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Si Se Puente! Validation and Puentistas Beyond Undergraduate Studies: Sustaining Latina/o/x College Achievement

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SI SE PUENTE! VALIDATION AND PUENTISTAS BEYOND

UNDERGRADUATE STUDIES: SUSTAINING LATINA/O/X COLLEGE

ACHIEVEMENT

_____

A Dissertation

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

_____

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

_____

by

Frances Valdovinos

June 2020

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June 2020

Approved by:

Dr. Enrique Murillo, Ph.D., Committee Chair

Dr. Edna Martinez, Ph.D., Committee Member

Dr. Tara Yosso, Ph.D., Committee Member

ABSTRACT

Latina/o/x are the fastest growing group in the United States and in the state of California. Higher education has also encountered a growth in Latina/o/x students pursuing higher education. Yet, despite this continuous rise higher education is less likely to retain the Latina/o/x student population. The purpose of this interpretive phenomenology study was to discover what factors of the Puente Program supported and prepared the Latina/o/x participants in facilitating transfer and college achievement during their undergraduate studies. Through the use of validation theory and the lived experiences of the participants, this study allows for a better understanding of the way *Puentistas* were able to sustain validation throughout their undergraduate career and beyond. The Puente Program is constructed on the basis of three central components: academic (English courses), counseling, and mentoring. It aims at preparing students to transition from community college to four-year institutions. The significance contributions of this study will add to the factors of how participating in the program can be advantageous to the fastest growing group in higher education, the Latina/o/x student population.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is a testament to all those who helped and shaped my educational trajectory. There are many who have contributed to this monumental accomplishment. I am fortunate to be surrounded by wonderful family and incredible friends who made all of this a possibility. To all those individuals who made this plausible by keeping me focused and positive, I sincerely appreciate you.

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To my siblings, Ivonne and Brian, it was us against the world! I want you to know how much I appreciate you. I am fortunate to have spent my childhood growing up with you both. *Mamá y papá, gracias por mostrarme lo que es*

echarle ganas y nunca rendirte. Les agradezco a ambos por todo lo que hicieron por su familia. Sin ustedes no estaría en donde estoy. To my wonderful in-laws who are such an important part of my life. I want you know that you are all very special to me and I love you dearly.

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were part of my committee and to exchange dialect about topics we are both so

passionate about. I also enjoyed our lunches and coffee runs!

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all the future generations of Latina/o/x scholars. You are capable of achieving all your aspirations. To all my Valdovinos and Regalado family who I love from the bottom of my heart. To my husband, children, nieces, nephews, and godchildren who mean the world to me. Lastly, to my heroes, my parents. Who decided to prosper, despite all odds being against them. *Los adoro mama y papa*!

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CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

The Latina/o/x population is the fastest growing group in the nation and in California's higher education system (Fry, 2002; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2018). According to the 2010 U.S. Census report, 65 percent of growth in the past decade is attributed to the Hispanic population (Taylor & Cohn, 2012). The U.S. Census projects the Hispanic population will reach over 111 million people within the next decade, making them 28 percent of the United States population (United States Census Bureau, 2018). Despite the continuous rise in college-going rates and population, higher education institutions have not been successful in retaining and graduating Latina/o/x students (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2015). Additionally, students who begin their college career at a community college are less likely to transfer to a four-year institution or attain their undergraduate degree (Núñez, Hoover, Pickett, Stuart-Carruthers, & Vázquez, 2013; University of California Office of the President Puente Project [UCOPPP], 2018). Only 15 percent of those students who transfer to a four-year institution, attain a bachelors degree (Ryan & Bauman, 2016).

Using validation theory as a framework, this study examined Latina/o/x students who participated in the Puente Program while attending a California Community College (CCC). Validation theory is active when "it involves faculty, counselors, coaches, and administrators actively reaching out to students or

designing activities that promote active learning and interpersonal growth among students, faculty, and staff" (Rendon, 1994, p. 44). Through the use of validation theory and analyzing students' involvement in the program, the researcher highlights different stages in the participant's trajectory in higher education and how that has influenced their future endeavors. This analysis concentrates on the participant's narratives as they reflect on their educational aspirations and their experiences as community college transfer students.

While focusing on the three major components of the Puente Program: academic (English courses), counseling, and mentoring, this research is designed to understand the experiences of Puente Program alumni. Consequently, the researcher endeavors in expanding the limited empirical studies that highlight community college outreach programs. More specifically, a program that enhances the pathways of the Latina/o/x student in higher education.

<center>Problem Statement</center>

Latina/o/x is the fastest growing group in the nation and in California's higher education system (Fry, 2002; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2018). According to the 2010 U.S. Census report, 65 percent of growth in the past decade is attributed to the Hispanic population (Taylor & Cohn, 2012). The U.S. Census projects the Hispanic population will reach over 111 million people within the next decade, making them 28 percent of the United States population (United States Census Bureau, 2018). Yet, despite

this continuous increase in growth, higher education is least successful in retaining and graduating Latina/o/x students (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2015). Even more troubling is that students who begin their college career at a community college are less likely to transfer to a four-year institution and/or attain their undergraduate degree (Núñez et al., 2013; University of California Office of the President Puente Project [UCOPPP], 2018). In fact, about 15 percent of those who begin at community colleges and transfer to a four-year institution, attain a degree (Ryan & Bauman, 2016). In California, there are 115 campuses that serve 2.1 million students (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2020), 44% of them (1,008,356) are Latina/o/x students (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2018).

It has been recognized that higher levels of education are correlated with an increase of potential earnings and an increase in both social and cultural capital (Carnevale, Rose, & Cheah, 2011). In fact, The Campaign for College Opportunity (2019) reports that in California, one of the most innovative states and largest economies in the world, industries have evolved with a higher need for individuals with advanced education, technical know-how, and global knowledge. These demands demonstrate the importance of an education, college degrees, or vocational training. Subsequently, because the Latina/o/x population is the fastest growing, the increase in this populations college access and college completion is vital.

While there is a growth in Latina/o/x college enrollment, research suggests that completion rates are low for this demographic. In fact, in the state of California only 18 percent of Latina/o/x adults have a college degree — lower than any other racial/ethnic group (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2018). Unfortunately, instead of reducing the gaps in educational and degree attainment between Latina/o/x and White college students, these gaps are continuing to grow (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2018). Fry & Taylor (2013) suggest that completion rates are based on the specific institution, employment status, enrollment status, parental education, and income. Furthermore, large numbers of Latina/o/x pursue higher education through community colleges, work full-time, enroll in class part-time, and are first-generation college students from low income homes (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2018). Thus, making completion rates more challenging and programs built for educational attainment and college aspirations imperative.

Improvement upon the educational attainment of the Latina/o/x through resources aimed at success in postsecondary education, will ensure the educational pipeline delivers to the fastest growing population in the nation and in higher education.

For the purpose of this study, the terms Latina/o/x, Chicana/o/x, and Hispanic, will be used interchangeably. These terms are used by different sources when referencing the same population. However, this research will concentrate on the term Latina/o/x which will be described in further detail later

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on in this dissertation. This study will also refer to the Puente Project as the Puente Program. These too are terms used substitutable.

Purpose Statement

Using an interpretive phenomenology approach and the use of validation theory, this study qualitatively analyzed the experiences of the Puente Program alumni, which will also be referred to as *Puentistas.* The purpose of this interpretive phenomenology study aims at understanding what factors of the Puente Program cultivated Latina/o/x students to pursue transferring from a community college to a four-year institution. Subsequently, the study identifies what factors sustained with participants through and beyond their undergraduate studies. This study can be used to better understand the intricacy of the program from the perspectives of the *Puentistas*.

The formation of this research began with establishing interviews that were directed at *Puentistas*. The interviews were designed to discover how the feeling of belonging and validation that is emphasized during the program, encouraged participants to sustain and persist as they navigate to and through their undergraduate studies. Although there is limited research about students who participate in the Puente Program, this study expands our knowledge and interpretation on how Latina/o/x view their role as college students during and after their involvement in the program. Moreover, it will help in identifying the role they give institutional agents, in connection to their experience in postsecondary studies and beyond.

To understand the uniqueness of the program, the intent of its creation will be elaborated in the following chapter. Nonetheless, the program was established to provide support for students to transfer to a four-year institution. Using a cohort model, Puente Program functions through three major components: academic (English courses), counseling, and mentoring. Academically, the program provides a year of intensive English instruction that focuses on writing and reading – specifically emphasizing literature on the Latina/o/x identity and culture (The Puente Project, 2019). The counseling component offers intensive academic counseling and provides oversight of the students' progress towards transfer. The mentoring component establishes a connection with mentors from the professional and academic community (Rendon, 2002).

Although higher education institutions are responsible for the recruitment and promotion of the program at their campus, students are admitted by meeting specific criteria. Students must be placed in development English at their respective institution in order to meet the programs academic requirement (The Puente Project, 2019). Though the focus is to enroll students within a year of beginning their postsecondary education, placement is based on meeting the aforementioned requirement.

<div align="center">Research Questions</div>

As previously mentioned, this study is designed to understand how the Puente Program impacted *Puentistas* and subsequently contributed to their

undergraduate studies and beyond. This study was guided by the following three research questions:

1. How do the Puente Program alumni describe their experiences of their trajectory into higher education?

2. From the participants perspective, what components of the Puente Program were most effective in bridging their postsecondary studies and beyond?

3. What elements of the Puente Program did participants identify helped with feeling validated and assisted them in achieving their academic goals?

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the research that examines the experiences of Latina/o/x students in the Puente Program and the impact the program had on their educational journey. The theory of validation provides a foundation to better understand the concept of belonging and how Latina/o/x students' postsecondary educational experiences are impacted.

As the fastest growing population in the United States, it is essential to understand Latina/o/x experiences as they navigate through the higher education pipeline (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2018). In addition, understanding how degree completion rates amongst Latina/o/x are affected by the continued lack of comparable visual representation of themselves within postsecondary four-year institutions and selective colleges. Furthermore, the

outcome of this research aims to explore and better understand how participants

transcend and persist to accomplish their academic goals and earn their college

degree. Moreover, this study has the capability of expanding our knowledge on

community college outreach programs and how to meet the needs of the growing

Latina/o/x population.

<center>Theoretical Underpinnings</center>

The aim of this interpretive phenomenology study was to acquire a deeper

understanding of the participant's lived experiences in the program and how, if at

all, it is connected to feelings of validation. Validation ensues through the practice

of the six elements of validation – contact initiated by institutional agents;

increased self-esteem through the validation process; validation as a necessity to

student development; validation resulting from the interaction between students

and multiple agents in – and out – of the classroom; validation as a

developmental process; validation being present from the beginning of a

student's college experience (Rendon, 1994).

Latina/o/x students, many of whom are first-generation college students,

have the desire and aspirations to pursue higher education (Núñez et al., 2013).

Despite the potential and promise of this student population, the reality is too

many encounter educational inequalities making it challenging to succeed

academically as they navigate a complex educational system (Tovar, 2013).

External influences such as family, work responsibilities, and financial strains,

stimulate the decisions these students make about college attendance (Núñez et

<center>8</center>

al., 2013). These types of structures make higher education a challenge for many students. Additionally, social structures in education also play a role in creating, maintaining, and perpetuating social inequalities for underrepresented groups (Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

To best understand the desire of educational aspirations of the Latina/o/x student, we must examine and consider the psychosocial aspect this student population faces. There have been many studies that indicate student engagement and involvement are essential to student development and progress in higher education (Astin, 1984; Pace, 1984; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto 1993). These theories are relevant to the traditional college students who attend college after high school and have a better understanding of postsecondary education. Traditional college students "come from families where the precedent of attending college is well established" (Rendon, 1994, p. 34), and are conscious of the ways in which to navigate the system prior to and while attending college. This immersion into the academic involvement and social aspects of higher education is unfamiliar and can be a difficult task for underrepresented students who are first-generation, nontraditional college students (Rendon, 2002).

The reflection of hidden curriculum in higher education is present and emerges from lack of inculcated socialization of many underrepresented populations. Though much is known about the hidden curriculum in K12 research, the definition of it is also applicable to higher education. Hidden

curriculum refers to the unwritten, unofficial, and likely unintended teachings and perspectives that students learn in school (Margolis, Soldatenko, Acker, & Gair, 2001).

