and as she self-described a "great capacity to improve". Since the idea of going to college was appealing to her, I inquired about how the interest took root and the reasons for seeking a university education in the first place. What did college symbolize, in her mind, and stand in contrast to? What values did it represent?

MV: When you think back to years past when you were in high school or even before then, can you remember what college meant to you? Why did you pursue it?

Martha: I think so...because I wanted to be successful like the other people who had important positions, we see on TV or hear about. It was about success.

MV: What was 'success'? Other than having important position, how would you tell a 'successful' person from someone who is not successful?

Martha: That we have a better life. I think...maybe I have the opportunity to work for the government and that's open a lot of doors and that make me feel happy that I work and I can pay for a better life.

It helps to consider Martha's upbringing in a financially stable household and ways in which this important factor may have informed her understanding of the higher tiers of employment (i.e., a middle-class job within the public sector).

Conventional wisdom suggests that immigrants are poor, have limited prospects in their country of origin, and so they migrate to other countries where they may earn higher wages even for relatively unskilled jobs. This viewpoint somewhat concurs with the initial formulations of the neoclassical economic model suggesting that international migration is caused by differences in wage rates between countries. For instance, Borjas (1990), a leading economist of migration, introduced the concept of a 'global migration market' in which rational individuals calculate the relative costs and benefits of staying relative to those of finding employment in a foreign destination. But Martha's case speaks to the concerns of sociologists who find economic explanations troubling because they fail to account for some notable empirical findings (McGovern, 2007). For instance, research shows that while income is undoubtedly a factor in migration, most people do not migrate (UN, 2006), and those who do, largely come from regions and countries that are experiencing substantial change as they become increasingly integrated into the international economy (Massey et al, 1998). McGovern (2007) draws on Portes and Rumbaut (2006) to argue that television and mass advertising may generate feelings of 'relative deprivation', and "given that many hold jobs before moving, migrants are more often people who act out of an acute sense of *relative deprivation* rather than absolute poverty" (p. 220, italic in original). It is revealing that Martha's conception of success was informed by images and personalities on TV, as well as her lived experiences with a steady job she held in Mexico. She explained what she hoped to accomplish:

- Martha: I have two goals. My first goal is get my GED, because I want to study nursing. My second goal is working in the newspaper but Spanish newspaper, like freelance writing.
- MV: But do you know how many years you'd need to go to school to achieve that, because there're many specialties of nursing, such as....
- Martha: I don't know (laughter)
- MV: So you haven't done that homework yet, you are not sure.
- Martha: But I don't care (laughter) because I want to do it. I chose nursing because it pays good salary and benefits. It pays pension. But...I like it. In my last work in Mexico when I was working for the government, I was working [for] the Health Department. And..uhmm sometimes I need[ed] to take pictures of the surgery, when I took pictures, I felt good, and.. uhmm.. I felt better when I saw the face of the people when they feel better.

Here we see the manifestation of Martha's multiple identities as a 'middle-class', 'college-going' and later 'college graduate', 'medical reporter', 'healthcare professional', and so forth. These identities were formed in Mexico, and once in the U.S., started interacting with her newfound subjectivities such as 'English learner' and 'immigrant' to inform a new direction in life. However, her lived realities along with educational choices in her native country became a source of inspiration, a concept similar to what Yosso (2005) labels 'aspirational capital'. Yosso defines 'aspirational capital' as "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of perceived barriers" (p. 77). As part of a so-called 'community cultural wealth model'

that refers to an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts that minorities of color possess and utilize, the author includes other forms of capital such as ‘familial’, ‘social’ ‘navigational’, and ‘resistance’ capital⁴⁹. Martha’s expression of aspirations, seem to fit this and other asset-based formulations that emphasize the significance of cultural ties in supporting young peoples’ decision-making (e.g., Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Suarez-Orozco, 2009b). Specifically, when asked explicitly about ways in which her educational background in Mexico impacts future possibilities and her trajectory in the U.S., Martha thought hard and responded slowly:

I think...uhm..I learn[ed] how to write and interview...how they say...write report. But...uhm...most important is...I feel more confident that I get a better job, a job that I want and a job that I can do and I like.

This indicates that Martha is conscious of the significance of her schooling not only in literal but symbolic terms. It suggests that her experiences as a ‘college-educated individual’ mobilized by a ‘college-going identity’ has contributed to a heightened sense of confidence, reaffirming her search for a career that is not only well paying but desirable and intrinsically fulfilling.

In contrast to Martha who was arguably in a position to make strategic decisions, Elias’ choices were markedly limited by both his past and present conditions. First, his educational trajectory in Mexico and consequently his job experience there were characterized by economic restraints and family responsibilities that focused on ‘surviving’ for basic needs:

MV: How did you like the schools over there?
Elias: It was okay, it was different because..eh.. a lot of money.
MV: Wasn’t it free to go to school there?
Elias: Yes, it was free, but...eh...different. I have 4 brothers and sisters.
MV: What did your father do?
Elias: Oh...just working in the fields....working in the fields.
MV: I see. Did you also work in the fields?
Elias: Yes, me, from 14, 15 and my brothers and sisters.
MV: Hmm... No time to go to school.
Elias: No time to go to school (shaking head).

Elias later described himself as an “okay” student who “liked math”, but was unable to stay in school due to family circumstances. Same conditions continued on curbing his chances for pursuing high school or GED credentials in the U.S. He detailed his responsibilities for supporting his family in Mexico by sending them the money he earned in construction field. But most important, he revealed his status as an undocumented immigrant, identifying it as the main barrier standing in his way forward. Still, despite the limitations, when asked about his plans for the next five years, Elias expressed optimism in earning his U.S. citizenship and getting his “papers”, so that he could explore other options:

⁴⁹ Yosso’s (2005) appropriation of concepts such as ‘capital’ and ‘wealth’, have come under question. See Leonardo’s (2010) critique of the uptake of Bourdieu’s (1977) concept of ‘cultural capital’ within CRT’s relationship with class.

- MV: Do you think if you had your papers, you could make more money?
- Elias: Well, if I had my papers, there can be more opportunities for me.
If you get your citizenship, you can apply for different jobs.
- MV: What kind of jobs are you thinking about?
- Elias: Right now I no work for a company, for different guys for example.
- MV: I see, you mean you can do the same job but work for a company instead of private contractors?
- Elias: Yes, if I want, because they pay better. You get pay when get sick.
But I want to learn more English, and then have my own business.
- MV: Do you know if you need a degree or certificate to establish that?
- Elias: I don't know, maybe.

Similar to Martha's claim about the stability of positions associated with government jobs, Elias values reliable work. Regardless of middle-class or working-class status of jobs, features such as a pension plan, medical coverage and sick leave were well known by participants as increasingly limited. Focus group data clearly indicates that students idealized this type of employment to a degree that some would sacrifice a higher hourly pay in exchange for work at a reputable company. Government employment was clearly considered a valuable commodity in a tech-based regional economy known for its insecure, contingent employment (Benner, 2002).

For students like Elias, Pedro and Ramon, all young men of prime working age, the undocumented status meant that their occupational aspirations were out of sync with the realities of the world they now inhabited. While undocumented youth, coming of age in the United States, are actively demanding full inclusion into U.S. society (Bloemraad & Trost, 2008; Seif, 2004), undocumented adults have mostly remained in the shadows. The fear that predominates in the legal consciousness of first generation undocumented immigrants (Abergo, 2011) further exacerbates their access to opportunities, exposing them to the dangers of deportation and thus affecting their sense of belonging and incorporation experiences. Weighing in on the contemporary theories of immigrant incorporation (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Reitz, 1998; Portes & Zhou, 1993) and the influential framework of segmented assimilation⁵⁰, Abergo (2011) concludes that "legal status, and undocumented status more specifically, have yet to be fully examined as central determinants of immigrants' life chances in the United States" (p. 339).

Data analysis for this study suggests that while pre-migration educational trajectory is an important factor in determining post-immigration hopes and dreams for academic and occupational attainment, the context of 'illegality' poses the most serious threat to the realization of these dreams. For instance, although Pedro held out a small hope for following up on his academic skills in accounting, he reached the same conclusion as Elias that it is best and perhaps 'safest' to venture out and become self-employed. They hoped to establish private businesses in the construction field by way of becoming private contractors themselves and hiring other workers for projects that they secured. Likewise, Ramon who signaled his interest in building on prior education in computer technology and his dreams for college conceded that in the short term he might consider self-employment.

It is interesting to observe that more than 30 percent of focal students expressed

⁵⁰ This framework identifies the context of reception. It maintains that governmental policies are secondary to co-ethnic community ties as the most important mode of incorporation. Also, societal reception (through the presence or absence of prejudice) in influencing immigrants' educational and occupational attainment, are shown to be important factors.

entrepreneurial aspirations at the beginning of the semester. This number was not limited to undocumented individuals and, in fact, few more of IET participants in the classroom showed interest in starting their own businesses as the semester got under way. The idea of free enterprise is certainly rooted in the American dream ideology whereby the discourses of choice and personal power play important roles in the decision making process of first generation immigrants (Bartlett, 2007; Merenstein, 2008; Lopez, 2015). However, the entrepreneurial tendencies also reflect ways that students invest in learning English in order to access resources for advancement or survival in the face of grim job prospects. Entrepreneurship, in this sense, becomes a trope for resisting the relations of power that prohibit or limit access to jobs that characterize Taylorism or Fordism of the past.

Still, another dominant theme that emerged even within the constraints of job availability and U.S. residency for some participants was the importance of having ‘meaningful’ jobs as a vehicle to a connection with the larger community. The desire to make a positive impact on other people’s lives, especially offering assistance to fellow citizens from their country of origin, was expressed by the majority of learners. As expressed in a previous citation, Martha drew great satisfaction from witnessing the patients’ recovery, a factor that contributed to her evolving interest in the profession of nursing. Elias also articulated his career aspirations for owning his own business in a language that conveyed a desire to stay connected to his community by training “his Mexican friends” and providing jobs for them.

Likewise, Lupe who had recently obtained legal residency had compelling personal and professional reasons to pursue postsecondary education. Her elaboration on past incentives to prepare for a job as a paralegal in Mexico and in the U.S. also appealed to notions of community:

I was always a good student. I got good grades. My father was a teacher in Mexico. He had a good example for me, he was my inspiration. My father was a really smart person...very smart. I learn[ed] a lot. My goal was to get a degree in Mexico...and I want..eh.. I want my father feel proud [fighting back tears]... I want my feeling of proud...I went to school, because I want to help people with problem. Because I think paralegal is a good option for help[ing] poor people, because sometimes ...sometimes people, eh...sometimes Mexican people in this country need pay for the lawyer a lot of money, for example for immigration. I want to help them (laughter).