Lessons of the hidden curriculum are also experienced outside of class and can be seen in certain mannerisms and behaviors. Broadening conventional "understandings of curriculum beyond the visible materials teachers present in their classrooms to include less visible curricular structures, processes, and discourses" (Yosso, 2002, p. 93) will assert the position institutions have on continuing these structures. For this reason, understanding Latina/o/x students who have been historically marginalized and excluded from education, is key to understanding and creating a pathway towards social and academic validation in a college environment.

Assumptions

The realities of each specific participant had variations. The nature of reality of one person differs and is independent from that of another. The underlying assumption in this study is participants feelings of validation and academic aspirations were influenced by the Puente Program. While the Puente Program suggest that Latina/o/x college students have a greater probability in feeling validated by participating in the program, the researcher's assumption of this evidence is based on previous interactions with the Puente Program. Nonetheless, the findings are dependent on the participants interviews and on the data analysis. Lastly, while this study focuses on a specific student

population and program, it is assumed that there is a possibility the results may expand to a broader range of lived experiences from participants in different outreach support programs and diverse student populations.

<div align="center">Delimitations</div>

Although this study was designed to address the three research questions previously mentioned, there are a few delimitations in this study. In data collection, Creswell (2014) identifies delimitations as further defining specific parameters of a study. The delimitations that were purposely selected for the study are the following:

- The study focused specifically on college achievement of the Latina/o/x student population and does not consider other ethnicities. Despite the Puente Program catering to all diverse student populations, the overwhelming majority of Puente students are from Latina/o/x backgrounds (The Puente Project, 2019).

- The research did not examine students' participation in other programs or clubs.

- The study did not take into consideration whether the participant was first, second, third, etc., generation of Latina/o/x college student. It considered all generations.

- This study focused on participants who began their higher education at a California community college.

- This research focused on students who transferred to a California four-year public institution and obtained a college degree.

- This research did not consider students who transferred to a private or out-of-state institution

- This research did not consider students who were in the program but did not transfer.

- The study did not consider students who did transfer to a four-year public institution but did not obtain a degree.

Definitions of Key Terms

In this section, the researcher will provide definitions of key terms that will be discussed throughout the study. These terms are vital to understanding this study and the experiences of the participants in the program. They are defined here and discussed throughout the study.

<u>Puente Program</u>

As previously noted, the Puente Project will be referred to as the Puente Program. The program was initiated to provide a pathway from the community college to a four-year institution (The Puente Project, 2019). This pathway represents a bridge or *Puente* in Spanish. From this Spanish term *Puente*, comes the classification of its participants, or *Puentistas.*

<u>Puentistas</u>

Puentistas are considered current Puente Program participants and alumni of the program. The motto of *Puentistas* is, "Once a *Puentista*, always a *Puentista*!" This phrase showcases the way in which the program encourages and underlines the meaning of comradery, *familia*, validation, and feelings of belonging.

<u>Latina/o/x</u>

According to the rules of the Spanish language, the term *Latino* traditionally encompasses both male and female genders. Conversely, the term *Hispanic*, derives from the Latin word *Hispania*, which was first implemented in the U.S. Census in 1980 and was adopted by the United States government under the Nixon administration (Delgado-Romero, Manlove, Manlove, & Hernandez, 2006). Latino identifies individuals from Central or South America, Caribbean, and Mexico (Delgado-Romero et al., 2006). Whereas, Hispanic refers to people from countries who speak Spanish (Salinas, 2015). On the other hand, Chicana/o/x is the term used to identify individuals who are of Mexican-American descent. Specifically notable, the terms Chicana and Chicano were used during the Chicano movement of the 1960's.

The term Latina/o/x will be used throughout this study to be all inclusive, including those who identify as gender non-conforming, and transgender (Marquez, 2018). Latina/o/x, Hispanic, and Chicana/o/x are used by different sources when referencing the same population. For the purpose of this study, the

term *Latina*/o/x will be used to refer to its participants and the "x" will provide a social identifier that neutralizes the gender binary in the Spanish language.

Validation Theory

Rendon's (1994) validation theory is identified as "an enabling, confirming, and supportive process initiated by in – and out – of class agents that fosters academic and interpersonal development" (p. 44). Validation occurs throughout the practice of the six elements of validation – contact initiated by institutional agents; increased self-esteem through the validation process; validation as a necessity to student development; validation resulting from the interaction between students and multiple agents in – and out – of the classroom; validation as a developmental process; validation being present from the beginning of a student's college experience (Rendon, 2002). This process will be elaborated in the following chapter and will serve as the foundation for the research presented in this dissertation.

Hispanic Serving Institution

A Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) has become a more prevalent designation for institutions of higher education. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2019), an HSI has an enrollment of undergraduate full-time equivalent students, of which 25 percent consider themselves Hispanic or Latina/o/x.

Institutional Agents

Institutional agents play a critical role in providing the tools and resources for students to succeed in higher education. They assist in developing skills that will increase achievement in school and social mobility (Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard, & Lintz, 1996; Stanton-Salazar, Vasquez, & Mehan, 1996; Rendon, 2002; Rendon & Muñoz, 2011). Institutional agents provide important information about admission processes, school programs, academic advising, mentoring, as well as, career decision-making. Institutional agents are part of social networks, both personal and academic, and exhibit their influence on Latina/o/x students according to the quality of the relationship (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). These relationships become instrumental for many Latina/o/x students.

Imposter Syndrome

Imposter Syndrome, or imposter phenomenon, is described as an "internal experience of intellectual phoniness in people who believe that they are not intelligent, capable or creative despite evidence of high achievement" (Clance & Imes, 1978, p. 241). Imposter syndrome occurs when individuals question the idea that their success is a function of their intelligence and hard work. Individuals often internalize social stereotypes and actually believe their achievements are due to mere luck (Coryell, Wagner, Clark, Stuessy, 2013). Questions about their capabilities and competence, and feelings of inadequacy fill their thoughts. This phenomenon occurs in professional and/or academic settings.

Summary

The collection of the data and results of this study are important for practitioners who are focused on being agents of change for Latina/o/x students. Specifically, when it comes to exploring the lived experiences of this student population and their transfer and completion rates. Puente Program aims at facilitating transfer and helping students understand the process. On a practical level, institutional agents, practitioners, and those concerned with improving the transfer rates of Latina/o/x, will be able to understand the importance of belonging and validation. This substantiation allows for student development and growth, which is an indicator of how important validation is in the pursuit of higher education.

On a theoretical level, understanding how validation theory has the ability to change the perspectives and persistence of the Latina/o/x student population is beneficial when putting any program into practice. Latina/o/x students learn to navigate the system and immerse themselves into the academic and social aspects of higher education. Producing and establishing these types of resources for underrepresented student populations is critical, not only in higher education but also in a professional environment.

The next chapter introduces the theoretical framework which guided this study and presents literature on the topics introduced in chapter one, including the Puente Program and the Latina/o/x student population. Chapter two also provides a context for understanding how Latina/o/x students transition to the

four-year public university and the factors that influence college success for this

population.

CHAPTER TWO:

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Chapter two will expand on the theoretical framework this study is grounded in and introduce literature that relates to the Puente Program and Latina/o/x students. This chapter begins with the Puente Program to highlight the impact the program has on increasing transfer rates to four-year institutions. Followed, by a discussion of recent developmental educational legislation and the implications for special programs like Puente. Additionally, literature on community colleges and the transition process to a four-year public institution will help in understanding the experiences of the Puente Program participants. Subsequently, will be the introduction of validation theory to identify the educational trajectory of this student population and the factors influencing their college success.

Latina/o/x is the fastest growing group in the nation, as well as in higher education (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2018). Yet, despite this continuous rise, higher education is less likely to retain and graduate the Latina/o/x student population from college within 6 years (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2015). Moreover, Latina/o/x students are increasingly overrepresented in community colleges and underrepresented in four-year universities or selective colleges (Carnevale & Strohl, 2010). In fact, research has shown that students who begin their higher education career at a

community college significantly reduce their chances of attaining a baccalaureate degree (Núñez et al., 2013). This is true specifically for low-income and non-traditional students who are disproportionally represented at community colleges (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010). Moreover, African-American/Black and Latina/o/x students attending a community college, transfer to four-year institutions at lower rates than their White or Asian student counterparts (Alfonso, 2006; Dougherty, 1992; Gándara, Alvarado, Driscoll, & Orfield, 2012; Long & Kurlaender, 2009, The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2018).

Particularly in California, the existing gap in bachelor's degree attainment between Latina/o/x and White students, increased from 30 to 31 percentage points in the last decade (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2018). This growing gap is concerning for the state of higher education, more precisely, for Latina/o/x students attending California Community Colleges (CCC). This unmistakable concern is telling of projections that show that by the year 2060, more than 45 percent of Californians will be Latina/o/x (State of California Department of Finance, 2018). Since higher education is less likely to retain the fastest growing population, resulting is less degree completion, resources aimed at their successful degree completion are vital.

To best understand the history behind this organizational structure in the California higher educational system, the Master Plan of 1960 will be reviewed. Policymakers in California introduced a 15-year Master Plan of Higher Education in response to public pressure to increase educational attainment for the Baby

Boomer population (Callan, 2009). At the time of its inception, this plan was to serve for only 15 years. However, today it is still used to guide the higher education framework in the state. The Master Plan defined the mission and roles of the California higher education systems (Callan, 2009): the California Community College (CCC), the California State University (CSU), and the University of California (UC). Kerr (1994) identified the formulation of the Master Plan as a statewide system encompassing four fundamental principles: 1) to provide viable solutions for society; 2) to provide egalitarian desires for an egalitarian people, denoting universal access; 3) to create a meritocracy for highly trained scientists, doctors, and lawyers; and 4) to meet the labor market requirements of a modern industrial society.

The Master Plan was created with specific designations (California State Department of Education, 1960). The University of California (UC) was designated jurisdiction over instruction in law, medicine, and doctoral degrees. The UC was to serve the top 12 1/2 percent of eligible graduating seniors of public high schools. The California State University (CSU) would concentrate on undergraduate and graduate degrees up to master's level, while serving the top 33 1/3 percent of eligible graduating seniors of public high schools. Finally, the community colleges were to provide open access for any student who would benefit from instruction. They would provide vocational, technical, and liberal arts courses, to prepare students to transfer to a state college or university to complete their undergraduate degree.

To ensure goals from each system were met, the plan put forth the responsibilities for each segment under a loosely coupled statewide coordinating system. Though this effort was a way to guarantee college access to all pursuing higher education, it also maintained merit driven educational access to higher-income students (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2018). Merit has been largely guided by sources of capital and values steered by middle- or high-class society. Consequently, understanding what forms of capital low-income, first-generation, Latina/o/x students recognize in connection to their academic trajectory can help draw a connection to their underrepresentation in four-year public universities.

As previously noted, Latina/o/x student are overrepresented in community colleges. Moreover, there have been numerous studies documenting the low transfer rates of community college students to the CSU's and UC's (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Callan, 2009; Dougherty, 2001; Geiser & Atkinson, 2010; Public Policy Institute of California, 2016). For this reason, supporting community college students, from all backgrounds, from the beginning of their higher education journey is necessary and the support must persist during the transfer process. Transition to a four-year public university can be overwhelming and discouraging. Transfer students, in particular, have to go through a transition when they first begin community college, and once again, when they transfer to a four-year institution. Rivas, Perez, Alvarez, & Solórzano, (2007) asserted that "the consistently low Latina-o transfer rates highlight the need for an institutional

'transfer culture' that will standardize the transfer process and guarantee that all qualified students who seek to transfer to a university can do so in an efficient and timely manner" (p. 2). A positive transfer culture has the capability of reducing a variety of barriers that emerge upon enrollment for many Latina/o/x students (Fry, 2002; Ornelas, 2002; Martinez & Fernandez, 2004; Ornelas & Solórzano, 2004; Solórzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera 2005; Yosso & Solórzano, Perez & Ceja, 2010).

It is essential for institutions of education, at all levels of the Master Plan spectrum, to provide Latina/o/x students with a positive institutional culture that will assist in their successful degree attainment. Institutions are failing this student population, specifically, those who begin their college career at community colleges. Furthermore, research shows that these students are more probable to have attended primary and secondary schools with inadequate school resources, less access to rigorous classes, and disparities in the quality of programs and extracurricular activities (Jao, 2018). Not having the necessary tools to begin higher education, is reasoning for encouraging and providing a positive culture that must be at the forefront of facilitating educational attainment of this student population.

An effective way to promote transfer, is to support students through institutional support structures and the assistance of collaborative student-focused institutional agents (Rendon & Muñoz, 2011). This type of support encourages feelings of validation and being engaged. One example, of a

supportive structure are programs that offer a transfer culture and partnership where both student and institution are working collaboratively (Gandara et al., 2012). This type of collaboration is the focus of the Puente program.

The Puente program has proven to be successful in increasing enrollment of underserved students at four-year colleges and universities (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2018). Data from 2009-2010 shows, the transfer rate of Puente participants was 56%, compared to 44% for all community college students, (Puente, 2019). In fact, "Puente students maintain enrollment more often than all California Community College (CCC) students statewide. More than eight in ten, or 83%, of program participants enroll in three continuous terms compared with 71% of all CCC students statewide (Puente, 2019).

This information provides the underpinnings of the programs capability to assist students transitioning to four-year institutions, while also ensuring that students are transferring in a timely manner. From its inception, the Puente Program has focused on providing its students with the necessary resources for educational success and degree attainment (Rendon, 2002).

Puente Program

The Puente Project, which will be referred to as Puente Program throughout this research, was established in 1981 at Chabot College in Northern California. The concept of Puente, Spanish word for "bridge", was to create a pathway from community college to a four-year institution. Though the program

was initially created for implementation at higher education institutions, it is now established in high schools and junior high schools (The Puente Project, 2019).

The program was originally created by Patricia McGrath (English Professor) and Feliz Galaviz (counselor), who became concerned with the high dropout rates of many Latina/o/x students at their community college. Low transfer rates, degree attainment, and retention rates were among the major problems they encountered (Rendon, 2002). One of the main issues found within the Latina/o/x student population, was that they were not taking the necessary prerequisites classes for degree attainment or transfer. Additionally, very few students were taking the general education courses needed to meet transfer requirements or obtain their associates degree (Vigil Laden, 1999). McGrath and Galaviz established that this was due to the infrequent communication this student population had with either faculty or their academic counselors (Rendon, 2002). Based on the results of their review, the program was initiated.

Presently, the Puente Program is co-sponsored by the University of California and the California Community College Chancellor's Office, with its headquarters located at the University of California, Berkeley (The Puente Project, 2019). In fact, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office Puente Project (2018) reports that the program has expanded to 56 community colleges in California. The programs mission "is to increase the number of educationally disadvantaged students who enroll in four-year colleges and universities, earn college degrees and return to the community as mentors and

leaders to future generations. The program is interdisciplinary in approach, with writing, counseling and mentoring components." (The Puente Project, 2019).

Puente Program functions in a cohort model through its three major components: academic (English courses), counseling, and mentoring. Academically, the program provides a year of intensive English instruction that focuses on writing and reading – specifically emphasizing literature on the Latina/o/x culture and identity (The Puente Project, 2019). The counseling component offers intensive college academic counseling and provides oversight of the students' progress towards transfer. By making sure the student is placed in the proper courses, the counselor ensures the student will complete their coursework in a timely manner. The mentoring element establishes a connection with mentors from the professional and academic community. Mentors come from different backgrounds, they are successful professionals, and they have shared experiences with their mentees (Rendon, 2002).

It is important to note, although Puente Program is focused on assisting all students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds, the program has specific admission requirements students must meet before participating. Students must place in the developmental English course specific to their community college, as well as, meeting the required minimum grade point average (GPA), which is dependent on each institution of higher education (The Puente Project, 2019). The minimum GPA may range depending on each institution, but it begins at a 2.0 GPA. The program has not implemented any

changes on any of its admission practices based on new laws in the state of California. New law such as California Assembly Bill 705 have been established to change the placement practices at community colleges. The following section describes the intention and creation of this law.

<div align="center">California Assembly Bill 705</div>

The placement practices for Puente Program's English courses have not been affected with the implementation of new laws aimed at reforming education at community colleges in California. The California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office Puente Project (2018) reports the same admission requirements with no change due to the new laws established in the state. Students considering Puente Program must be placed in development English in order to meet the programs requirement (The Puente Project, 2019). Nevertheless, the state of California has begun reforms that will allow students to be placed higher than remedial courses.

As the fifth largest economy in the world, California is responsible for ensuring that its future workforce has access and is successful in educational attainment (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2018). Studies have shown that placements have a profound effect in a community college student's academics and in their overall trajectory during their pursuit of higher education (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010). California is at the forefront of making a change in the way student's transition in community college.

The passage of Assembly Bill 705 in Fall 2017 exemplifies how California

community colleges will, once again, be central to the evolution of developmental

education. Passed on October 13, 2017, AB705:

> requires that a community college district or college maximize the
>
> probability that a student will enter and complete transfer-level coursework
>
> in English and math within a one year timeframe and use, in the
>
> placement of students into English and math courses, one or more of the
>
> following: high school coursework, high school grades, and high school
>
> grade point average (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office,
>
> 2018).

This change in assessment and placement practices, was set to be in full

compliance in Fall 2019 (California Community College Chancellor's Office,

2018). The establishment of AB705, was based on data showing that students

who begin their higher education career at a community college significantly

reduce their chances of transfer and degree attainment (Núñez et al., 2013;

California Community College Chancellor's Office, 2018). Subsequently, students

who took developmental education and had improper placement, resulted in a

prolonged stay at the community college. In fact, about 75 percent of Latina/o/x

students attending two-year community colleges, and 53 percent of those who

begin at four-year universities are enrolled in developmental education (Chen &

Simone, 2016).

Evident in these studies was that many students who were not graduating or transitioning to four-year institutions were from underrepresented backgrounds, predominantly Latina/o/x and African-American/Black (Rodriguez, Cuellar Mejia, & Johnson, 2018). Due to these improper placement practices, students who would otherwise succeed in college-level courses were enrolled in developmental education courses, resulting in a systematic barrier for student success (Scott-Clayton, Crosta, & Belfield, 2014). These institutional structures represent the divergence from underrepresented student populations that have high aspirations for academic success, also known as the "cooling out" effect (Clark, 1960).

As previously stated, the Puente Program's creation was based on the need to assist students from underserved backgrounds towards degree attainment. Laws similar to AB 705 and program like Puente, aim at breaking down barriers and assisting students from all backgrounds in transitioning to four-year institutions.

Transition to a Four-Year Public Institution

The transition from a community college to a public four-year institution can be a difficult task for some students. In fact, regardless of where they start, the most critical time in a student's higher education trajectory is during the first year (Bradburn, 2002). Regardless of the college preparation received, it is vital to this transition to empower students and create environments where there is an increase of educational opportunities (Rendon, 1994). Additionally, for

underrepresented students of color, colleges and universities must provide culturally relevant and sensitive supports if the goal is to increase access and opportunity to postsecondary education as indicated by the California Master Plan.

The transition from the community college to a public four-year university, involves ensuring a meaningful experience between students, staff, faculty, and all institutional agents (Rendon, 2011). Dedicated resources and a greater understanding of culture and inclusion is essential to support Latina/o/x students, many of whom are considered non-traditional and are underrepresented (Rendon & Muñoz, 2011). Understanding these experiences and how they shape their higher education trajectory will help in better assisting them.

Ornelas and Solórzano (2004) examined the pre and post transfer experiences of underrepresented students. In their case study, they identified essential elements for developing a transfer culture beneficial for the Latina/o/x student population. The findings resulted in perceptions from students, counselors, faculty, administrators, that were linked to recommendations for transfer culture. The participants in their study reported they were highly driven and motivated, an example they had learned from their parents who worked hard and encouraged them. Students described their desire to transition and transfer but reported a number of institutional barriers. They encountered conflicting information about how to transition and transfer, which was overwhelming. They identified a lack of support and transfer information, being the first in their family

to attend college, and also dealing with financial aid and tuition fees, as major hurdles. They also emphasized the outside responsibilities, such as working, which interfered with school time. Despite these obstacles, the participants reported their motivation was high. They refused to be another statistic and wanted to demonstrate that they were capable of academic achievement (Ornelas & Solórzano, 2004).

Latina/o/x students who enter postsecondary education through the community college have high aspirations towards transfer and degree attainment. Institutions and practitioners of higher education must be fully integrated in supporting these students. Furthermore, it is not only engagement of these interactions that matter, but also the quality, and how often they take place (Hurtado, 2007). Meaningful experiences with institutional agents are vital and beneficial to serving the needs of underrepresented students. Especially, transfer students who have unique circumstances and perspectives.

The transition to a four-year public institution can be intimidating and more perplexing than a community college for first-generation transfer students. Many Latina/o/x college students find that integrating into the campus culture can be challenging and it is less probable when they do not know the ways to navigate the system (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). For this reason, institution and its institutional agents play a big role in this transition and transfer (Rendon & Muñoz, 2011). Thus, in order to increase and improve the educational attainment of the Latina/o/x student population understanding what institutions of higher

education can do to best support these students, is vital from enrollment and degree completion.

Latina/o/x Students and Institutional Agents

The frequency of student/faculty communication and relationships with academic counselors help support student retention. Furthermore, the cultivation of certain psychosocial factors – i.e. academic self-efficacy, attention to study, time management, involvement, emotional satisfaction with academics, and class communication – during the first-year of college, is significant for student success (Cooper, 2002; Rocca, 2010, Krumrei-Mancuso et al., 2013). Interactions between students and institutional agents, makes a difference in how fruitful a student's college experience will be. Institutional agents can be defined "as those individuals who have the capacity and commitment to transmit directly, or negotiate the transmission of, institutional resources and opportunities" (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p. 6).

Interaction between students and institutional agents differ across race and gender. Particularly, interactions with faculty are dissimilar. Kim and Lundberg (2016) found that at four-year institutions, students of color are less likely to interact with faculty compared to their White counterparts. Research focusing on the experiences of community college students are a bit more ambiguous. For example, Alford (2012) found that Latina/o/x students have higher rates of interaction with faculty, while Kim (2010) discovered higher rates of interaction of African-American/Black students.

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The literature focusing on student interaction with faculty has also revealed variances across gender. Male students have greater levels of faculty interactions than female students, resulting in larger gains in cognitive skills (Kim & Lundberg, 2016). Sax, Bryant, and Harper, (2005) revealed female students interact with faculty at higher rates in comparison to male students. Nevertheless, the effects of these interactions are greater for male students.

Institutional agents provide vital information about college admission, school programs, academic advising, mentoring, as well as career decision-making. They also lift the cover in the hidden curriculum, a social reproduction of the dominant class where unambiguous power structures are employed (Yosso, 2002). Based on the quality of the relationship, institutional agents could exhibit their influence on Latina/o/x students (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Moreover, institutional agents become key in providing support for students to succeed in higher education, as well as in developing skills that will increase achievement in school and social mobility (Lin, 1982; Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard, & Lintz, 1996; Stanton-Salazar, Vasquez, & Mehan, 1996, Rendon & Muñoz, 2011, Garcia & Ramirez, 2018). These relationships become instrumental and are highly influential in this population's educational trajectory.

There have been many studies showing that relationships established through experiences of engagement and involvement are fundamental to student development and progression in higher education (Astin, 1984; Pace, 1984; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto 1993). Alexander Astin's (1984) student

involvement theory which "holds that student learning is increased when there is more [student] involvement in both academic and social aspects of the college experience" (Krumrei-Mancuso, et al., 2013, p. 251). This theory positions the student as the primary decision maker as it relates to their involvement in college classes and extracurricular activities. Student involvement is significant for both capital and academic growth. However, Astin's (1984) study and many other similar theories, have focused on the experiences of the traditional college student.

Traditional college students "come from families where the precedent of attending college is well established" (Rendon, 1994, p. 34) and are conscious of the ways in which to navigate the system. They comprehend that academic and social involvement is necessary and expected in higher education. On the other hand, non-traditional students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, including Latina/o/x students–many whom are first-generation college students and come from low socio-economic backgrounds– involvement, integration, and engagement is a challenge because of a lack of direct institutional support (Rendon, 2002; Garcia & Ramirez, 2018). Institutions of higher education have not been successful in assisting this student population in the immersion of college classes and extracurricular activities. As an unfamiliar process, beginning it may be overwhelming.