Clearly, Lupe’s membership in an ethnic community has a strong impact on her decision-making about future paths. She later identified her goal as completing ESL coursework and continuing on to postsecondary (possibly 4 year college) to fulfill her ambitions in a paralegal-related field.

Against the backdrop of these multiple interlocking forces that I coded as ‘personal’, ‘professional’ and ‘community’ aspirations, the framework of IET was presented to the students in the target classroom. It was premised on the idea of addressing job readiness and workplace training, but also on the assumption that students need guidance to clarify their targeted objectives and ‘realistically’ restructure their priorities. More important, they needed to identify concrete and well-defined steps towards reaching these objectives.

IET and Goal Setting

A central component of the proposed framework of IET is the practice of goal setting, a ‘value adding’ skill that is believed to improve worker production performance (Locke &

Latham; 2006, 2002) and thus increase the efficiency and productivity in the workplace. Linked to the job search process for ESL students, however, the idea is having learners create an outline of established objectives as well as a careful, well-researched, and sequential timeline to carry them out. Hence, students in the target classroom were taught to create profiles that reflected a targeted field of employment and the steps it requires them to take. They also produced a tracking guide that presumably kept them focused on their progress, while marking milestones along the way.

Ramon hoped for a career in computer technology but when it came to forming interest groups, he reported joining the restaurant worker unit due to previous work experience in the food industry. There he found the group activity format especially useful for practicing language skills. He also benefited from the context of collaboration with group members who gave him “smart ideas” about unique job opportunities. Networking and language learning stood out for Lan as well. She joined the healthcare professional group as it represented the closest fit with her entrepreneurial aspirations in owning a nursing home. In-group interaction helped her generate ideas about the process of securing a loan for business.

Another example of an indirect or unintended benefit was presented to Lan and Ramon through the technology-enhanced aspects of IET, designed to complement instruction on job search skills, vocabulary associated with occupations, and scripted problem-solving dialogues at various work situations. The approach and modality utilized in this instance enhanced their language proficiency that was a central goal to them. But beyond that, they were also provided with access to computers and opportunities not only to navigate the internet and advance their computer skills but also to research facts about their area of interest, a practice that often took place in the company of other group members. With a background in information technology, Ramon was keen on spending time in the computer lab and searching the web:

The first time I learned about food trucks..uhm..my friend show[ed] me in the [computer] lab a website with a lot [of] information. He said, you can find part-time, full-time....everything. I saw La Raza Food....but they are in LA. But I can look all the time and find good mobile food business for me. My friend and I can work together.

Lan was also enthusiastic about the opportunities that web searches could provide:

Before, I didn't know about all those things computers can do. When I went [to] research with my group [about] nursing jobs, I like owner nursing home my friends say: you can check the loan online and check if expensive or you may need more money. She showed me to do it.

The collaborative work and networking opportunities cited here illustrate agentic ways that learners engage with each other rather than the prescriptive curriculum and its material. Their appropriation of the group activity format and technology resources reflects a complex interaction between structure and agency. Students did not straightforwardly accept or reject the IET framework or classroom practices. But by leveraging these resources to gain knowledge about their specific interests, they did counter the course directives and in doing so, they resisted the dominant discourse around acquiring middle-skill job training. Their uptake of the technology component highlighted the role of the purposeful human action and unpredictable

outcome of classroom activities (Giddens, 1977), although such interactions targeted an increasingly risky and uncertain future path without the support of traditional work structures that offered job security and fringe benefits (Mythen, 2005; Beck, 1992). Nonetheless, while such risky choices ultimately fit within Ogbu's (1998) 'instrumental adaptation' model, oriented to a way of 'survival' in the U.S. society, participation in the IET class did not alter Lan, Ramon, and most other students' pre-established occupational goals.

Among the remaining participants, Martha and Angelica reacted most favorably to the overall instructional package and especially the activities around goal setting since their career aspirations were related to the celebrated fields promoted by IET. Martha found the healthcare specific teaching material and the emphasis on a career in Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) field the most useful. As the title suggests, CNAs assist nurses with patient admittance and vitals. It is the lowest level credential that one can have in the nursing field and it does not make a person a nurse per se. There is also a category of Nursing Aides who work under a nurse's supervision in nursing homes, assisted living, hospice, hospitals, correctional facilities and other long-term care settings. Both CNAs and Nursing Aides are required to pass a specialized exam to work in the field but the exam is typically only tied to a single course so there is a quicker point of entry. I asked Martha if these were professions she had in mind:

- Martha: No. I didn't know about CNA. I need high school diploma for a short class in CNA and after I graduate I can look for a job.
- MV: Do you know if it makes you a nurse?
- Martha: No, it's different from nurse. For registered nurse I need college classes. But I will do it.
- MV: You mean you will go for CNA or registered nurse?
- Martha: First, I have to be a CNA for get[ting] experience. I need REALISTIC goal. After that, I look for college classes for nursing. (Emphasis her own)

Martha's stance in this excerpt is different from her first interview where she seemed solely focused on academic requirements for a conventional nursing degree. Here she signals a tendency to work as a CNA before attaining a higher academic degree.

She also uses the phrase 'realistic goal' which students in the IET class used frequently. None of the participants in the control group mentioned it, a fact that attests to the IET group's exposure to the phrase and the ideas it represented in the course of lectures and classroom activities. One student provided the example that in a group activity⁵¹ designed to have learners brainstorm on job opportunities in the nursing field, several students voiced their curiosity about career prospects as a CNA, highlighted in the textbook. Other group members shared information about the requirements, training process and income level and together they concluded that it represented a good example of a 'realistic goal' to work towards. They then shared the results with the rest of the class.

Similar to Martha and after exposure to the curricular model for a few weeks, Angelica expressed excitement about a much-needed focus on what she described as "something that is important in the American society". She commented on the advantage of a step-by-step goal setting project, its corollary benefits and relevance to her real-life situation:

⁵¹ Typically, in conducting activities in the IET class, the teacher groups students based on occupational interest, so that members all shared same career orientations.

- MV: You mentioned that this class is changing a lot of things for you. Can you say more about it?
- Angelica: I learned things that I didn't know before.
- MV: What are some examples?
- Angelica: For example, first is to write my goal, that's most important. Then we have to follow different steps to achieve, but it has to be realistic goal to achieve it. Also how to write my resume and also know my qualities, know my skills, I learned how to have [an] interview [for a] job. But in Mexico nobody told me to write my goals, to make a plan and know my skills. In this thing, it is different, it is the way [of] American life. I like it. But..uhm in this thing, I don't feel so confident. Though my English is no good, I have to prepare.

Angelica had explained earlier that having grown up in Mexico, she always envisioned herself as a future nurse. And since she was also motivated to immigrate to the U.S. and heard that “United States needs a lot of nurses”, her “dream was to be a nurse in the United States”. With an associate degree in the field, Angelica indeed succeeded in practicing nursing in Mexico but only for a short time before relocating to California.

Chiswick and DebBurman (2003) identify schooling and language as two important indicators of the ‘international transferability of skills’, which can be viewed as a function of similarities in the labor markets of the home country and the host country. According to them “the more general the skills acquired through schooling in the origin, the greater the transferability to the destination, and hence the smaller the decline in value of skills upon migration” (p. 6). It is difficult to assess the quality of training that Angelica received in Mexico, but judging by her comments, her low confidence in her language abilities also lowers her ability to set higher-level goals and increase the transferability of her skills in pursuing a nursing career. Hence, participation in the IET classroom convinced her that becoming a CNA is the next best alternative.

- Angelica: In here, I cannot work as a nurse. But in this class I learned that I can achieve my goal. This semester was and is great for me, I can think about my skills and what I can do in future. First I have to get a medical assistant training and see what is convenient for me.

Far more than the curriculum or teaching material, Angelica credited the teacher who kept “pushing” her to identify a “realistic goal” and the specific steps to take towards achieving it.

But what is a realistic goal? What are the constitutive elements of a goal or aspiration defined as realistic or rational, and how do students distinguish between that and its dialectical opposite because the implication is that their existing goals may be ‘unrealistic’ or ‘irrational. Reflections on these questions and analyzing data for answers will help us map out the alignment of the pre- and post-IET goals and address the existence of constraining factors.

Realistic Goal-Setting

Generally speaking, aspirations conjure up the notion of ‘dreams’ that are different from realities or what can be logically expected. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) seem to have a similar connotation in mind when making this useful distinction between aspirations and expectations:

Aspirations and expectations are not the same thing. Aspirations refer to desired levels of future performance (what people want to happen); expectations are beliefs about the probable future state of affairs (what people think will happen). Aspirations are less realistic than expectations, since what people subjectively desire, typically exceeds what they rationally expect. As such expectations constitute the fundamental blocks on which future behavioral choices are made. (pp. 215-216)

In this sense aspirations are tied to sheer yearnings and desires, impacting individuals at a deep personal level and satisfying a personal goal. It describes Lupe's wish, for instance, to make her father proud, or Angelica who always dreamed of becoming a nurse, or even Celia's desire to learn perfect English to be 'somebody'. Aspirations, as pointed out above, are broad, subjective and biased, whereas 'expectations' represent the picture of a more accurately defined and objectively detailed outcome that contains measurable nuances and can begin with taking small steps towards the attainment of the overall goal. Thus, considering the varied circumstances that inherently include limitations, expectations refer to what is logically and realistically possible in each individual case. Given IET's insistence on goal setting and rational step-by-step planning, a 'realistic goal' is closest in definition to this latter elaboration on reasonable expectations as a projection of 'probable future state of affairs'. The idea is to encourage students to take a careful look at their unique situations and plan according to what they logically think will happen.

However, given the previous discussion on 'social mirroring' and 'internalized oppression', it is wise to reflect on the extent to which 'reasonable expectations' can be truly 'objective'. For depending on the individual's interpretation of the nature of limitations (i.e., limit situations a la Freire), and the way in which they pose constraints, expectations can vary. For instance, if a job-seeking ESL learner has internalized a sense of inadequacy with respect to her/his English language proficiency or pronunciation skills, the expectation for work at a lower status level of a desired profession may seem realistic when 'in reality' having less-than native fluency and accent may not necessarily stand in the way of achieving the original goal.

Another aspect of 'internalized oppression' that may curtail a realistic assessment of one's strengths and challenges is the way in which adult immigrant students see themselves not only in linguistic and racial categories (Macedo et al, 2006; Goldberg, 1993), but in 'classed' categories'. That is, because of social mirroring process, a racialized individual conceives of him/herself belonging also to a 'classed' stratum whose members share certain economic, social, and cultural characteristics. Some of the participants in the study characterized themselves in terms of the type of work they are expected to perform. For instance, having taken on a number of labor-intensive jobs in the past, Celia made the following observation while imparting once again a viewpoint about the centrality of language proficiency to the availability of opportunities:

- MV: Do you think there are differences in terms of opportunities between the immigrants and nonimmigrants here?
- Celia: They are different because they can speak the language and we have to learn English....But we're...uhm...we're here to work, we are very hard workers. And sometimes the people over here don't want to do it. So we have to do it for them.