Understanding students who have been historically marginalized and excluded from education, as well as, grasping the factors that play into the

process of having a sense of belonging, is "key to understanding how particular forms of social and academic experiences affect these students" (Hurtado & Carter, 1997, p. 324). Furthermore, institutions and institutional agents must contribute to the connection and involvement process Latina/o/x students experience, to achieve progress and success (Rendon, 2002).

Factors Influencing College Success for Latina/o/x Students

<u>Hispanic Serving Institutions</u>

Data shows student outcomes, such as transfer, are connected to the behaviors, environments, and educational experiences students have during their college career (Bensimon, 2007). This demonstrates the importance of having a connection and feeling validated by an institution and its agents (Rendon, 1994). Since the Latina/o/x student population is the fastest growing in higher education (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2018), our nations higher education institutions, more importantly, those who have been deemed Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), "are on the front line of educating a diverse America" (Conrad & Gasman, 2015, p. 93). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2019), an HSI is "defined as an institution of higher education that—(A) is an eligible institution; and (B) has an enrollment of undergraduate full-time equivalent students that is at least 25 percent Hispanic students at the end of the award year immediately preceding the date of application".

HSIs are leading the way in establishing new pathways to college access and long-term success for Latina/o/x students. Nonetheless, though the Latina/o/x college student population is increasing in numbers, many institutions – including HSIs – have a limited understanding about the ways to successfully assist them academically (Conrad & Gasman, 2015). To best understand the educational pipeline for this student population Yosso and Solórzano (2006) help us visualize the number of students that navigate from K-20. In their study, they reported that out of every 100 Chicanas/os that enter elementary school, only 46 graduate high school. Of those, 26 continue to higher education – 17 enroll in community college and 9 enroll in four-year institutions. Only 1 of the 17 community college student's actually transfer to a four-year institution. Out of the 26 that initially pursue higher education, 8 earn a bachelor's degree (Yosso & Solórzano, 2006).

This educational pipeline may look somewhat different today reflecting higher numbers of Latina/o/x students entering postsecondary education. However, Latina/o/x enrollment and the rates at which they complete college remain low (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2018). These educational outcomes need to be at the forefront of HSIs who serve this population. It is necessary for them to advocate for the populations they serve and make "a difference in the lives of students whom higher education has been least successful in educating (e.g., racially marginalized groups and the poor)" (Bensimon, 2007, p. 445).

<u>Community Colleges</u>

Community colleges are open access institutions (CCCCO, 2020) that were structured to serve all who wanted and sought instruction as dictated in the Master Plan (1960). Community colleges are the highest enrolling institutions of Latina/o/x in higher education (Carnevale & Strohl, 2010). In fact, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC, 2018) confirms that 24% of students enrolled for credit in community colleges are Latina/o/x. Resulting, in Latina/o/x as the largest student population attending community colleges nationally (AACC, 2018). Literature focusing on Latina/o/x student population tends to prioritize four-year, selective institutions. There is limited and underdeveloped knowledge on what factors influence college success for the Latina/o/x student population at community colleges.

The research related to the community college stresses the importance of the transfer component (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2018). Unfortunately, students of color continue to have among the lowest transfer rates, despite having high aspirations (Wassmer, Moore, and Shulock, 2004). In fact, higher education is less successful in transferring Latina/o/x students, as well as increasing their completion rates (CCCCO, 2020). Overall, a disproportionately low number of Latina/o/x students transfer compared to their White and Asian counterparts (CCCCO, 2019).

While institutions need improve transfer rates, fourteen percent of Latina/o/x students transfer to a UC campus, and over sixty seven percent

transfer to a CSU (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2018). This indicates that transfer access is a key to increasing degree completion for Latina/o/x students. Furthermore, the CSU seems to provide a stronger association to baccalaureate attainment for students who start at a community college (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2018), resulting in more community college transfer students choosing to transfer to CSUs. The reasons why these transfer trends exist is limited.

Emphasis has been placed on understanding what influences college success of students who attend community colleges (Bailey, Calcagno, Jenkins, Leinbach, & Kienzl, 2006; Acevedo-Gil, Santos, Alonso, & Solórzano, 2015). However, importance should also reflect on how community college enrollment has changed exponentially. In 1920, community colleges enrolled less than 2% of college freshman (Brint & Karabel, 1989). Today, 40% of first-time freshman in the United States attend community colleges (AACC, 2018). The mission of community colleges is to serve "almost any and every community educational need" (Seidman, 1985, p. 6). Compared to students who go straight into the four-year insitutions, community college students are disproportionately low income, students of color, nontraditional, and enrolled in developmental education (Dougherty & Lombardi, 2016). The American Association of Community Colleges (n.d.), suggested:

> most community college missions have the basic commitments to: (a)
>
> serving all segments of society through an open-access admissions policy

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that offers equal and fair treatment to all students; (b) comprehensive educational program; (c) serving its community as a community-based institution of higher education; (d) teaching; and (e) lifelong learning (para 1).

Cohen, Brawer, and Kisker (2014), describe the curricular functions of community colleges as:

a)   academic transfer

b)   occupational education

c)   continuing education

d)   developmental education

e)   community service

Thus, the community college and its functions in serving all students, has become a very important component in higher education.

The California Community College system is home to the nation's largest community college and public higher education system (Rivera, 2012; California Community Colleges, 2018). California community colleges have begun a transformation in reforming the way student's transition in higher education (California Community Colleges, 2018). This transformation has begun a shift in best practices aimed to better assist students academically through the implementation of new laws like Assembly Bill 705 (AB705). As previously noted, AB 705 is changing the landscape in assessment and placement practices, and as of Fall 2019, all California Community Colleges were required to be in full

compliance of the new law (California Community College Chancellor's Office, 2018).

Institutional Structure

Dedicated resources, including a greater understanding of culture and inclusion, must be developed when assisting non-traditional, Latina/o/x college students. Institutions, staff, faculty, and all other practitioners of higher education, must be fully integrated in supporting these student's educational experiences. It has been recognized that students who feel empowered and welcomed by their institution, and its institutional agents, develop the confidence and motivation to succeed academically (Rendon & Muñoz, 2011; Acevedo-Gil et al., 2015). As noted previously, it is not only being engaged that matters to Latina/o/x students, but also the quality and number of times the engagement occurs.

The structure that shapes an institution is crucial in the way in which it serves the needs of non-traditional, underrepresented student populations (Rendon, 2002). More specifically, it is important to address how institutional structure serves those who have been systematically marginalized and have unique circumstances and perspectives, which may not correlate with traditional institutional methods of action (Garcia & Ramirez, 2018). Furthermore, their unique circumstances as non-traditional students convey different college experiences and interactions (Rendon & Muñoz, 2011).

A unique circumstance this student population experiences during their educational trajectory, is the need to balance multiple priorities, perspectives,

and values (Rendon, 2002). As a result of this constant balancing act, attending to family needs or work responsibilities students "are frequently subjected to stereotypes and competency questioning by faculty or peers as to whether they are really motivated to acquire higher education" (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007, p. 382). This student population has aspirations and determination towards degree attainment. However, the dominant class structures present in higher education institutions may perpetuate negative beliefs about their motivation (Yosso, 2002). Institutions, along with institutional agents, who serve a diverse student population, must recognize the unique circumstances of this group to increase the quality of the connections and educational trajectory (Rendon, 1994; Rendon & Muñoz, 2011).

Research suggests that institutional factors hinder Latina/o/x educational attainment (Garcia & Ramirez, 2018). Since completion rates and levels of disparity vary across institutions, campuses of higher education must be more effective in assisting students (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2018). Identifying the factors that obstruct students along their educational trajectories, and breaking barriers, will provide a more complete evaluation of the institution's effective practices.

With regards to the community college, Melguizo (2007) found that the majority of Latina/o/x and African-American/Black college students enter the community college as a result of poor academic performance, the need of an affordable campus close to home, and low college going information. With a

large number of Latinas/o/x and African-American/Black students "choosing" to attend community colleges, it is important for institutions to evaluate what is impeding them from attending a four-year university or selective college straight from high school. Successfully transferring these students for the opportunity of obtaining a bachelor's degree requires structural change (Melguizo, 2007; The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2020).

Yosso and Solórzano (2006) report that Latina/o/x gaps in educational outcomes in higher education are due to the negative learning conditions structured in the K-12 schools they attend. Unfortunately, their opportunity to increase the college knowledge necessary to enter and succeed in higher education is compromised. Thus, knowing that low-income, first-generation Latina/o/x students tend to have access to less transferrable capital in their K-12 educational experience, is crucial to understand how academic and culturally responsive outreach programs assist these students in positively navigating a system that has adverse educational outcomes for them.

Additionally, indicative of the low transfer rates to four-year public universities and selective colleges, the placement practices into developmental courses, may be a result of previous high school preparation, as well as issues with placement exams (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2018). This demonstrates the importance of strengthening transfer outcomes for students of color and laws similar to AB 705.

Capital and Latina/o/x Students

Traditional models of socialization in higher education are described through processes by which students internalized and conformed to the norms and values of American society resulting in gains of capital (Bandura & Walters, 1963; Sampson, 1977). Capital gained is visible in many forms and can be transmitted from generation to generation (Lareau & Weininger, 2003). Pierre Bourdieu (1986) described capital with the following:

> can present itself in three fundamental guises: as economic capital, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the forms of property right; as cultural capital, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the forms of education qualification; and as social capital, made up of social obligations ('connections'), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the forms of a tile of nobility (p. 242-243).

Bourdieu's (1986) cultural capital symbolizes the acquired wealth through economic gain. He suggested that economic capital is similar to cultural capital and explained that economic capital is what is passed on from one-generation to the next. Furthermore, economic capital is founded on the cultural capital gained and is likely to be passed on. Social capital, on the other hand, is referred to as the durable networks established for future use. Social capital is not naturally given and is dependent on the possessions of cultural and economic capital.

Moreover, Bourdieu (1986) argued that these forms of capital convey the potential to generate valued resources and increase economic capital.

Initial models of socialization, divergent to Bourdieu's, were inclined with the ideals of Euro-centric beliefs, not considering the unique circumstances of non-traditional students (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). This type of intentional education aimed at developing the necessary skills for constructive socialization, "while officially designed to educate, may have always played an inadvertent yet key role in reproducing social inequality" (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p. 5). These processes and properties of social structure demanded that acculturation occur. The idea of acculturation, described as the process of managing a new and largely unfamiliar culture (Taft, 1977), "is a continuous process by which strangers are resocialized into a host culture so as to be directed toward greater compatibility with or fitness into a host culture, and ultimately toward assimilation" (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984, p. 209).

These critical assumptions and approaches, specifically in education, must be redeveloped to better assist underrepresented student populations (Yosso, 2005). One of the most prevalent forms of contemporary racism in American education is this type of deficit thinking (Yosso, 2005). Deficit thinking takes the position that students from underrepresented backgrounds are at fault for their poor academic performance and must assimilate to the dominant culture. Educators and institutional agents need to identify deficit thinking practices towards their students, to begin to develop culturally relevant practices and

content that validate these students' personal and cultural experiences (Rendón, 1994; Yosso, 2005).

Moreover, Flores, Ojeda, Huang, Gee, & Lee (2006), found that educational goals and their attainment are consistent with student's integration of two different cultures. This integration of embracing new ideals, while maintaining the ways of their heritage culture, is critical to student development and progression in higher education (Ojeda, Castillo, Meza, & Piña-Watson, 2014). Students experience this process from the beginning of their college careers, and as they continue to their professional communities (Hyland, 2009).

While pursuing higher education, Latina/o/x "students must learn to interpret and navigate an educational process that structurally works against their interests and mobility" (Moreno, 2002, p. 581). As previously noted, Bourdieu (1986) cultural capital framework asserts that privileged groups in society inherit knowledge, networks, and skills, referred to as cultural, economic, and social capital. Membership in these groups provides collectively owned capital that entitles its members to credit in specific context, socially and culturally. Thus, individuals who do not possess the social and cultural capital are, by default, excluded and regarded as lacking the suitable capital for society (Bourdieu, 1986).

Many first-generation, low-socioeconomic, and students of color are viewed as possessing less cultural and social capital than privileged groups (Rendon, 1994). While cultural capital refers to the "knowledge of the system,

how it works, and how to access opportunities" (Gandara & Moreno, 2002, p.

466), social capital, is the "familiarity with and access to, supportive social

networks that foster opportunity" (Gandara & Moreno, 2002, p. 466). Although,

these forms of capital are connected to college persistence (Bourdieu, 1986), the

role of family and community is also linked to increased levels of academic

achievement (Holcomb-McCoy, 2010).

<u>Family and Community Role</u>

Among Latina/o/x the family role is highly important as is embedded in the

culture (Rendon, 1994). Consistently, the familial support forecast institutional

attachment to college more strongly for Latina/o/x student due to the constant

encouragement and motivation (Holcomb-Mc-Koy, 2010). Moreover, the level of

education and income a family possesses can affect how low-income, first-

generation students choose their higher educational institutions (Berkner &

Chavez 1997; Choy et al., 2000).

Students consider the amount of financial aid offered, the proximity to their

home, and having the ability to work while in college (Melguizo, 2007) when

making the decision of where to attend school. Additionally, high parental

expectations can affect the decision and the type of institution – community

college, state university, or selective college – where a student enrolls (Walpole,

2007). When parents do not possess a college degree, Latina/o/x students turn

to siblings or extended family members for guidance (Carolan-Silva & Reyes,

2013; Perez & McDonough, 2008). Family influences the educational trajectory of

these students. The constant encouragement motivates the Latina/o/x student to pursue college, consciously knowing that it will benefit their family and community (Rendon, Amaury Nora, & Kanagala, 2014).

Many Latina/o/x students pursuing higher education are considered non-traditional students who come from working-class backgrounds, are low-income, and are often the first in their family to attend college (Rendon, 2002). As a result, the limited knowledge of the higher education processes students possess may affect their educational attainment, as well as knowledge on the navigational processes in higher education institutions (Perrakis & Hagedorn, 2010). Though these educational systems created by the dominant culture are prevalent, conversely, Latina/o/x students learn to create communal groups that provide resources of knowledge generated from familial pedagogies (Gonzalez, Moll, Tenery, Rivera, Rendon, Gonzales, & Amanti, 1995; Yosso, 2005). These communal groups and familial pedagogies further motivate and allow for means to navigate through college.

Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model challenges the deficit perspective that promotes traditional views of capital. Yosso describes community cultural wealth as "an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (p.77). Community cultural wealth is rooted from critical race theory, which broadens the conceptualization of cultural and social

capital, while also providing a deeper understanding of the educational pathways and life experiences of the Latina/o/x student population.

Community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) is comprised of six forms of capital:

- Aspirational Capital

- Linguistic Capital

- Familial Capital

- Social Capital

- Navigational Capital

- Resistant Capital

Aspirational capital is the ability to have high hopes despite of social, economic, and institutional barriers. Linguistic capital refers to the many ways in which people are able to communicate in more than one language and express themselves in different community norms. Familial capital comprises cultural practices and forms of knowledge nurtured on rooted familial relationships. Social capital are the networks of people and community resources. Navigational capital is the ability to maneuver and make sense of institutions where people of color are underrepresented. Resistant capital refers to the skills acquired through oppositional behaviors or identities that challenge marginalization's and inequalities.

Yosso (2005, 2006) explained that despite many Latina/o/x students perceived absence of the dominant capital, community cultural wealth is

prevalent. Familial support increases college persistence provides positive

perceptions of school and allows for an optimistic sense of well-being (Holcomb-

McCoy, 2010). For the Latina/o/x student population, family and community are

influential in their collegiate pathway, their resilience, their persistence, and

perseverance. These values are deeply engrained in cultural identity and passed

on from generation to generation (Kiyama, 2010).

Validation Theory

Differences in student backgrounds and understanding how historically

marginalized populations have been excluded, have prompted scholars to

question whether academic engagement and involvement is the most vital

component for student success and retention for non-traditional students. Laura

Rendon (1994) introduced the theory of validation, which describes involvement

as the responsibility of institutional agents (faculty, staff, and administration of an

institution). Rendon (1994) introduced validation theory with the intentions of

highlighting low-income, first-generation, college student's experiences in higher

education and found:

> that nontraditional students do not perceive involvement as *them* taking
>
> the initiative. They perceive it when someone takes an active role in
>
> assisting them. The role of the institution in fostering validation is active –
>
> it involves faculty, counselors, coaches, and administrators actively
>
> reaching out to students or designing activities that promote active

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learning and interpersonal growth among students, faculty, and staff (p. 44).

Rendon's (1994) theory of validation was developed from a qualitative study she interviewed and observed various educational stakeholders. Her study consisted of non-traditional students, counselors, faculty, and state officials. She observed participants in a community college setting and reviewed 22 student narratives. It was apparent that validation was "an enabling, confirming, and supportive process initiated by in – and out – of class agents that fosters academic and interpersonal development" (p. 44). Interactions with her diverse participants were recorded and analyzed into themes.

Rendon (1994) results showed six elements of validation:

- contact initiated by institutional agents

- increased self-esteem through the validation process

- validation as a necessity to student development

- validation resulting from the interaction between students and multiple agents in – and out – of the classroom

- validation as a developmental process

- validation being present from the beginning of a student's college experience

Contact initiated by institutional agents–faculty, staff, and administrators–taking the initiative in engaging and involving students, increases the self-esteem and confidence in learning, resulting in growth of self-worth. Rendon (1994)

described validation as a necessity for student development and allows students to feel capable through the academic and interpersonal mechanisms of validation. Meaningful interactions with multiple agents in – and out – of class, i.e., family, faculty, supporting students, coaches, advisors, are vital to the validation process. Validation is also not finite and is a developmental process that continues over time. Lastly, validation is most critical when it occurs early in the student's college experience, preferably at the beginning of their college career.

Rendon's (1994) theory of validation represents how academic institutions and institutional agents can positively influence and transform the lives of students pursuing higher education. Though "virtually all students experience some difficulty in making the transition to college" (Tinto, 1993, p. 98), the theory of validation reflects on a distinctive way of servicing students and an indispensable way of validating Latina/o/x students (Rendon, 1994).

Using validation theory, Rendon (2002) researched how the Puente Program, through its holistic approach, ensured students felt validated and a sense of belonging. Rendon (2002) found that participants of the program felt welcomed and connected to their institution and the institutional agents that represent it. Being that Puente is a cohort model program, students are navigating unfamiliar academic processes alongside their peers. This connection, resulted in having an increase in students' academic self-efficacy and college persistence (Rendon, 2002). Through her research, Rendon (2002) found that

over 48 percent of participants who experienced validation, successfully transferred to universities. This number was higher than the average transfer rate for non-participants.

Rendon and Muñoz (2011) revisited validation theory and explained "when validation is present, students feel capable of learning and have a sense of self-worth" (p.18). Reflecting on Rendon (1994) validation theory, Rendon and Muñoz (2011) provided examples of validating instances described by students as:

- Faculty took the time to learn their names and refer to them by name.

- Faculty gave students opportunities to witness themselves as successful learners.

- Faculty ensured that the curriculum reflected student backgrounds.

- Faculty shared knowledge with students and became partners in learning.

- Faculty told students, "You can do this, and I am going to help you."

- Coaches took the time to help students select courses and plan their futures.

- Parents, spouses, and children supported students in their quest to earn a college degree.

- Faculty encouraged students to support each other (i.e., form friendships, develop peer networks, share assignments, provide positive reinforcement).

- Faculty and staff served as mentors for students and made and effort to meet with them outside of class such as in patio areas, in cafeterias, and/or in the library.

These examples further emphasize the importance of how institutional agents can make significant connections with students and change their educational trajectories. These connections have a higher probability of making students feel like they belong and increases their success in higher education. Conversely, perspectives "that validation is akin to coddling students to the point that it might make them weaker, and that college students should be able to survive on their own" (Rendon and Muñoz, 2011, p. 17), is a prevalent reaction concerning validation.

Rendon and Muñoz (2011) argued that validation does quite the contrary to pampering or making students weaker. In fact, making students feel validated makes them more confident and helps them believe in their own "ability to learn, acquire self-worth, and increase their motivation to succeed" (Rendon and Muñoz, 2011, p. 18). Students benefit from employing validation and this allows them to recognize they are capable learners that belong in higher education.

Participation in Puente

The Puente Program plays a central part in the participants experiences during their tenure in the program. Moreover, the Puente Program incorporates validation and a sense of belonging by affirming the rich cultural background of the Latina/o/x people. Rendon's (1994) theory of validation offers a better

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understanding of the impact Puente has on this student population. Rendon (1994, 2002) explained how institutions and institutional agents who play an active role in the academic life of their students, have the opportunity to positively influence their college career. Castellanos and Gloria (2007) reported that "interweaving core values into the fabric of the university experience will assist Latina/o students in having cultural sustenance and validation, which will likely prompt both individual and group longevity toward graduation" (p. 386).

The Puente Program offers access to resources, provides tools to progress, validates Latina/o/x students' rich culture, and connects them with institutional agents. Specifically, the cohort model, helps students navigate unfamiliar academic processes alongside their peers, resulting in students having a sense of belonging. Similarly, it increases academic self-efficacy, which "involves a student's beliefs about his or her ability to reach desired goals and successfully complete tasks" (Krumrei-Mancuso et al., 2013, p. 261). Puente Program increases a student's self-worth, while also providing them with the assets to achieve academic success.

Additionally, students participating in the Puente Program report finding their voice and becoming empowered (Moreno, 2002). They indicate an increase of self-confidence despite coming in with feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy. Imposter syndrome (Clance & Imes, 1978; Coryell, Wagner, Clark, Stuessy, 2013), or imposter phenomenon, is something many first-generation, underrepresented student populations face. Imposter syndrome occurs when

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individuals have feelings of inadequacy and question their abilities and competence, despite having high achievements. Due to these negative believes, participating in outreach programs can be difficult for non-traditional and underrepresented students. For this reason, institutional agents and programs similar to Puente, are vital in assisting students overcome these feelings of inadequacy.

Educational institutions are beginning to address the inability of outreach programs and learning communities to reach more students who may be dealing with feelings of not belonging (Rendon, 2002). This is especially important, for the community college because it is more likely to be the beginning of an individual's college career. In addition, addressing this issue is vital for community colleges who serve non-traditional, underrepresented groups, commuter students, students from low socio-economic backgrounds, and students who work either part time or full time (Fike & Fike, 2008). It is important to acknowledge how college culture and the transition to a four-year institution impacts this student population.

<center>College Culture and Puente's Significance</center>

College culture is significant as it pertains to persistence and socialization in postsecondary education. McClafferty, McDonough, and Nunez (2002) state that college culture occurs in an institution where all students are informed and prepared to make decisions about their postsecondary education. Establishing a positive college culture requires organizational change. Tinto (1997) suggest that

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college culture is best developed when student socialization involves faculty, staff, and administrators. This is the case for both traditional and non-traditional students. Further, having a positive college culture offers a better perspective on ways to address academic progress and retention of underrepresented students.

College culture in the Puente Program is implemented in a comprehensive manner through its three major components: academics, counseling, and mentoring (The Puente Project, 2019). Nonetheless, it is also vital to provide a transfer culture that will have a positive impact. According to Handel (2006), in order for community colleges to establish a positive "transfer-going" culture, they must:

- Establish transfer to a four-year institution as a high institutional priority

- Ensure that transfer is seen by students as expected and attainable

- Offer a rigorous curriculum for all students that includes writing, critical thinking, mathematics, and the sciences

- Provide high quality instruction, including innovative and research-based pedagogies

- Develop intensive academic support programs based on models of "academic excellence" (e.g. academic counseling, peer tutoring, and reciprocal learning techniques)

- Create an environment of belonging in which students feel stimulated to achieve at high academic levels

- Establish strong community and family linkages that foster intellectually stimulating, secure and culturally rich environments for students on and off campus.