Here, Celia seems to be identifying with her group's dominant labor market "fit". While she may not consider the practice fair, she accepts the situation as part of the daily reality she lives. And to the extent that this is true Celia may indeed position herself to fulfill labor market needs.

To be clear, this does not suggest that the participants are in agreement with an essentialized version of their labor market fit, but that the salience of internalized oppression and its subjective nature can take 'realistic' out of the practice of realistic goal setting. For although students may be convinced they have rational expectations about their career prospects and the hurdles along the way, their views on what counts as realistic, reasonable and unbiased can be influenced by past experiences of discrimination and marginalization. As such, they may be effectively nudged towards the lower categories of work that do not truly represent their capabilities. In this sense, any notion of realistic goal setting has to take account of those worker subjectivities that are part and parcel of past traditions of race and class relations of power (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Leonardo, 2004, 2010; Gillborn, 2005).

It is also notable that participants' uptake of the goal setting strategy highlights that they recognize and accept it as an American phenomenon. On the one hand, as Angelica expresses in a previous excerpt, learning to set realistic goals is understood as a "way of American life" and part of the larger project of assimilating the narrative of upward social mobility. On the other hand, data indicates that setting goals is also understood as a prerequisite for 'survival' within the context of a frantic, intense and frenetic society that immigrants have come to know. When asked about the significance of planning, participants recognized their circumstances and the surrounding context as part of the inescapable state of affairs.

Lupe: Before going to class, I didn't know about goals but now I got the ideas about my future because this teacher talks about my goals. She's really good. She helps me, talks to me about my plans for future, because in this country everybody have to work. Everything is fast, fast, so we can't waste time.

Martha: I think goals are very important. I mean it's very different how it works with life everyday. When I was in Mexico..eh... people spend a lot of time with family. When I came here I see that people work a lot and see the family only on the weekend. And that's very different. In Mexico you have maybe just from 8AM to 5PM and then you have all this time, the rest of the day to spend with your kids. This is very hard but it is the way of life [in] America. You have to work aaaall the day. But..uhm... here you need goals and follow the steps to your work...working hard but get to some results, I mean have good salary and better things to buy.

Lan: Goals are more important for everyone because we don't have future without plan, maybe in some countries but not in America [laughter]. Here you need jobs and good plans to get them fast. No person can wait for job because people have too much pay for home, for children, for car.. for everything...everything. This class has realistic goals that me and [my] friends talk about.

There are a number of issues to unpack in this excerpt. For instance, it implies the understanding that the ‘reality’ of every day situations (embodied in the existing conditions) demands efficient measures to speed up the pace of normal life endeavors. In turn, this emphasizes taking responsibility for the importance of work as the means for gaining better purchasing power and an efficient route to meet urgent needs. In practical terms, the processes for career development or job preparation call for plans to better manage one’s time, energy and focus as a way of accepting a new culture for survival purposes as well as assimilating into consumerism norms. But more significant, given the educational context and the schooling milieu within which students are engaged in discussions about goal setting, it is possible that learning and knowledge are taken to be oriented to survival and instrumental adaptation (Ogbu, 1998). By itself, this interpretation has far reaching ramifications in the formations of subjectivities and learner dispositions as will be discussed shortly.

References to the high cost of living, fast pace of life and lack of family time speak to the challenges that learners face in fulfilling their multiple roles as learners, breadwinners, parents and workers. To the extent that IET’s approach to learning and training represents a practical means of confronting these challenges, it appeals to the student population’s sense of urgency especially since it suggests that investments do not necessarily have a long time-horizon to pay off. For some, like Martha and Angelica, the possibility of acquiring middle-skill jobs shortens their wait time to enter the labor market and accelerates their rate of productivity as measured by their purchasing power. Follow-up conversations with Angelica a year after she started the IET course confirmed that she did in fact succeed in acquiring a CNA position and was content working at a clinic in the area. Expecting another child and uncertain about pursuing post-secondary education, she reported enjoying the financial freedom gained from her CNA employment, but wished for a less demanding and more predictable schedule. Moreover, Angelica reportedly sidestepped obtaining her GED by passing an English proficiency test and was told that she was immediately employable. On the other hand, Martha enrolled in the High School Diploma program and was hoping to start her job search (for a CNA or Nursing Aide position) in near future. She expressed the opinion that earning a high school diploma gives her the “freedom to choose many things in future”.

Downgraded Aspirations and Counter-Narratives

Summing up the findings thus far, it appears that depending on their histories and lived experiences, IET participants are impacted differently by this experimental intervention. Specifically, those with greater educational capital in their country of origin seemed to have higher aspirations but were more readily influenced by the promise of IET. For these learners, IET succeeded in promoting minimal training and subsequent lower- grade employment options. This was especially true for learners who initially expressed interest in pursuing postsecondary education in a field that corresponded to fields featured by the IET curriculum. In such cases, language skills, presented the most serious ‘limit situation’ to learners. The foundational practice of realistic goal setting, along with material from assigned texts and group discussions facilitated Angelica and Martha’s decision making to lean towards the lower ranks of professions in their desired field. Earlier, they had spoken of long standing plans for getting secure jobs with salaries and benefits, but by the end of the semester, these plans and their aspirations were downgraded in favor of shorter term and more immediate gains. In this regard, IET appeared to constrain their aspirations, although this assessment is based only on the observed outcome in the short term. It is still unclear whether or not these students will take on further education and subsequent career

advancement.

Data also shows that undocumented status, which applied to a third of the IET respondents, made the practice of IET almost irrelevant to this group, as their residency issues prevented them from pursuing jobs in the ‘middle-skill’ category. At the same time, other participants in the IET group, with or without residency documentation, stayed committed to their original plans but selected aspects of the curriculum that were meaningful to them. Although entrepreneurship figured prominently among this group’s interests, particular features of these interests emerged and developed in the course of collective activities. This took place when students claimed interactive space and connected group discussions to their members’ own lived experiences and future expectations. By utilizing aspects of instruction that had salience for them including the use of technology and networking opportunities and by tailoring the instruction to fit their specific needs, these learners positioned themselves as agentic individuals. They offered alternative interpretations and counter-narratives to those presented by IET -- a finding that is significant in light of IET’s decontextualized approach to teaching and learning that overlooks the existence of larger oppressive conditions such as undocumented status.

In addition, standardized test results for Lan and Ramon who were among the ‘entrepreneurs’ in the IET group indicated the most significant gains for English reading and listening skills among focal students. Measured by the differential between the pre- and post-tests, their reading learner outcome of 11- and 14-point gains were highest among all focal student results ranging from 0 to 14 points. This can be another indication of the way these two students appropriated aspects of instruction, in this case language proficiency skills, which were advantageous to them. Following on this thread, it is relevant to bring up a few important findings linked to the standardized assessment instruments, what they illuminated in terms of classroom dynamics leading to enhanced work-skill proficiency and the ways in which learners made sense of their significance.

Altogether, the analysis of testing outcomes showed substantial differences between the control group (a mainstream intermediate level class) and IET learners’ performances on reading and listening measures. The largest gap was found between reading scores with the mean learning gain of 6.11 for the IET class as opposed to 3.71 for the mainstream group. But the difference is even larger when generally comparing the IET group’s scores with that of students in all 11 classes at the comparable level (N=283). Below are the details of learning gains per the paired score analysis across all Intermediate level courses in the program for the fall 2012 semester.

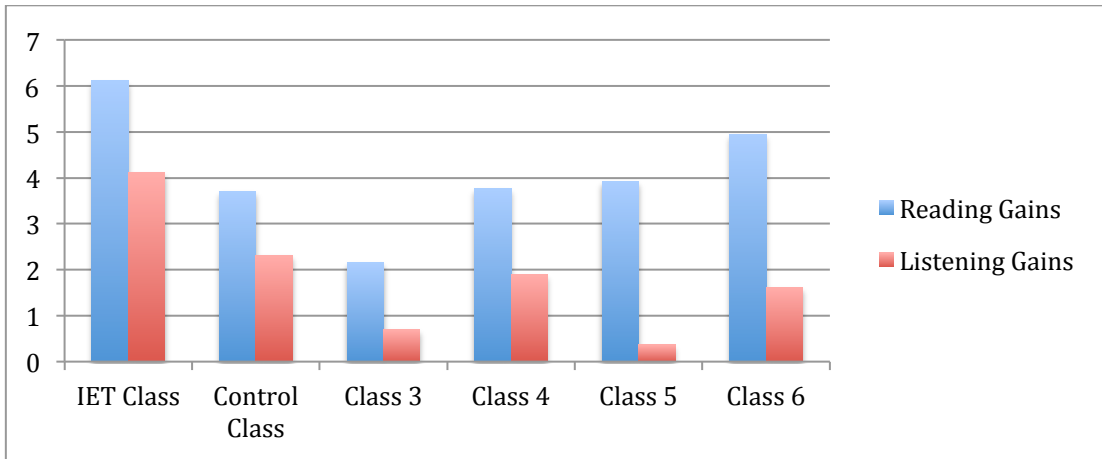


Figure 5

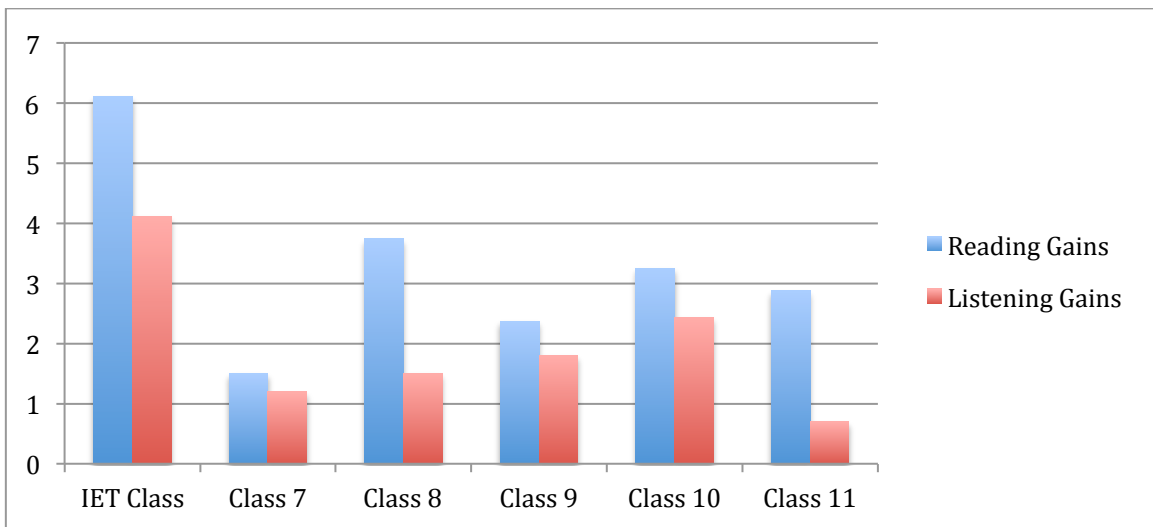


Figure 6

As the charts illustrate, learning gains on both testing measures are highest for the target group.⁵² There are a number of factors that can affect test results. For instance, it is reasonable to surmise that stronger learner persistence (in terms of attending school) among the IET participants can be tied to their better performance. Calculated as the total hourly attendance across the entire semester, IET learners accumulated an average of 158 hours per student, a rate that is considerably higher than the 72-hours average figure recorded for the control group.⁵³ This can

⁵² Listening skills performance is typically lower among students in the program, a feature that remains constant within this data set.