Though these characteristics are not all-encompassing to what is needed for transfer, they provide commitment from the institution to their students who aspire to transfer to a four-year institution. This type of transfer-going culture allows for students to feel like they belong, thus, resulting in a positive college experience.

For traditional students, the socialization process to the college culture is a predictor of student's persistence (Tinto, 1997). For non-traditional students this socialization process is unfamiliar (Rendon, 1994). For this reason, the Puente Program focuses on a college culture and experience that matches the Latina/o/x student's backgrounds and family life. Moreno (2002) examined how the Puente Program – through academics (English courses), counseling, and mentoring – influences students both in the short term (college access) and the long term (college persistence). Through its holistic approach, the Puente Program highlights the theory of validation, and provides student's access to resources and knowledge on ways to succeed in higher education. Being a cohort model program, helps students navigate unfamiliar academic processes alongside their peers (The Puente Project, 2019). This results in students feeling validated and in an increase on their academic self-efficacy (Rendon, 2002; Rendon & Muñoz, 2011). Consequently, Latina/o/x students who participate in the Puente Program

successfully achieve transfer and/or degree attainment at a higher rate and in a timely manner versus non-participants (The Puente Project, 2019).

College culture plays a vital component to the contextual variables that influence the Latina/o/x student population pursuing higher education (Castillo, Conoley, & Brossart, 2004). Furthermore, "a student's perception of the university environment mediates the relationship between ethnic identity and persistence attitudes" (Castillo, Conoley, Choi-Pearson, Archuleta, Phoummarath, & Van Landingham, 2007, p. 270). Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler (1996) reported Latina/o/x students attending higher education institutions acknowledged inequities, felt unwelcomed and alienated, as well as experiencing hostile environments. This results in difficulty of adjusting and it "increases when considering the university environment and campus climate as it relates to White students and their perceptions of ethnic minority students" (Clayton, Medina, & Wiseman, 2017, p. 5).

Students feeling alienated and lack a sense of belonging, often resort to college environments that they feel more comfortable in (Hurtado et al., 1996), such as the Puente Program. These counterspaces are often "safe spaces" outside of mainstream spaces that are occupied by underrepresented groups (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). For this reason, faculty, staff, and especially counselors must integrate themselves in the daily activities of their student population (Grubb et al., 2002) and assist in increasing academic and interpersonal validation (Acevedo-Gil et al., 2015).

Conclusion

Attaining the resources as it pertains to postsecondary education, increases Latina/o/x student achievement and persistence. Puente Program addresses the importance of retention and academic success of many non-traditional, first-generation, Latina/o/x college students. The three components of Puente are factors influencing college success for many of its Latina/o/x students. Research suggests that participation in outreach programs, like the Puente Program, contribute to positive impact of college culture, student validation, and sense of belonging (Rendon & Muñoz, 2011). Coordination between institutional agents, faculty, staff, and mentors, provide the support necessary to increase college achievement and degree attainment.

The purpose of this chapter was to provide an overview of literature that is related to the program and Latina/o/x students. Additionally, this chapter elaborated on the Puente Program and the effects it has on the transition to a four-year institution. Validation theory was introduced to provide the theoretical framework for this study and to provide context about the educational trajectory of this student population. The literature on community colleges and the transfer process helped with understanding this student population educational pipeline.

CHAPTER THREE:

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter will provide a detailed account of the methods the researcher

applied to conduct the study. This chapter will begin with an explanation of the

research design implemented. Then, a discussion on the research setting and

sample is presented, followed by the research method guiding the study. Next,

the researcher provides a description of the data collection and data analysis. To

conclude this chapter, a detailed description of the researcher's positionality will

be disclosed. The following section will discuss the research design, including the

conceptual framework.

Research Design

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), a conceptual framework serves

as the underlying structure which guides a research study. The conceptual

framework is used as the foundational basis that provides a lens in examining a

specific problem and functions as the core of the investigation (Merriam & Tisdell,

2016). In research design, the conceptual framework is essentially useful to the

study and plays a pivotal role in the way research and data are analyzed.

Grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, concerned with understanding the

lived experiences of individuals (Lopez & Willis, 2004), this study focused on

Rendon's (1994) validation theory and the impact the Puente Program has on its

student population undergraduate and post-baccalaureate experiences. Since, the theory of validation considers involvement as the responsibility of institutional agents rather than students, who may not be familiar with the ways in which to navigate the higher education process, it was important to analyze how the program validates its student participants. Rendon (1994) believes that academic institutions and its institutional agents can positively influence students from underrepresented and diverse backgrounds. Puente Program asserts its objective of making students feel validated through its three major components of academics, counseling, and mentoring. The program's goal is for its students to feel welcomed and know they can succeed in higher education.

By employing an interpretive phenomenology approach (Lopez & Willis, 2004), this research focused on qualitatively analyzing the lived experiences of the Latina/o/x Puente Program alumni. As described by Creswell (2013) "a phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon" (p. 76). Additionally, this study aimed at understanding validation as experienced by participants during their participation in the program. Specifically, how the feeling of validation sustained and continued during their undergraduate studies and post-baccalaureate experiences, if at all. As previously mentioned, though literature on the Puente Program is limited, this study expands our understanding of the impact of validation beyond program participation.

By capturing the complexity of the lived experiences of the participants, the researcher obtained a richness in description on how they persisted, and the continuity of this persistence during their undergraduate studies and post-baccalaureate experiences. This study contributes our understanding of the impact of the program at a postsecondary level. Particularly on the ways in which the Latina/o/x participants felt validated, and the role the program and its institutional agents had on their higher education trajectory.

The rationale for using qualitative research is to explain and comprehend the meaning of each participant's experience. Creswell (2014) defines qualitative research as:

> an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data. The final written report has a flexible structure (p. 4).

For this reason, using a qualitative methodology allowed for an understanding of the theory of validation and the impact it had on the participants during their partaking in the Puente Program and beyond. This form of inquiry supports an inductive style and focuses on each individual participant's meaning. It also highlights the significance and importance of both Puente and validating students.

Qualitative research has the ability to capture meanings as participants identify them. These meanings reflect their specific experiences through an exploration and inquiry process that allows for self-awareness and self-reflection of the participants, and even the researcher (Creswell, 2014). It provides an opportunity for their voices to be acknowledged and addresses concerns that cannot be answered through the use of other methods. For these reasons, qualitative methods will best support this study in understanding and explaining participant's meanings.

More specifically, the interpretive phenomenological research approach used allowed for the researcher to go beyond describing participants' experiences. In fact, this study utilized interpretive phenomenology through what Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) conceptualized as Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Drawing from the field of psychology IPA is:

> a qualitative research approach committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences. IPA is phenomenological in that it is concerned with exploring experience in its own terms... IPA researchers are especially interested in what happens when everyday flow of lived experiences takes on a particular significance for people. This usually occurs when something important has happened in our lives. (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, p. 3)

In IPA, changes in identity brought on by transitions in the participant's life is important. This is specifically relevant to this study, which sought to understand

what Puente Program alumni experience as they transferred from a community college to a four-year public institution.

Research Setting and Sample

This study explored students' experiences related to the Puente Program and offered a distinctive investigation on the fastest growing student population in California and the nation (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2015). The Latina/o/x student population continues to be underserved and misinterpreted as they navigate through the educational pipeline. The Puente Program serves with a purpose to assist underrepresented populations, like Latina/o/x students, by providing the programming and resources necessary for degree attainment and transfer to a four-year institution. Since its inception, the program has continued to progress and has been established in middle schools, high schools, and community colleges throughout the state of California (The Puente Project, 2019). It has been successful in reaching program goals and in modeling a platform that bridges culture, community, and education. The program has also been expanded to both Texas and Washington. (The Puente Project, 2019).

Setting

The researcher felt it was important to obtain the lived, validating, experiences from *Puentistas*. Participants in this study attended different community colleges where they were introduced and joined the Puente Program. They also attended different four-year public institutions once they transferred. Though participants joined the program at different institutions, the same

structure of the three major components (academics, counseling, and mentoring) are applied. Additionally, Puente Program administrative staff continuously train instructors and counselors at each institution with up to date information and implement new rigorous instruction focused on its three components (The Puente Project, 2019).

<u>Sampling</u>

Through the use of convenience sampling (Creswell, 2014), taking advantage of the population closest to the researcher, the researcher began by sending an email to known Puente Alumni. Once this process was initiated, a snowball effect allowed for other participants to be recruited and participate in the study. This form of sampling, known as snowball sampling, is a form of purposeful sampling that occurs when new individuals are recommended by other participants in the study (Creswell, 2014). After prospective participants were identified, the researcher contacted the potential participants who were recommended through snowball sampling.

To align with the three research questions, as noted in chapter one and will be discussed in this chapter later on, the selection of participants was guided by purposeful sampling through the establishment of determined parameters (Glesne, 2016). Puente alumni, also known as *Puentistas*, was a parameter that is predetermined in the study. Specifically, students who participated in Puente at a community college and transferred to a four-year institution. Another parameter required participants to have obtained their undergraduate degree. The

participant's background was also criteria in determining who to interview. While

Latina/o/x students have historically been the majority ethnic group in the

program, other ethnic and racial groups also participate. However, the focus of

this study is Latina/o/x participants. Most of Puente Program participants self-

identify as Latina/o/x (UCOPP, 2018).

In addition, to the above stated parameters, the purposeful sampling of the

selection process also consisted of participants who transferred to a four-year

public institution from a community college in California. Although the Puente

Program is also implemented in high schools and junior high schools, where the

focus is to assist students in transitioning straight into a four-year institution, the

sampling of participants in this study concentrated on those who began their

higher education career at a community college. Participants who transferred

from a community college were selected due to the initial focus and creation of

the program: to assist underrepresented groups in transferring to four-year

institutions, to facilitate growth in degree attainment, and to increase in retention

rates at community colleges (Rendon, 2002). Furthermore, because the program

is most prevalent at two-year institutions – community colleges (The Puente

Project, 2019) – and the faculty and staff who are hired at each institution, are

dedicated specifically to assisting the participants in Puente, the information

obtained from participants who attended community colleges better served the

purpose of this study.

The recruitment of participants represents a purposeful rather than a random sample. As previously noted, the selection of participants was guided by purposeful sampling through the establishment of determined parameters (Glesne, 2016). Purposeful sampling is a technique used in qualitative research for the selection of information-rich cases that result in the most effective and in-depth study (Patton, 2002). These cases are those from which the researcher can greatly expand and learn about the issues in the study.

Once the participants for the study were selected, they received an informed consent form. To ensure there was no perception of coercion, the researcher informed them that the study did not offer any monetary compensation. However, the researcher emailed all participants a $10 gift card to purchase coffee after each interview occurred. This was a form of expressing gratitude for their time. The researcher purchased the gifts out of her own funds and did not offer them prior to the interviews being conducted.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore Puente Program alumni lived-experiences with Puente. More specifically, the researcher was interested in understanding their validating experiences. As previously identified in chapter one of this study, the questions that guided this research are the following:

- How do the Puente Program alumni describe their experiences of their trajectory into higher education?

- From the participants perspective, what components of the Puente

Program were most effective in bridging their postsecondary studies and beyond?

- What elements of the Puente Program did participants identify helped with feeling validated and assisted them in achieving their academic goals?

Research Method

For the purpose of conducting an in-depth investigation of the real-life experiences of the Latina/o/x student population that participated in the Puente Program, an interpretive phenomenological methodology was used.

The researcher's connection to this study comes as a former Puente Program mentor. As a mentor, the researcher met and interacted with program participants, counselors, and faculty. The researcher spoke in front of classrooms and provided guidance to students seeking information about transfer. The researcher's connection is also rooted in having a sibling who participated in the program while attending community college. This sibling was a Puente Program participant and alumni.

Data Collection

This section will concentrate on the study's data collection. Throughout this research, the interpretive phenomenology approach involved collecting information through interviews and document analysis. The researcher's data collection was obtained through conducting one-on-one, semi-structured

interviews and document analysis. Moreover, each type of source of data had its strengths and weaknesses as it relates to the research conducted.

As a qualitative researcher, interviews were conducted in a single session with each participant. Paying close attention to the human actions when conducting my study was valuable. In particular, the reactions of said actions because qualitative inquiry "by nature, is a customized, inductive, emergent process that permits more of the researcher's personal signature in study design, implementation, and write-up" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 3). The participants provided information that was centered on their experiences as *Puentistas*.

One-on-one semi structured interviews were an important way to conduct this study. The interviews were 45-60 minutes long and were conducted in a time and location convenient and comfortable to the participants. The semi-structured interviews allowed the "individual respondents to define the world in unique ways" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 110). It allowed for specific questions related to the study to be asked to participants. Moreover, spontaneous conversations resonated and came about from the initial semi-structured questions, offered information beneficial to the study. These questions were intended to elicit views and perceptions of the participants as they pertained to their experiences with the Puente Program. The questions pertaining to their lived experiences and feelings of validation while participating in the program and after partaking in the program, were intended at advancing and guiding the conversations.

The document analysis provided data for this study. Organizational

documents and document analysis allowed for a better perspective of the Puente

Program and its establishment in many higher education institutions. This also

helped with understanding the lived experiences of the participants as they

pertained to their involvement in the program. By using organizational

documents, a better visual of the program and how it is grounded in real world

applications (Merriam, 1998) was established. Documents included information

from the program website, as well as, the California Community Colleges

Chancellor's Office and University of California, Berkeley websites. The

organizational documents collected are public record and can be accessed

through the above-mentioned websites. Documents collected allowed for

information on the success rate of the program in regard to supporting the

Latina/o/x student population. It also provided information on the multicultural

approach that is the focus of the English component in the program. The

literature utilized is focused on providing culture and identity of Latina/o/x

scholars.

      Table 1 showcases how the sources used to collect data aligned to help

with examining my research questions.

Table 1. Alignment of Data Collection Methods and Research Questions

	Document Analysis	Interviews
How do the Puente Program alumni describe their experiences of their trajectory into higher education?	X	X
From the participants perspective, what components of the Puente Program were most effective in bridging their postsecondary studies and beyond?	X	X
What elements of the Puente Program did participants identify helped with feeling validated and assisted them in achieving their academic goals?	X	X

Data Analysis

In order to ascertain the richness of the lived experiences of each participant, through dialect, interviews were transcribed and coded. As mentioned in the description of IPA, it was important to recognize the experiences the Puente Program alumni had and the moments in their lives that contributed to their transitioning from community college to the four-year public

university. For this reason, transcriptions of each interview were read multiple times for accuracy and familiarity.

The data was coded, organized, and analyzed continuously throughout this study. All the data sources, including the interview transcripts, and the fieldnotes, were manually analyzed and coded (Saldaña, 2016). As the researcher read through the data, the coding process began by pre-coding (Saldaña, 2009). This was established through highlighting and underlying specific phrases or sentences, as they related to the research questions. Excel was also utilized to keep track of the coding process and theme development. Through the consideration of the research questions, this first cycle of coding was influenced by the coding process as described by Saldaña, 2016.

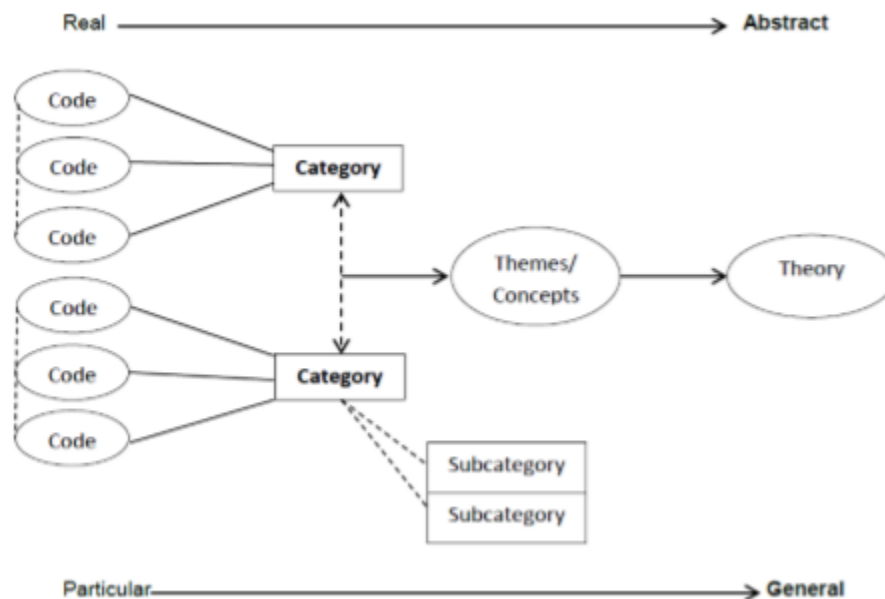Below, figure 3.1 provides a coding map of Saldaña's data analysis.

Figure 1. Saldaña's Codes-to-Theory Model for Qualitative Inquiry

According to Saldaña (2016), a code is "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p.4). Through the coding process both the data collection and data analysis phase of a study were connected. Coding is an exploratory process that is interpretive and heuristic, and is based on the researcher's synthesis of the data. Saldaña (2016) explains, "As you code and recode, expect…your codes and categories to become more refined and, depending on your methodological approach, more conceptual and abstract" (p. 12). This coding process results in two stages, the first and second cycle of coding. The first cycle of the coding process ranges from a single word to an entire page. In the second cycle, the portions coded are partial to what has already been established.

An outcome of the analytic reflection and coding process in qualitative studies, are themes. Themes are a result of several categories that form a specific focus. A theme is "an outcome of coding, categorization, and analytic reflection, not something that [was], in itself, coded" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 13).

The use of eclectic coding was used to employ a purposeful procedure of two or more coding types (Saldaña, 2016). The two types of coding employed were emotion coding, which was utilized to analyze feelings or attitudes about the research findings, and In Vivo coding which was used for recurring themes based on the participants own words and phrases as they pertain to their experiences in the program (Saldaña, 2016). The second cycle of coding used

was pattern coding, that identified similar coded data and grouped them for major themes (Saldaña, 2016).

The researcher was open to the use of additional codes that may developed from the data analysis (Saldaña, 2016). However, predetermined, or deductive codes such as connection and belonging, were used to analyze the data and provide a better perspective of the lived experiences of the program alumni.

<div align="center">Trustworthiness</div>

As qualitative research grows, social and behavioral scientists must make sure the strategies used for the trustworthiness of their study are both credible and rigorous (Creswell & Miller, 2000). For this reason, qualitative researchers must use various ways to enhance validation of their study. Trustworthiness in qualitative research "are procedures (e.g., member checking, triangulating data sources) that qualitative researches us to demonstrate the accuracy of their findings and convince readers of this accuracy" (Creswell, 2014, p. 250). It is a researcher's responsibility to implement a study that will result in trustworthy outcomes where subjectivities are monitored. As noted by Dyson and Genishi (2005), "who we are outside our identities as university researchers influences the kinds of questions we ask…. how we collect, analyze, and interpret data" (p. 57-58).

Accordingly, understanding the lived experiences of the participants began with the rapport established with participants. The researcher took into

consideration the lived experiences of each participant to increase the understanding of their specific circumstances. Though their situations may have been a result of the systematic inequalities that have been prevalent in their environment, this study focused on the ways in which each Puente Program participant described their navigation process of higher education and how they persisted in higher education.

By using member checking and sharing the initial transcribed interview and analyses with participants, the researcher determined the accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2014). The researcher shared the interview transcriptions with the participants via email to provide them with the opportunity to confirm the accuracy of the transcribed interview. The participants had the opportunity to reply to the email with any specific major or minor changes, or confirm the accuracy of their transcripts as were emailed to them. The researcher also shared the findings after coding was completed. The sharing of the findings allowed participants with the opportunity to corroborate the data. The objective of the transcriptions and sharing of findings, through the use of member checking, was to highlight the major themes (Creswell, 2014) that were evident during the interviews process.

Throughout the data analysis stage, the researcher monitored her subjectivities to deter from having them "skew, distort, construe, and misconstrue" any part of my data (Glesne, 2005, p. 123). This process was facilitated through the assistance of a critical friend (Gordon, 2006) who provided

critique and feedback. Gordon (2006) describes the critical friend concept as having "the potential to reduce or even remove blind spots" (p. 5) that are present from my subjectivities. Accordingly, my critical friend provided awareness on these subjectivities. My critical friend was my dissertation chair, whose research interest center around Latina/o/x students. He is faculty and has published extensively on this topic. He is also the editor and chief for the *Journal of Latinos and Education*, as well as, the executive director for the Latino Education & Advocacy Days (LEAD), a week-long conference focusing on educational equity and achievement of Latina/o/x students. Through the critical friend and peer review, which also included committee members, the researcher addressed the trustworthiness of this study (Glesne, 2016). The peer review also allowed for reflection on any cases where participants exhibit dissimilar experiences and/or understandings.

The use of thick description was also implemented — "description that goes beyond the mere or bare reporting of an act (thin description), but describes and probes the intentions, motives, meanings, contexts, situations and circumstances of action" (Denzin, 1989, p. 39). The data and notes compiled provided detailed descriptions of the perspectives of each participant, resulting in a richer, more realistic study that the reader can connect and transfer their own experiences to (Creswell, 2014). This transferability is "achieved when readers feel as though the story of the research overlaps with their own situation and they intuitively transfer the research to their own action" (Tracy, 2010, p. 845).

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Being reflexive guided the design in a manner that is suitable for an interpretive study (Glesne, 2016). Van Manen (2016) highlighted that to truly understand phenomenology is to go through it by lived experience. Lived experience "aims to provide concrete insights into the qualitative meanings of phenomena in people's lives" (Van Manen, 2016, p. 40). Van Manen (2016) alerted that phenomenology can be difficult because it needs to be reinvented over and over.

Researcher Positionality

Paulo Freire identified the concept of educational liberation, in the context of the student/teacher relationship. The banking model concept, hypothesized by Freire critiques the traditional educational system where students are viewed as containers that teachers merely put knowledge in. This model, according to Freire, only enforces oppression. Freire reflected on how the property, knowledge, belongs to the instructor "and education is seen as a transaction in which teachers deposit knowledge in the students" (Beckett, 2013, p. 50). Freire described this model as being deficient in critical thinking and ownership of knowledge as it relates to a student's cognitive development.

Freire insisted that the reality of education was that as work progresses teachers become more teacher-students and students become student-teachers. He believed that together they become critical co-investigators (Beckett, 2013). This reflection, according to Freire, is the most beneficial way for individuals to flourish in an educational setting. Having the ability to think critically and develop

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new thoughts by reflecting on the lessons being taught, generates new knowledge.

The banking system is something that continues to be shadowed in education. I recall trying to memorize the questions and answers for a test, rather than truly understanding the meaning behind it. As someone who has taught and lectured in front of a class, I know the importance of openness to critical discourse. Understanding the concept of being co-investigators signifies that the reality of both the student and the teacher are considered when reflecting on a stance. In return, a better way of analyzing the issue is produced. However, though the concept of being a co-investigator in a class setting is advantageous, in research this model can alter the sharing of lived experiences.

This study aims at highlighting the experiences of Puente Program alumni and the importance of participation in the program while attending community college, and during the transfer process to a four-year public institution. Specifically, the way in which it prepared the Latina/o/x participant with facilitating transfer to four-year institutions, to post-baccalaureate studies, and eventually, to either graduate school or their professional careers. The researcher attempted to emphasize the experiences of the participants, the importance of the program, and feeling validated. Specifically, how it is vital to have a connection to the institution and institutional agents. As previously described, both my sibling and I had the opportunity to participate in the program while attending community college. I was grateful for the relationship I established with my counselor and the

resources I was provided. Appreciative for the guidance, I was able to continue striving towards degree attainment and transferred to a four-year institution. As such, my understanding of my researcher subjectivity and positionality in the study is implicit.

The experiences I have gone through educationally, professionally, and personally, have all shaped my views and social identities. When I began my higher education career, I was a first-generation, Latina, single mother, college student. I found it hard to navigate through the higher education system and its admissions process, specifically, the financial aid and transfer process which were unnerving. Moreover, as a first-generation college student who started at a community college, I knew that despite my lack of college knowledge or roadmap to transfer, I had high aspirations and determination. These identities that made me and the obstacles I surpassed, empowered me throughout the research process. I present Gloria Anzaldua's following words to describe my thought process during my study:

> What does being a thinking subject, an intellectual, mean for a woman of color from working class origins? It means not fulfilling our parents' expectations, it means often going against their expectations by exceeding them. It means being concerned about the ways knowledges are invented. It means continually challenging institutionalized discourses. It means being suspicious of the dominant culture's interpretations of "our" experience, of the way they "read" us (Anzaldua, 1990, p. xxv).