⁵³ Classes meet at different time slots and different sites, pulling learners from populations in slightly different neighborhoods with regard to socio-economic and educational backgrounds. To control for these variations, I only compared the IET class with the control group whose class meets at the same time and site as the IET class..

partially explain the surge in test results, but attendance alone cannot justify the discrepancy in learning gains. In fact, while ‘persisters’ among the IET focal students included Martha and Celia with 232 and 233 classroom hours, Lan and Ramon were top performers with having accumulated only 180 and 119 hours of instruction respectively. Therefore, we need to consider factors such as learners’ prior knowledge, close alignment of instructional content with workforce skills and most important of all, teachers’ familiarity with curriculum standards.⁵⁴

Balancing these considerations, we can see that employability-oriented instruction was indeed effective in raising language competency in work related situations. Given previous discussions, we can also see that learners utilized this knowledge in ways that could accommodate future plans unique to each and every participant. It is true that IET proved successful in persuading Angelica and Martha to obtain and maintain CNA positions rather than pursuing their dream of becoming a nurse, but students’ creative appropriation of IET resources possibly also contributed to the fulfillment of their future expectations both in terms of job preparation and perhaps by continued investment in language proficiency for future educational contexts.

In fact, it came to light through the focus group conversations that learners attached great importance to their test results as an indicator of meeting program benchmarks, qualifying for promotion to the next level of ESL.⁵⁵ With the exception of Lupe, all focal IET students met these benchmarks. In comparison to the control group, a larger number of IET learners (by 25 percent) were promoted to the advanced ESL. Students were pleased to have achieved this by the end of the semester and it became clear that English language proficiency still ranked the highest among learners’ priorities. Punctuated in most cases by their high regard for learning the grammar and structure it provided for assessing their own performance, IET participants evaluated the course mainly based on their language acquisition experience.⁵⁶ For instance, Lupe maintained that she “learned some reading and speaking...but grammar was the best thing that happened in this class”. Ramon recalled that in El Salvador his English teacher “didn’t teach any grammar, just basic questions ‘how are you?’, ‘where are you from?’ and so on”. He believed that the textbook and Ms. Brody’s explanations along with her grammar charts clarified significant confusions for him with respect to some of the grammatical paradigms. This, in his mind, constituted the defining feature of the IET course. Even Martha who was quite enthusiastic about the occupational goal setting aspect of IET as well as dialogues among career-specific group members, and who characterized these activities as the highlight of her experience with this course, explained her reasoning in these terms:

I learned a lot from other students in my group... especially from the Vietnamese people I learn[ed] grammar...they are really, I don’t know how to say it...they are very smart. They say subject...clause.. adverb clause ..It’s easy for me to understand.

⁵⁴ It’s also important to note that teacher character and teaching style plays a role in raising test results, a factor that, in turn, impacts persistence. Ms. Brody, in fact, had a reputation as a good instructor who ‘keeps her students’.

⁵⁵ Students also indicated their desire to gain better results on standardized testing such that the program can earn higher ‘pay points’ and be able to continue offering ESL instruction (teachers in the program often encourage students to do their best on the high stakes tests to help program’s financial bottom line)

⁵⁶ While the assessment results have significant bearing on promotion from one level of ESL to the next within the program, focal students showed particularly persistent interest in knowing their scores on a one-time grammar test administered only at the end of the semester.

Martha's point circles us back to the original emphasis on language mastery and achieving perfection, although the fascination with grammar and focus on learning a decontextualized and prescriptive set of rules adds a new layer to the complexity of participant motivations vis-à-vis the so called 'contextualized' curriculum.

Students' desire to learn the abstract rules of language could be influenced by a number of reasons including adherence to the traditional styles of learning in their countries of origin and in keeping with their native cultures (Caranagarajah, 1999)⁵⁷. In this way, this could be a commentary on the agentive ways they approach instruction and maintain their sense of control. However, as we learned through Celia and others, for the immigrant learner population mastering perfect English in terms of proper sentence structure, grammatical accuracy, near native pronunciation and so forth becomes inextricably tied to issues of identity and personhood. Given their feelings of optimism about the future and faith in the equal opportunity narrative, the perfectionist attitude displays learners' profound sense of personal responsibility in becoming the best language learners and most independent opportunity seekers they can become. This is where adult immigrant learners negotiate their identities and feelings of belonging while exercising their sense of personal power and individual choice.

But this is also where the enduring American dream ideology interacts with the 21st century neoliberal model of personhood that has found its way into the organizational practices and classroom interactions at the discursive level. Learners' motivation for mastering the nuances of language is heightened under circumstances where classroom practices are framed by neoliberal and human capital provisions, which view English as a set of skills and linguistic capital tied only to employment opportunities and economic mobility. Such perspectives also define the parameters of one's personhood and sense of belonging in that they determine what it means to be a good student, a responsible citizen, or a productive worker (Lopez, 2015; Flores, 2013). In her study of adult migrants in an English language program, Ullman (2012) concludes that "national belonging for Mexican migrants in the USA involves producing themselves as neoliberal subjects" and the "learning of English... is central to this struggle for personhood" (p. 466). Likewise, linked to the selective uptake of the employment ideas that IET offers, data analysis for the present study shows that a more subtle, yet far more significant phenomenon that impacts all learners involves the production and reinforcement of a number of dispositions akin to what Foucault (1991) has characterized as 'neoliberal subjectivities'. In what follows, I will first expand on the concept of neoliberal subjectivities and aspects of IET that contribute to producing them, and then present a second set of findings with respect to forms of limitations and control they may ultimately exert.

Neoliberal Subject-Making, a Discursive Production

"[Neoliberalism] is a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedom and skills... [It] has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world."
--David Harvey, A Brief History of Neoliberalism, 2005

⁵⁷ It may also be that the formulaic and formalistic (as well as uncritical) approach to learning English provides not only a sense of familiarity but control over a learning target without the cultural, social, political and, in this case, economic values attached to it. Interrogating these important questions is outside the scope of the present study.

As suggested earlier, the term ‘neoliberalism’, is famously associated with economic policies based on a free market ideology. Its most common use refers to policies such as eliminating price controls, deregulating capital markets, privatization and fiscal austerity (Boas & Gans-Morse, 2009). Guided by the premise that unfettered competition drives economic prosperity, neoliberalism emerged in the latter half of the 1970s primarily in the U.S. and the Great Britain, but also implemented in Chile and elsewhere (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberalism has driven a conception of freedom as an overarching individual and social value while reducing the state function to that of a minimal state (Block & Somers, 2014). Its reach into other corners of the globe also established it as a mode of discourse and cultural logic (Harvey, 2005; Ong, 2006). Read (2009) observes that ‘neoliberalism’ is “as much a transformation *in* ideology as it is *of* ideology (p. 26, emphasis in original).” Drawing on Foucault, Read (2009) argues that a critical examination of neoliberalism must address the transformation of its discursive deployment as a new understanding of human nature and social existence rather than a political paradigm.

Ironically, Foucault’s (1991) discussions on neoliberalism and the discursive production of ideology are formulated in a language steeped in political and economic terminology. He characterizes neoliberalism as a new mode of ‘governmentality’, a manner or a mentality in which people are governed and yet govern themselves.⁵⁸ ‘Entrepreneurs of themselves’ is the operative phrase he uses to describe his formulations. Foucault also speaks of the penetration of the logic of the economic efficiency into the realm of personal life through an emphasis on themes such as self-improvement, entrepreneurship and flexibility. It is this aspect of neoliberal ideology and its intersection with the discourse of language learning and personhood that the remainder of data illuminates.

Foucault’s notion of ‘governmentality’ is useful for this analysis in two ways: First, it facilitates an understanding of the post-industrial culture of work and the mechanisms of subject-formation in the contemporary West. The ‘entrepreneurship’ of the self is in many ways related to the qualities described as ‘value adding’ in today’s work parlance since the term implies self-initiation, performance stimuli, self-determination pertaining both to individuals and work teams, and ultimately self-regulation. Second, it provides a powerful analytical instrument for understanding developments connected to education, specifically as it relates to lifelong learning. Olssen, (2006) contends that Foucault’s conception of governmentality “provides a means of understanding how educational and economic practices mutually condition and adapt to each other” (p. 214).

Foucault aimed to understand the nature of governmental rationalities linked to specific technologies in terms of how collective power was exercised over individuals. He writes, “How”, not in the sense of “How does it manifest itself?” but “By what means is it exercised?” and “What happens when individuals exert (as they say) power over others?” (1982, p. 217)

This is what he meant by government, which referred to a form of activity aimed to guide and shape individual or group conduct. But the nature of the key word ‘conduct’ pertains to power relations and thus points to issues of control. It pertains to directing others’ conduct either through coercion, which at times enacted through strict means, and/or, by “a way of behaving

⁵⁸ In developing the concept, Foucault was inspired by Max Weber’s work. As Lemke (2001) explains, “Weber was important for having shifted Marx’s problem of the contradictory logic of Capitalism onto a level where he discussed it as the irrational rationality of the capitalist society” (P. 192).

within a more or less open field of possibilities” (pp. 220-221). Hence, he writes “The exercise of power consists in guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome” (p. 221). And this is what makes the issue of power “less a confrontation between two adversaries...than a question of government” (p. 221). Therefore ‘governmentality’ comes to mean “ structures of power by which conduct is organized and by which governance is aligned with the self-organizing capacities of individual subjects” (Olssen, 2006, p. 216).

For Foucault, questions of power are also always connected to questions of knowledge. In fact, he uses the two terms together (power/knowledge) to delineate a historical, discursive process through which power is rationalized by individuals and the collective. He describes taxonomies and practices of classification that develop over decades and centuries. According to him, it is over time, space and through different historical modalities that certain formations of power/knowledge come to be taken for granted as ‘regimes of truth’. One of these historically situated formations is neoliberal rationality since the 1970s, and my interest here is its relevance to a style of language education that overtly incorporates training as one model of governing individuals in their relation to the collective. For instance, if we take the theme of economic efficiency as one of the building blocks of the neoliberal ideology in its economic and political iteration⁵⁹, it signifies the necessity of a shift towards the ideal of production of goods and services with the least waste of time and effort (Bobbitt, 1918). Related to adult learners and their anticipated role in the labor market, this shift needs to be reflected 1) in the work of governing actors and the policies they devise, again “within a more or less open field of possibilities”, and 2) in the conduct of the immigrant learners as economically rational individuals who govern themselves (through self-entrepreneurship) while being governed.

Conceivably, the former goal is achieved through the knowledge economy and human capital theories that are the discourses embedded in the policy documents shaping adult and continuing education in the U.S and around the world (Gibb, 2008; Flores, 2013). One example is the pathways model and the integrated approach to education and training that attempts to shorten the academic preparation and entry point to the labor market. Linked to the conduct of actors, the latter objective is aimed at transforming the organization of production by transforming the very relationship between individuals and their labor. This objective is met when workers internalize a self-regulatory system of management with acute attention to the importance of time and effort, that is, when they ‘optimize’ their relation to themselves and their work (Miller and Rose, 1990; Donzelot, 1991). Let us turn to data once again to explore how this can happen locally and at the micro level of student interactions and classroom discourse.

IET as a Situated Form of Governmentality

As mentioned above, learners frequently made reference to the fast pace of life in the U.S. and the paradigm shift it presented from what they had known in their native countries. For many, attending school and keeping up with demands of language learning was a time-consuming and serious undertaking in and of itself. Balancing steps towards career advancement at the same time was viewed as setting multiple goals that would disrupt the natural cycle of their lives and delink them from the rhythm of their bodies and established habits. As part of the efforts to monitor their own progress toward step-by-step goal achievement, IET participants created a ‘progress profile’ in the classroom to stay the course and manage their own time. When

⁵⁹ By itself, economic efficiency is not a concept or value particular to neoliberal thinking. But placing it on par with humanistic and social values is.

I asked about what might stop them from following up on their projected career trajectory as delineated in their progress profile, Celia recapped an observation that some of the students in the focus group shared:

You have to have money, study and don't work, like when I am a mother, I work and I am a student, because it is difficult because you have to have time to study. So I spend time with my two kids, each of them and then I get too tired. I think how can I study now? I study one hour and I get tired.

The apparent difficulty and unfeasibility of the pursuit of multiple goals at this pragmatic level may also explain the expression of uncertainties and indeterminate ways through which learners framed their expectations. It was also at the point of reflecting on concrete plans that their multiple identities, as parents, workers, undocumented immigrants (in some cases), and learners converged as they evaluated and reevaluated their objectives and rearranged priorities. For instance, an added sense of uncertainty was noticeable in Celia's remarks when she continued:

Another thing is that I don't have a social security number. If you don't have the Social security number, how am I going to get a job? If you don't have a social security number, they don't give you scholarship, you need money to go to school.

Here Celia displays her awareness of the limitations of college and career options she could pursue. She offers a truly realistic assessment of a situation that determines what she may or may not accomplish.

Interestingly, however, despite the occasional placing of responsibility for disadvantage onto the larger structure (i.e., seeing themselves as vulnerable subjects), respondents also saw themselves as relatively autonomous and rational beings (as liberal subjects). In her discussion of the 'myth' of the liberal subject, Fineman (2008) conceives of the vulnerability and autonomy as opposing states (Anderson, 2014). However, thinking about the study participants, the concept of governmentality can serve as a theoretical tool to reconcile the apparent tension between the two, since it is primarily the immigrant learners' grave sense of vulnerability in conjunction with their faith in the opportunity narrative that shifts the onus for redressing disadvantage (from the state) onto the governing self.

This message came through clearly in the second focus group meeting at the end of the semester. Students had spent considerable amount of time discussing not just distinct job categories and the logistics of acquiring positions but what it means to have practical and positive attitudes in the context of workplaces. More generally they gained 'practical knowledge' about the culture of work in America. While the program-designated core text offers a chapter or two specifically on the topic of employment, the IET curriculum was devoted exclusively to the vocational content of setting employment goals, finding jobs and keeping them. Through the entire process, features that increase efficiency and are major factors to production took center stage. Students report that characteristics such as dependability, punctuality, diligence, taking responsibility, monitoring oneself, the ability to multitask and manage time and stress were highlighted and discussed extensively in the course of instruction, although it appears that the vocational context of such discussions naturally expanded and permeated other spheres of life. As Celia's comments suggest, addressing the problematic of efficiency in the process of career

advancement shifted on to the level of school, home and family life (Foucault, 1971).

In addition, supplemental reading material and discussion prompts typically included narratives of immigrants who have overcome overwhelming odds to fulfill their ambitions.⁶⁰ The stories portrayed achievements not only through hard work and sheer determination, but by shifting life priorities and adjusting strategies to manage life under existing circumstances. In this way the instruction further reinforced students' understanding of harsh living conditions as both integral and inescapable components of the socioeconomic narrative to which immigrants needed to assimilate. By essentializing these challenges and representing them as natural, given and fixed realities that can only be dealt with through the individual's adaptive skills, IET positioned learners discursively as actors who had to rely solely on themselves and their sense of resilience.

Consequently, the theme of 'sacrifice' echoed well with many students who spoke of revisiting their past strategies for tackling life challenges. Celia mainly blamed her mother for having "wasted" her time and precious childhood years in Mexico when she could have kept her daughter in the U.S. school system to learn English. She was determined to avoid repeating her mother's "mistakes" and "sacrifice everything" so that her own children have access to the best education possible. Lan and Ramon talked about possibly sacrificing their small savings in order to start their own businesses. And Martha, Angelica, and Lupe were adamant about "working hard on their English skills", adjusting their lifestyle and forgoing their free time and simple pleasures in life now in order later to afford the things they desire such as "owning a home", "good schools for kids" and "better things to buy". In this regard, IET's singular emphasis on employment in the context of language learning appears to have created a strengthened representation of the value of English mainly in terms of its monetary return.

In theory and practice, IET promoted a way of life in line with the neoliberal mode of governance. In Giroux's (2014) words, neoliberalism "is driven by a survival of the fittest ethic, grounded in the idea of the free, possessive individual", and that "reduces all problems to private issues, and the only way to understand them is through the restrictive lens of individual responsibility, character and self-resilience" (p. 1). Angelica followed up on Celia's remarks about the stress associated with juggling tasks:

I remember last year I came to night classes, it was difficult because when I leave from work, right away I have to take a shower really fast, eat my dinner really fast, after that I get the bus I come to school. I was doing this for about one and half year. Studying with many stress is not easy, even learning.... But it had helped me to make me strong....it teach me that I can do it.

In other words, one needs only to exercise his or her adaptive skills to fit in. And Lupe, who had recently obtained legal residence for her family including a daughter born with a chronic medical condition, agreed:

I think it is hard...it is very hard, but uhm...it is not impossible. Just do your best, never give up, and keep trying and trying for success. I think I am ambitious lady. I want to do more [laughter]. I have a job, it's really not a good job [laughter] but I have

⁶⁰ One such story was titled *Once a Migrant Worker, Now a Brain Surgeon*. Students shared reactions to the story of an accomplished doctor and university researcher "whose hands used to pick produce; now they remove tumors". The teacher came across this story reported in Today show on television and obtained reprints for all students to read and discuss in class.

the money to pay rent, I have a car, I have clothes, I have a cell phone. But if I study...if I learn English...eh..work hard, I can pay for buy a house, no rent. I think you have to [be] responsible for success...uhm dedicated in every single second of your life. We have to focus on our education, because nobody can build future for us. If you [have to] pay for hospital for children ..eh to care..or get sick, you need good education and good salary. Who will pay?

At this point Celia reflected on a story discussed earlier in the classroom. She was reminded of a *Migrant Worker Turned into a Brain Surgeon* narrative, a real life story that the teacher had relayed in class after watching it on TV. Celia then responded to Lupe's comments:

It's like...uhm.. like Dr. Quinones story. I think I feel similar because I remember that I always tried to be first, tried to be the best in class, because that's the feeling that no one can take away, and I always tried to be the best even if my mother doesn't [didn't] like see it, even here when I come to the U.S. I always want to do my best.

Several important points can be raised with respect to this excerpt. First, one gets the sense from the exchange that ideas are not just expressed but 'developed' in the course of the conversations when speakers volunteer opinions and use the interaction as a framework both to represent their lived experiences and build on each other's understandings. Conveyed here as part of the focus group dialogue, the viewpoints are also embodiments of previous interactions and socialization inside the classroom with the teacher, usually in response to various texts and in the process of countless group and pair activities and class projects orchestrated by the teacher. This is where learners deliberated the vocational content, shared their experiences of hardship along with occasional achievements, reevaluated and adapted their views when deemed necessary and, in effect, co-constructed ideas on how to resolve life challenges. Angelica highlighted the participatory aspect of this process by noting: "In this class I learned that if my classmates can do it, I can do it too."

Second, the narratives paint a picture of individuals engaged in a discursive process of re-inventing themselves. Specifically, Lupe's short but packed rendition of this image embodies a number of neoliberal ideals such as ambition (read: competitiveness), individual initiative, consumer sovereignty, responsibility, and ultimately self-control, all of which are articulated in a language of self-help. In aspiring to this form of autonomous individualism, she strives to become an 'entrepreneur of herself', an independent actor who relies heavily on her own conduct and use of resources through hard work and personal strength. This notion of self-entrepreneurship is related, but somewhat distinct from merely having the entrepreneurial aspirations that Pedro and Elias or even Ramon in the IET class exhibited. Although all these respondents share the neoliberal element of 'flexible work' (Lopez, 2015; Flores, 2013), data shows that Pedro, Elias and Ramon's motivations were primarily rooted in the idea of starting their own business as a way of circumventing their residency documentation issues. On the other hand, Lupe seems to feel empowered by the 'choices' that she is presently making as well as those that her focus on education will ultimately allow her to make.

Third, learner interactions in the sample data further suggest that IET's employment-oriented model contributes to producing neoliberal subjectivities by way of reinforcing a seemingly logical link between the ultimate goal of learning English and material prosperity (Chun, 2009; Lopez, 2015). It recalls Lemke's (2001) widely quoted characterization of

neoliberalism as a “political project that endeavors to create a social reality that it suggests already exists” (p. 203). Given the sociocultural context of language learning, students’ uptake of IET’s neoliberal discourse is reflected in the way they frame their expectations for future attainments. Although learning to earn the means of survival is the highest priority for all students, the neoliberal agenda presents a standard of personhood that constructs citizens as consumers while marketing English as a valuable commodity with a high rate of return on learner investment (Villanueva, 2000; Baynham, 2006).

In the final analysis, students are encouraged to think along the lines of efficiency models and the neoliberal cost/benefit paradigm (Lemke, 2001) that normatively constructs and interpellates them as entrepreneurial actors with a strong sense of freedom and the responsibility that comes with it. In this regard, Wendy Brown (2005) asserts that:

[Neoliberalism] carries responsibility for the self to new heights: the rationally calculating individual bears full responsibility for the consequences of his or her action no matter how severe the constraints on this action—for example, lack of skills, education and childcare in a period of high unemployment and limited welfare benefits. (p. 42)

Correspondingly, IET participants who typically confronted childcare, unemployment and education related constraints, appeared to make attempts at creating a form of ‘managed life’ characterized by individual autonomy and self-care.

Together along with interview responses, data from the second focus group meeting was qualitatively different from the first round. Although a mix of focal students from both the mainstream ESL and IET group participated in the group meeting, IET respondents set the tone for the discussion around the merits of self-reliance and careful planning. Typical phrases included “action plan”, “setting realistic goals”, “tracking progress”, “[not] wasting time” and indeed “[being] responsible”, “ambitious”, and “believing [in oneself]”. The sense of community attachments that was expressed earlier seemed to have collapsed into the personal and professional ambitions while ‘achievement’ became more and more about personal success in the financial realm. Although the preference for finding permanent salaried work with benefits was still suggested and endorsed by some participants (e.g., Teresita and Vanita) the consensus was built around the rarity of finding these jobs and the need to focus on more ‘realistic’ prospects. Indeed, entrepreneurship and the flexibility that it offered presented a viable alternative and remained a dominant theme during these conversations since almost half of all focal students were aspiring to establish their own businesses by the end of the fall semester.

Clearly, the direct translation of neoliberal ideology into educational practice in this case cannot be entirely attributed to the effect of instruction in one short semester. And neither can we disregard the role of students’ counter-narratives and the way they negotiate their multiple, disjunctive identities vis-à-vis the practice of IET. But here we might remind ourselves of the Dream ideology, the exclusively American principles of personal responsibility and freedom that first generation immigrants continue to believe in and use as resources for making sense of their experiences. The development of self-managerial skills and cultivation of dispositions in line with them are indeed slow discursive processes that take place at the micro level of everyday socialization, but they build on the immigrant language learner’s optimism and faith in the fairness of the system, what Lopez (2015) has labeled more recently as “enduring narratives of immigration” (p. 101). Drawing on Ullman’s (2012) study of Mexican migrants, Lopez (2015)

maintains that:

Neoliberalism has reworked the notions of the American Dream through its emphasis on monetary success, personal responsibility, entrepreneurship, and flexibility. The Neoliberal American Dream is not concerned with questions of cultural assimilation, social integration, or civic participation, as the public sphere and collective action are not part of the neoliberal equation for personal success and accumulation of wealth. (p. 108)

It seems reasonable to argue that in the absence of substantive and critical interrogation of barriers to achievement, the resulting long-term effect of IET's neoliberal approach to vocations and vocational language training entails a false sense of personal power that can ultimately limit one's ability to question the role of larger structural constraints, let alone participate in collective activities to confront them. Of course, this can become a crisis for democracy in a general sense (Giroux, 2014) as the notion of 'personal success' defined by the accumulation of wealth becomes the singular concern for the calculating entrepreneurs of the self. While fulfilling the labor need for the employers, the neoliberal trend can constrain the individual's long-standing ambitions by the lure of shorter-term solutions. Lipman (2011) and others have asserted that neoliberalism "redefines democracy as choice in the marketplace and freedom as personal freedom to consume" (p. 10). Examples of the ideological consequences of neoliberal discourses figured prominently in the focus group discussion such as when Lupe defined a 'better life in America' as a:

better life, when you only work 8 hours, you spend time with your children and when you see something in the store, you have money to buy. It's better life for me because in the United States you have-eh-like ten kinds of shoes, many things but in Mexico, you have only one choice.

In fact, after obtaining her "papers", Lupe had shown great confidence in pursuing academic goals and exhibited strong community aspirations⁶¹, but eventually became interested in setting up her own flower shop as a short-term alternative to the longer trajectory of pursuing postsecondary education in the paralegal field. She later reported getting the initial inspiration from other women participants in the IET classroom who encouraged her to take steps towards financial independence. Some of these participants stayed in touch long after the IET classroom held its last session.

Lupe's trajectory and the formation of her identity as an entrepreneur of the self, exemplifies the way that individuals act, not just in relation to present events and material relations, but also in relation to their interpretation of past events, life stories and consequences, all of which take place on various timescales. Jay Lemke (2000) maintains that meanings are made within an ecosocial system that includes other people and various resources. According to him, "the formation of identity or even fundamental change in attitudes or habits of reasoning cannot take place on short timescales... It is the longer-term processes that determine for us the basic human social development (Lemke, 2000, p. 282). Drawing on Lemke, Wortham (2006) describes how social identification and academic learning can deeply depend on each other. He

⁶¹ Recall that she was working part time at a flower shop but was planning on becoming a paralegal, partly to help out her fellow Mexicans resolve their immigration issues.

maintains that the concept of ‘timescales’ helps clarify the relation between widely circulating models of identity and personhood and the versions of these models that occur in local contexts such as the classrooms:

Processes relevant to understanding meaningful human action takes across various characteristic time intervals—from the milliseconds required for neuromuscular activity, to the seconds required for ritualized interactional coordination, to the days and months required for group consensus-building, to the years required to the development of neuroses, to the centuries sometimes required for transformation in socio-economic systems. (pp. 8-9)

In other words, meanings are made within the classroom ecosocial system not just horizontally at the socialization level and through complex processes of interaction between students, teacher, and texts, but also vertically across the social, economic and historical timescales.

The IET classroom possessed its own emergent patterns. There were new routines that emerged, new social/occupational groupings and the typical interactions that sustained them, new texts were introduced, special wordings and phrasings were developed and used repeatedly. At least one social grouping was formed, which lasted longer than the classroom community. I have drawn on the data to show that throughout this process learners developed neoliberal identities and self-regulating dispositions, but their subjectivities were not constructed in a vacuum. Students had pre-conceived notions of personal choice and individual responsibility that were remnants of years past. Their understanding of their place in the social strata and scope of capabilities were informed by a long history, marked by complex relations of race and class. As a result, their English language education became inextricably tied to their sense of personhood. Across the timescales of many years and decades and over a century, starting with the rise of Americanization centers in the early 19th century, first generation immigrants relied on language mastery to mediate their access to the American dream that promised them equal opportunity, social integration, and material prosperity in exchange for hard work and resilience.

The neoliberal prototype of language education represented in the experimental project of IET built on these existing convictions. It did so to reinforce a sense of personal power and individual responsibility that are commensurate not only with a post-Fordist economy but also the ecosocial system that maintains it. IET parallels the production of a neoliberal subject that fits the political and economic context of our current socio-historical period (Flores, 2013). Thus, provisional and contract work are promoted to fulfill the demand for flexible workers and lifelong learners to perform service-oriented jobs for sectors such as healthcare. This chapter reported on data analysis to indicate that all learners had preconceived notions about the kind of stable jobs that would suit their specific needs, but some downgraded their aspirations at least in the short term. These students either settled for contract work in favor of what they deemed as more achievable objectives, or in some cases pursued entrepreneurial options.

I also used Foucault’s concept of governmentality to analyze the role of IET in a discursive creation of neoliberal subjectivities characterized by a strong sense of control and self-help. The ‘neoliberal American dream’ is the phrase that some scholars (Morgen & Gonzales, 2008; Lopez, 2015) have used to describe a redefinition of past renditions of the achievement ideology to signal a new process of subject-making that hails individuals to reduce their burden on society and build up their own human capital to become entrepreneurs of themselves (Ong, 1996). Findings in this chapter shed light on the reproductive powers of IET as an example of a neoliberal educational discourse, while also taking account of the spaces for agency and self-

determination. I will have more to say on the structure/agency duality aspects of the study in chapter 6, the concluding chapter, to which we will turn next.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

“Whoever observes, does so from a given point of view”

--Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom*, 2000

On the subject of the ‘neo-liberal empire’, its impact on educational policies and the need to answer more complex and compelling inquiries about knowledge, Joe Kincheloe (2008) poses the following questions:

- How knowledge is produced?
- Where does it come from—who produces it?
- How does it find its way into the curriculum?
- Who benefits from students parroting back to the authorities?
- In what ways does it serve the needs of the neo-liberal empire?
- What is the role of interpretation in the confrontation with this knowledge, what does it mean, what does it tell us about the worldview of those who produced it? (p. 4)

This dissertation’s concern about IET as a new form of vocationalism was, in part, an attempt to address such questions around the knowledge production processes that target the adult immigrant language learners. As curriculum scholars point out, any approach to curriculum development reflects a certain view of learners and learning (Apple, 2004; Kliebard, 2004). Very often these views are implicit in the way curriculum is developed and structured (Anyon, 1980) in the choices about content and goals (Zimmerman, 2002), and in the patterning of social relations in the classroom (Fineberg & Soltis, 2009; McDermott, 1987). The study looked at IET and its quest for training the students for middle-skill jobs as a vocational approach that reflects certain views of the immigrant adult learners, on one hand, and their pursuit of learning English, on the other. It will be helpful to approach the two strands separately.

IET’s Views of Learners

While the question of shifting aspirations was at the center of inquiry, the historical account in chapter 2 was aimed at establishing a trajectory of the complex interplay between race and class in constructing the identities of immigrants of color, while exploring the impact of this process on educational policy trends. The focus on the century-old trajectory of a race-based tracking system was necessary to describe a changing social order determined by new economic and racial structures that defined what should be taught at schools and what ‘official knowledge’ should be (see also Apple, 2012).

Within this perspective, IET was conceptualized as a step in the direction and tradition set forth by past vocational frameworks for schooling that revealed a series of assumptions about immigrant language learners as classed individuals whose future economic roles can be predetermined (Holzer & Lerman, 2009; Chernus & Fowler, 2010). For instance, it is certainly the case that immigrants, even those of the same nationality, are frequently divided by factors including social class, circumstances of their departure, length of stay in the U.S. and educational background (Suarez-Orozco, 2009a; Portes & Rumbaut, 2005). Participants in the study were no exception although they clearly share more group commonalities in comparison to the broader collective of immigrants in society. But reflected in the *Career Pathways* blueprint, state officials tend to lump together this diverse spectrum of individuals with diverse characteristics as

part of a data set on student demographics for a low-skill immigrant of color population. Primarily, by virtue of the school location within a specific zip code, they then classify and describe the group as both in need and in search of middle-skill jobs within the service industry. It is possible that the group is also considered at-risk of becoming future welfare recipients.

The study demonstrated that while demographic statistics are used to rationalize ‘second chance’ initiatives like IET, a closer look at the same data not only reveals significant disparities among individuals, but offers important clues as to how and why they imagine their future and potentials for success differently. For example, data analysis suggested that educational trajectory in the country of origin was one such factor that set the learners and their aspirations apart.

At the same time, I maintained that the grouping of students based on predicted job destinies was also the legacy of a racial ideology that intersected with the emerging class divisions in the early 20th century America. In examining the rise of vocational models such as IET with sole attention to the salient dimension of economic class, one has to caution against falling into the trap of a ‘grand conspiracy theory of education’ and a reductionist view where class leadership and authority, under all circumstances, dominate all aspects of learners’ occupational trajectories. There is a real danger, as Hall (1996) warns, to presume a priori a necessary correspondence between economic infrastructure (i.e., the base in Marxist Theory) and the political and ideological superstructures that support it. According to Hall (1996), such a theory of correspondence should be based “on those historically specific mechanisms-- and the concrete analysis of those historical ‘moments’-- through which such as formative relationship between structure and superstructure comes to be forged” (p. 332; italics in original). The articulation between the racial and class structures, and its impact on individuals’ schooling experiences in the U.S. are reflected in Leonardo’s (2013) assertion that “the economy (re)produces race as much as race articulates with the productive system” (p. 74). The resulting educational picture, he argues, suggests a complex and deeply intertwined relationship, “a coordinated but awkward dance between race and class”, representing “a dilemma around which educators and students twirl and spin” (p. 429-430).

In that vein, the emergence of recent modes of curriculum-making as exemplified by IET, cannot be explained adequately by focusing on capitalist relations of domination without giving considerable attention to the historical development of racial ideology in maintaining the U.S. social order.

Highlighting this process was critical on its own merits as it helped explain the motivations behind the *Pathways* initiative. But it is also essential as a reflection point in understanding the resultant process of social mirroring (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2000) and learner’s meaning makings within an ecosocial system (Lemke, 2000) that impacts their perceptions of themselves and their limitations. I also concluded that such processes of internalization takes place on various time scales and through circulating models of identity and personhood (Lemke, 2000; Wortham, 2006).

IET’s Views of Learning

The perspective that IET takes to ‘education’ also reveals a certain view of the task of learning as a purely economic endeavor. Learning in general and learning the language in particular are directly tied to economic concerns and to the individuals’ future earnings. From a broader perspective, this view of learning has become part of the century old movement that Apple (2012) characterizes as the following:

Educators have witnessed a massive attempt—one that has been more than a little successful—at exporting the crisis in the economy and in authority relations from the politics of dominant groups onto the schools. If teachers and curricula were more tightly controlled, more closely linked to the needs of business and industry, more technically oriented., the problems of achievement, of unemployment, of international economic competitiveness., and so on would largely disappear. . . . (p. xix).

Seen in this light, the notion of increased productivity, the ultimate goal of business and industry, has also become the ultimate goal and driving force behind curriculum design and school practices. This study further elaborated on the rationale focusing on the current and looming skills shortages of workers for the middle skill jobs that are claimed to be undermining U.S. competitiveness in the global economy since at least *A Nation at Risk*. Kochan, Finegold, and Osterman (2012) contend that such shortages have caused firms to shift their operations abroad. But they also contend that for most of the 20th century, people obtained marketable skills and achieved prosperity on the job and through their employers. Although post-secondary education and vocational training provided a path through which graduates achieved sharpened skills, the task of training workers for newer skills clearly fell within the purview of company responsibilities:

By promoting from within, firms enabled workers to progress to higher-level occupations. Unions negotiated career ladders that were linked to skills and seniority and they joined employers at an occupation or industry level to host apprenticeships and other training programs. The system ensured an adequate flow of new talent equipped with state-of-the-art skills. . . . But as unions declined, so did apprenticeships, other union-employer training programs, and promotion from within. (p. 35)

Despite this history, however, the conventional wisdom for the 21st century skill development still holds the belief that schools must be given a full load of responsibility for competitive workforce development, combatting poverty (Holzer & Lerner, 2009) and immigrant integration (Center for Migration Report, 2013). The cry for middle-skill job training has indeed consolidated forces between U.S. businesses and government on school reforms. Such efforts are exemplified by the *Pathways* approach that promotes skills-specific training programs to help the academically unprepared students enter the middle-skill labor market to fulfill the in-person service job demands.

It seems logical to believe that international competition would be won by nations with the most (and best) ‘value adding’ symbolic analysts (Reich, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 2010), and not in-person service workers whose work is performed from person to person and cannot be outsourced in the first place. And as to the problem of poverty, education deficits have been shown to have little to do with changes in the distribution of wages (Anyon & Greene, 2007; Mishel & Rothstein, 2007). It has been argued convincingly that income inequalities are not the result of changes in the distribution of human capital—that some have invested more in their education and training than others—but due to the changing structure of the job market (Frank & Cook, 1996; Brown, 2006; Brown et al. 2008; Means, 2015).

But beyond such inconsistencies, the emphasis on a purely functional form of education to assimilate the immigrants to the economic norms of existing society is noteworthy as the policy perpetuates the consolidation of schools and the notions of efficiency that is the legacy of

past traditions of tracking (Oakes, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Apple, 2012). In fact, the rise of *Pathways*, cannot be understood outside the dynamics of tracking practices and in parallel with the realities of class, race and unequal power relations that ultimately promote a greater concentration of students of color within occupational fields in the lower ranks of the new labor division.

The study demonstrated that the neoliberal curricular prototypes appear to be based on earlier social efficiency models that focused on educating the immigrant while limiting ‘waste’ in education culminating in Taylorism. The notions of productivity, efficiency and the framing of educational urgencies from a human capital perspective are common grounds characterizing both industrial and post- industrial eras (Bobbitt, 1918; Lazerson & Grubb, 2004). Such similarities become all the more striking once we acknowledge that immigration is, as the legendary U.S. labor leader Samuel Gompers insisted, fundamentally a labor problem (cited in McGovern, 2007, p. 218). McGovern insists that “the influence of economics is becoming increasingly pronounced, not only within the academic literature but also in the formulation of immigration policy” (2007, p. 218).

That said, traditional values, workplace norms and dispositions that once served the Fordist economic structure and required the exertion of control from above (Edwards, 1979), may no longer fulfill the post-Fordist demand for a new skill set capable of instilling a logic of discipline and self-control (Foucault, 1977). The study’s data point to the emergence of IET’s articulation with the new iterations of the discourse of lifelong learning, what Lambeir (2005) describes as ‘permanent education’ becoming a new kind of power mechanism. According to Lambeir (2005), “learning now is the constant striving for extra competencies, and the efficient management of the acquired ones” (p. 349). Olssen (2006) builds on Lambeir’s argument, to conclude that

[U]ltimately lifelong learning shifts responsibility from the system to the individual whereby individuals are responsible for self-emancipation and self-creation. It is the discourse of autonomous and independent individuals who are responsible for updating their skills in order to achieve their place in society. (p. 226)

Correspondingly, the study concluded that two of the focal students, Martha and Angelica whose pre-established aspirations were effectively constrained by IET, experienced this change through building on the more general and thus more transferrable aspects of their education in their native countries. They reportedly succeeded in ‘updating’ these skills and obtaining CNA positions through one in the U.S. but outside the post-secondary educational system.

Altogether, while optimal productivity as the object of learning is still the bottom line, IET exemplifies a shift in the mode of control to achieve this end goal. The Fordist system required power to be exercised from above and generally by the employers who decided on the content of lessons for English learners (Korman, 1967; Carlson, 1970). As discussed earlier, the end goal was exerting social control through a process of subject-making that teaches the immigrant how to conform to the existing rules in order to achieve the American identity. As social control is in itself not necessarily objectionable (Apple, 2004), the key lies in the goals of certain forms of control practiced in schools. For instance, Americanization classes, sponsored by YMCA, were initially held at factory sites. Korman (1965) documents that after 1900, companies like Illinois Steel, Allis-Chalmers, and International Harvester introduced more systematic safety, health, and welfare programs through the classes. In contrast to this form of

‘control from above’, the new curricular models strive to achieve the ideal of ‘control from within’, that is, through placing the responsibility directly on the learners/future workers (Foucault, 1971). This fact signals a transformation in the *mode* of control by making the individuals self-disciplined, responsible for expending effort and accountable for the outcomes of their learning and labor.

The Implications of IET’s Views for Learners and Learning

Looking at the *Pathways* and specifically IET at the classroom practice level, it seems inevitable that its views of the immigrant language learners and the task of learning result in a differentiated curriculum. First, judging by the textbook material and the participants’ reports of actual practice inside the classroom, data revealed that the notion of post-secondary schooling and the pursuit of a college credential to qualify for higher paying jobs was rarely addressed. This concept, so fundamental to the *Pathways* rhetoric, was in fact drowned out by a focus on finding job opportunities that take the shortest amount of time for skill development. And neither was the instruction geared, as it claimed, to attaining the language proficiency required for completion of specific work related tasks. Although respondents described practicing sample utterances and language structures used in the workplace, such training remained general and mostly transferrable to similar circumstances with minor variations. But first and foremost, completing tasks such as filling out generic job application forms, resume writing, and preparing for interviews took the center stage. Again, it appeared that the thrust of the course offering was centered on presenting the fastest and most efficient turn-around time to employment, especially targeting a student population presumed to be low-skill and, more importantly, presumed to *remain* low skill

Second, through the acquisition of soft skills including goal-setting, time and stress management, prioritizing, and multitasking, participants were encouraged to adapt their personal and professional lives to the realities of their situations vis-a-vis the existing material conditions. IET presented a new skill set of ‘survival skills’ designed to attune learners to a fast-paced, fast-changing and risk-laden life style, predicated on the need of individuals to become immediately employable and more important, to *stay* employable. Warding off against the prospects of precarious, unstable, and mystified future jobs constituted the underlying logic behind the IET curriculum formulation (Hughes et al., 2001; Strawn, 2011). And in the face of harsh realities and material conditions that were perceived by these language learners as unavoidable and predetermined, they were encouraged to continually assess and ‘update’ their existing skills in order to stay competitive, vigilant, and prepared to avert future uncertainties (Lambeir, 2005; Olssen, 2006).

Seen in this light, it seems logical for those in charge of curriculum development to work towards improving students’ adaptability skills. Although the participants demonstrated most positive outlooks and expressed grave optimism (as discussed at length earlier) about their job prospects, IET’s assumptions appear to be negative, with its overall approach, deterministic and pessimistically framed. Such sense of determinism is both an ideological construct that obscures and individualizes underlying structural tensions and contradictions (Brown et al., 2008; Means, 2015), and as Freire (2000) describes, an “immobilizing ideology of fatalism . . . which insists that we can do nothing to change the march of socio-historical and cultural reality because that is how the world is anyway” (p. 26). Through an introductory reflection in his last book, *Pedagogy of Freedom* (2000), Freire expands on this state of fatalism:

The most dominant contemporary version of such fatalism is neoliberalism. With it, we are led to believe that mass unemployment on a global scale is an-end-of-the-century inevitability. From the standpoint of such an ideology, only one road is open as far as educative practice is concerned: adapt the student to what is inevitable, to what cannot be changed. In this view what is essential is technical training, so that the student can adapt and therefore, survive. This book which I now offer to those who are interested in this theme is a decisive NO to an ideology that humiliates and denies our humanity. (p. 27)

It follows logically then that such forms of fatalism also depict ‘problems’ as superficial interpretations of the inevitable way that the world is, and therefore, any solutions proposed to solve such problems naturally target only the symptoms of a deeply rooted structural condition. Thus the celebrated notions of promoting students’ ‘critical thinking’ and ‘problem solving’ skills simply become a tool in the hands of the powerful few who dictate the curricula to further impose the banking or transmission theory of school knowledge and provide a sorting device to reproduce inequalities (Freire, 1970; Aronowitz, 1998). What is missing is imagining new ways of posing questions and solving the problems critically. Through what Giroux (2013) calls a ‘politics of disimagination’, IET ascertained that the students’ point of reference remain fixed on market aspects of social life and the cost/benefit framework that the neoliberal economic rationality dictates. In Giroux’s words, under such circumstances,

[not] only have the points of reference that provided a sense of certainty and collective hope in the past largely evaporated, but the only referents available are increasingly supplied by a hyper-market-driven society, megacorporations and a corrupt financial service industry. The commanding economic and cultural institutions of American society have taken on what David Theo Goldberg calls a "militarizing social logic." Market discipline now regulates all aspects of social life, and the regressive economic rationality that drives it sacrifices the public good, public values and social responsibility to a tawdry consumerist dream. (para.1)

Thus it comes at no surprise that the very choice of school knowledge, the act of designing classroom environments, though they may not be done consciously, are based on both ideological and economic presuppositions which provide common-sense rules for students as well as educator’s thoughts and actions. Furthermore, it became clear that inherent in the vocational discourse of IET was the achievement of the ideals of ‘learning to earn’ and therefore, ‘learning to consume’, that perpetuates the very condition of the hyper-market-driven society.

Students’ and teacher’s View of IET

The study’s research questions were designed to hone in on adult learner intentions and shifting aspiration linked to their ESL learning experience in the IET classroom. The potential saturation of classroom discourse with employment-centered content was central to this experience, hence conducting the inquiry required an understanding of learner’s interpretation of this content and its relevance to their professional lives. The vocational discourse, its historical precedence and current iterations represented the ‘system’ or alternatively, the element of ‘structure’ in the structure/agency duality. However, given the nature of the inquiry inherent in the research questions, attention should also be paid to the role of the ‘individual’ as the agent and the subject. After all, a singular focus on the system is a one-sided approach and fails to

contribute towards establishing any kind of correlation, if not causal explanation in how the learners take or shift their positions vis-a-vis the workforce demands.

Among other sociologists, Anthony Giddens (1979)⁶² has effectively raised concern about minimizing the role that purposeful human action plays in the explanation of social events. His argument illuminates a key difference between a fairly standard version of a causal explanation as expressed between the relationship between a flat tire and a nail in the tire, and the example of a person going into a store to buy a loaf of bread⁶³. Whereas in the first instance the explanation is clearly causal, in the second, it is the person's intention to buy the bread that 'caused' him to enter the store in the first place. In other words, the agent's wants are the mediating factor between the act of entering the store and the causal consequence of buying the bread. Through this example, Giddens reiterates the fact that "there can be no explanation of social need that does not presuppose some individual want as part of the causal explanation" (p. 37).

It is fair to say that the study established this collective 'want' on the part of learners as the need to improve language proficiency first and foremost, and to utilize this capability to carry on their future plans at later stages of career development. It is true that participants were all impacted to varying degrees by the course content, which was in turn informed by the broader socio-economic and political structure. Given the realities of internalized oppression and the perception of limit situations, there were those whose aspirations were constrained; and others whose U.S. residency status was a barrier to any form of intervention; and still there were those among both groups of resident and undocumented participants who utilized the employability narrative to pursue their personal objectives but in the direction of unstable, contingent work. In fact, in the last analysis, the general theme surrounding the market-based approach to learning and the development of neoliberal subjectivities emerged as the dominant discourse.

That said, even under the influence of the neoliberal discourse, data revealed that learners were involved in the action of constituting the social relations they live in. Their networking attempts and use of on-line resources were examples of agentive ways the individual actions and thoughts emerged as inventions within the structural constraints ("invention within limits" in Bourdieu's terms). After all, learners are individuals with multiple identities, histories, and lived experiences and although they enter the market economy, they do so in the social sphere mediating the transition. Such a position presupposes both the person as agent and the formative role of structure in shaping and constraining possible agency (Weedon, 1986; Baynham, 2006). Classroom practice in this sense was specific, historical and constrained by structure, but also able to transform it.

A final point needs to be raised with respect to the role of the teacher. As the first-time instructor in the IET classroom, Ms. Brody appeared to have complete buy-in regarding the efficacy of the instructional model and the legitimacy of its goals and objectives. But it should be pointed out that this case is far from typical. As an example, results from a cross-case analysis of Career Pathways that link low-skilled adults to family-sustaining wage careers (Bragg et al., 2007) reported a clear commitment, on the part of administrators and program managers, to enrolling and serving low-skilled adults. The authors noted that leadership support was evident at each site, with local leaders displaying a keen ability to leverage existing local strengths through internal relationships and external partnerships with employers and community-based

⁶² Also see Giddens, A (1977) *Studies in Social and Political Theory*, New York: basic Books.

⁶³ Fineberg & Soltis (2009) also make use of this example in explaining the interpretivist point of view.

organizations. They stated that programs heeded employers' call for contextualized instruction and in some cases employed their help in determining specific content offered in the curriculum. While the study concedes that a great deal of information is still missing on the effectiveness and benefits of career pathway programs, the authors express confidence that "carefully constructed, articulated, and contextualized curricula; productive relationships with employers and partner organizations; and comprehensive support services show promise for meeting the needs of low-skilled, low-wage learners" (p. 11). Interestingly, however, teachers' point of view with respect to the effectiveness of such programs was mentioned in passing and only briefly alluded to:

Practitioners wondered about the purpose of these rules and whether ultimately students were helped or hindered by them, despite the programs' dedication to following the rules and their efforts to comply with guidelines in order to meet student needs. (2007, p.11)

This lack of faith along with sense of ambivalence on the part of teachers concerning the core objectives of *Pathways*, raises serious doubts about the feasibility of such instructional models at the practice stage (Vafai, 2014) and on large scales. It brings up the points made earlier (in chapter 1) regarding the CUNY faculty struggle, highlighting the notion that a curriculum that has so dramatically failed to win the confidence of those responsible for executing it cannot be in the best interest of the university or its students.

Future studies are needed to explore both the student and teachers' position vis-à-vis the vocational models of ESL instruction. Such studies should interrogate teachers' positioning, and expand on the standpoint of learners with acute attention to the phenomenon of social mirroring. The realities of internalized racism (Tatum, 1997; Allen 1995) are what Aronowitz (2000), inspired by Freire, identifies as the "internalized authority of the master as the source of reproduction of oppression and an obstacle to the formation of the "subject" (p. 9). He forcefully argues that:

In the current climate liberal educators are hopelessly outgunned—intellectually as well as politically and financially. They have retreated from their humanistic positions, conceding the need for vocationalization of the lion's share of the school curriculum in working class communities. (p. 16)

Students and educators face uphill battles; a fact that attests to the need for 'critical consciousness', as opposed to critical thinking as a 'skill'. In the final analysis, critical consciousness should become the driving force of education if vocationalization trends in schooling are to be averted.

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Appendix A: Goal Survey

Student Goal Profile

1. First name: 2. Last Name:
3. Student ID:
4. Employment Status: Employed Looking for work Not looking for work
Retired
5. Short Term Goal: Goal for this semester: Please circle **only** one:
- a. I am learning English to: Get a job Improve job Go to College
Help my children with homework Make new friends
- b. If you are employed, do you like to: Keep job Improve job Change job
- c. If looking for a job, what kind of work do you like to do?
.....



6. Long Term Goal: Think about 5...10 years from now.
- a. Would your future plans require a 4 year college degree?
Yes, in what field? No
- b. What is the job you want to have? Choose from below. What are some problems/difficulties?
.....

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Auto Body Work /Auto Mechanic | <input type="checkbox"/> Housekeeping, Hotel / Motel |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accounting/book keeping/Finances | <input type="checkbox"/> Home Health Aide |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Certified Nursing Assistant | <input type="checkbox"/> Information Technology |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Child Development/Day care | <input type="checkbox"/> Medical Record Keeping |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Construction | <input type="checkbox"/> Medical Assistant |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cosmetology | <input type="checkbox"/> Retail / Cashier |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Customer Service | <input type="checkbox"/> Secretarial/Office Clerk |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Emergency Medical Technician | <input type="checkbox"/> Welding |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Food Services | <input type="checkbox"/> Other, please specify _____ |
-

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

A. Background/immigration experience

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself, your family, where you are from, etc.?
 - How long have you been in the U.S.
 - Could you tell me about some of reasons you left your native country?
 - In what ways is life in the U.S. different from what you were used to?
 - What do you consider the biggest challenge when immigrating to a new country?

B. Educational background--schooling value/purpose

2. Tell me about your schooling experience in your native country?
 - How was it different from what children or adults experience here in the U.S.?
 - In what ways was the school work important to you?
 - What did it mean to be 'successful' in your native country? How was it related to education and schooling experience?
 - How is your schooling related to your previous or current work experience?

C. Experience with ESL

3. Did you learn English before immigrating to the U.S.?
4. How important is it to learn the language? Why?
 - How did you find out about the ESL program here?
 - Why did you enroll in this program?
 - How long have you been taking classes?
 - What are you hoping to do after your improve your English?
 - How is your learning English helping you with reaching that goal?

D. Experience with IET (Contextualized ESL)

5. Do you currently work? If yes, in what field?
 - If finding work or improving job is your goal, do you know in what field?
 - How is this course different from other ESL courses you have taken before?
 - Can you describe activities you do in this class in a typical day?
 - Can you give me examples of 'works skills' you are learning in this class?
 - Do you think what you are learning will help you with reaching your career goal?
 - If so, how?
 - If you are interested in postsecondary/college, is this class helping you?