These words describe how I questioned my path through my higher education career, from my community college days all the way to my doctoral program. I challenged, but I also questioned myself from beginning to end. I knew my journey would be well worth it and that I would be able to provide scholarship and guidance to the next generation of Latina/o/x scholars. More significantly, to my incredible children. I knew that I wanted to provide a narrative to all those that I came in contact with, who perhaps like myself, have experienced higher education with a lack of validation and where whose culture has been dismissed. Moreover, I wanted to highlight the importance of community and becoming empowered throughout my lived experiences and understandings.

As a first-generation college student, my directionless path changed when I met my counselor who was also the Puente Program counselor at my community college. After learning from her how the Puente Program functioned through its academic English courses, counseling, and mentoring components, I became intrigued. The program aimed to assist students just like me who were going through many similar obstacles. Though, I partook in Puente Program events and found support and resources to assist me through my transition, I did not become fully immersed.

Through the guidance of my counselor, I was able to see first-hand the positive impact the program had on its participants. It was not until I returned to take part in events as a mentor that I saw, full circle, the program's objectives of

paving the way for underrepresented students. As previously mentioned, the program was also highly influential in the path to transfer for my sibling. I saw how it provided her many opportunities and resources for academic success and allowed her to envision a better future. This connection to community and culture opened up networking and capital opportunities that neither my sibling nor I previously had.

My thoughts towards Puente Program influenced my study, specifically because of my association to the program. Nonetheless, throughout my study I focused on bringing light to the significance of the program from each participant's perspective. Having the capability to relate to them, as it pertained to their struggles and experiences during their pursuit of higher education, assisted in establishing good rapport and relatedness. Being that I was a first-generation college student who had to learn how to balance school, work, motherhood, and my personal life, my background and experiences, helped in relating to each participant and their specific struggles. In many ways, our shared experiences formed a connection between participant and researcher.

Coming from a middle-class family, where education was always a priority, may differ from participants whose family's background, financial status, and perceptions of higher education are dissimilar. I was fortunate to have the support from family in many ways. Furthermore, the balance of daily responsibilities, although similar is some ways, may differ from some participants.

I understand that in many ways, I am privileged. As a researcher, with a graduate academic background, pursuing my doctorate, I understood I was in a position that gave me privilege and authority (Villena, 1996). This privilege is a result of the hard work, dedication, and influence my parents instilled in me. I refused to be another statistic and had the opportunity to strive towards pursuing my educational and career aspirations. I aspired to be in a position in which I can make a difference and encourage others to endeavor towards a better future. Though this may not be the case for some, I understand that I have a duty to pave the way for future generations who aspire towards the same educational goals. Furthermore, my goal as a researcher is to focus on obtaining the most genuine results. I recognize that my familiarity with the Puente Program informed my study as I collected and analyzed my data. However, through the various approaches of trustworthiness, I am able to affirm my subjectivity did not influence the results and the analysis of this study was based on the lived-experiences of the amazing participants.

Summary

Through the use of validation theory (Rendon, 1994), the focus of this research was on the Puente Program alumni and the preparation they received. The researcher highlighted how the program assists and prepares students in successful transition to a four-year university. In addition, this chapter identified the way the program contributes to the persistence of their students. In this chapter, the researcher discussed and provided a detailed account of the

methods applied to conduct this study. This chapter began with an explanation of the research design. Followed, by the discussion of the research setting and design, continued by elaborating on the research method of this study. Next, the researcher provided a description of the data collection and finalized the chapter with a detailed description of the researcher positionality. In the following chapter, the researcher will describe the data results of the study and reflect on the themes constructed based the collection of data.

CHAPTER FOUR:

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher will discuss the results and the way in which the data was analyzed and reviewed. This study applied an interpretive phenomenology methodology to explore the Puente Program participants lived experiences throughout their undergraduate studies and beyond. First, the identification of themes will be discussed, followed by information on the research participants. Then, discussion on the preparation for college received and family support the participants reported will be analyzed. Next, by way of the research questions, this study will highlight what the participants described was important in their successful transition and trajectory to a four-year public university.

The interpretive phenomenology method involved collecting data through semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The data collection was obtained through conducting one-on-one, semi-structured interviews of the Puente Program alumni participants. Throughout each interview being conducted, a reflective journal was utilized by the researcher to annotate notes of what was being discussed. Document analysis was also part of the study to reflect on the programs influence on student participation. Specifically, the literature in the English component. Moreover, each type of source of data had strengths and weaknesses as it related to the research being conducted.

Furthermore, the lived experiences as described by each participant increased the study's trustworthiness.

To answer the research questions of this study, all collected data were analyzed. Participants reported the impact the program had on them and the ways in which it shaped their views and understanding of attending college. Participants, all identified as first-generation college students, and explained the preparation they had in high school for attending college. Participants self-reported how the support and perspectives of those around them, were influential in their educational trajectories. They described the way in which the Puente Program bridged their transition from a community college to a public four-year institution. Participants also explained how they became more in tune with their feelings of self-worth and feeling validated, which also assisted some of them in their pursuit of graduate school and in their professional career.

The research employed was guided by three questions. These questions were developed to best understand the experiences of the Latina/o/x participants who were part of the Puente Program during their community college career. Participants described their experiences while attending community college and how they were able to successfully transfer to a public four-year institution. The study's research questions were identified to better understand the experiences of the participants and how these experiences may have influenced their persistence in higher education. To review, this study was guided by the following research questions:

- How do the Puente Program alumni describe their experiences of their trajectory into higher education?

- From the participants perspective, what components of the Puente Program were most effective in bridging their postsecondary studies and beyond?

- What elements of the Puente Program did participants identify helped with feeling validated and assisted them in achieving their academic goals?

It was important for this research to include participants who identified as Latina/o/x students, who were community college Puente Program alumni, and who transferred and obtained their bachelor's degree. A brief questionnaire allowed for the researcher to identify the participants background, 2-year and 4-year institutions, as well as, the specific degree, or degrees, attained. This initial brief questionnaire recognized the specific criteria participants possessed and that was necessary for this study. This questionnaire provided descriptions that gave a rounded picture of the participants in the research. There was no quantitative data performed for this study or in reviewing the initial brief questionnaire.

Identification of Themes

The interview transcripts were manually analyzed and coded. The interview data obtained were hand coded, by reading line-by-line of the

transcribed interviews. The researcher highlighted specific codes and used Excel to keep track of the number of times specific codes were reported, that resulted in categories. Through the coding process, themes began to emerge. Themes transpired from several codes that created categories, that form a specific focus.

The theoretical framework was important when analyzing the data for this interpretive phenomenology study. Through the use of Rendon's (1994) validation theory, themes emerged by using the six elements of validation. Following Saldaña's codes-to-theory model, the researcher obtained initial codes that were then constructed into categories. Codes such as "imposter syndrome," "negative feelings," "lack of knowledge," "survival mode," "scared," led to the category of *experiences previous to participating in the Puente Program*. Codes such as "connection," "support," "proud," "belonging," "culture/familia," and "voice/self-worth," led to the category of *experiences described subsequent to participating in the program*.

The categories of previous and subsequent participation to Puente influenced degree attainment. Most participants were introduced to the program within one year of beginning community college, but prior to taking part in the program they reported feeling overwhelmed. Once the categories were revisited, the theme of college achievement was generated. Below, Figure 4.1 demonstrates the coding process.

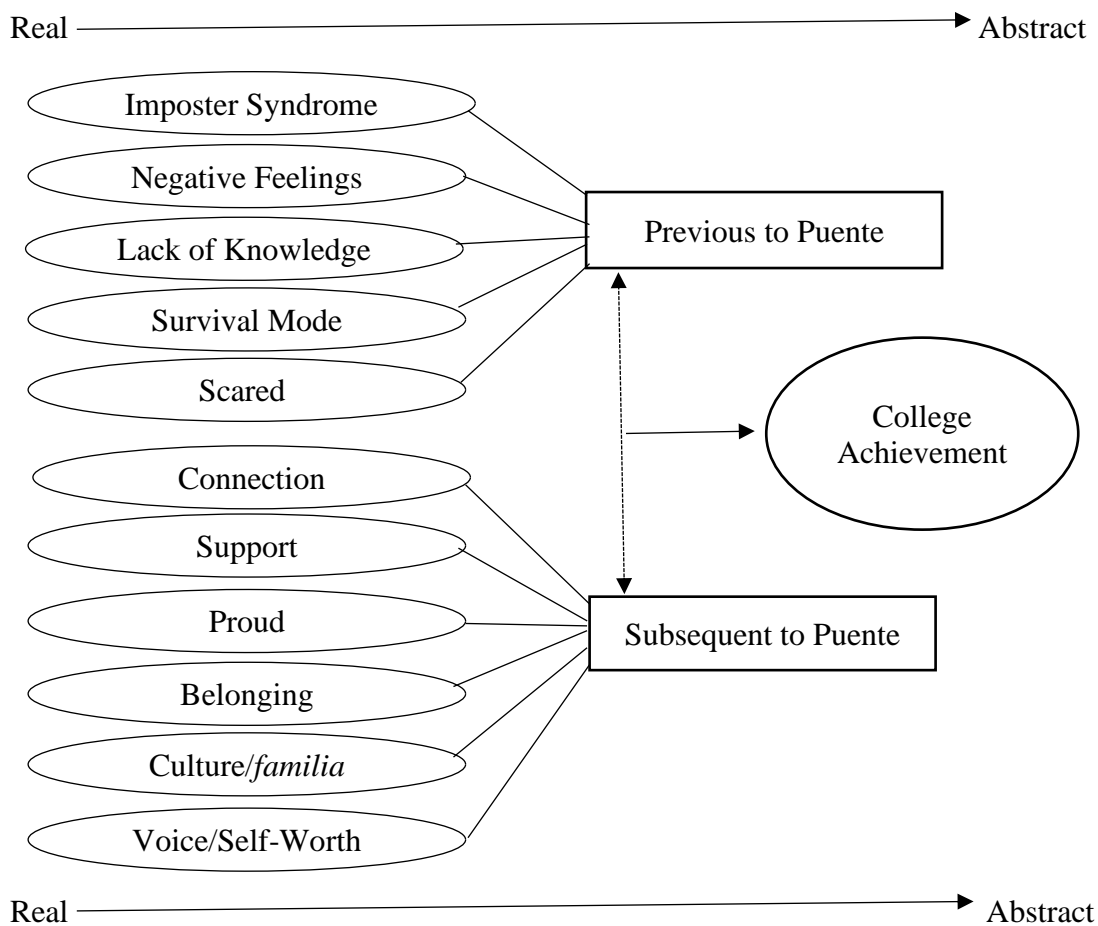Figure 2. Themes and Coding

Latina/o/x Participants

Below Table 2, provides the demographic information off all six participants based on what each reported. The researcher created pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality and protect the participant's identities. Two participants did not provide their age to the researcher. Two of the six participants identified themselves in more than one ethnicity.

Table 2. Demographic Table for All Research Participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Ethnicity
Angel	Female	N/A	Peruvian
Dani	Male	29	Chicana/o/x, Mexican-American
Frankie	Female	22	Latina/o/x
Oli	Female	35	Latina/o/x
Alex	Male	N/A	Mexican-American
Milan	Female	28	Chicana/o/x, Mexican-American

Frankie. Frankie obtained her bachelor's degree in Business Administration and currently serves as a member in the board of education at a K-12 school district. Frankie, stated that high school was not difficult and found much support through the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program. Participating in the AVID program during high school, provided Frankie with the opportunity to set college expectations after graduating and begin to explore higher education opportunities. Frankie exclaimed that, "high school wasn't too bad. I was part of the AVID program and so there that jump started my initial need for going to college to a four-year." Participating in AVID allowed for her to understand the importance of being involved in a program.

Frankie also had older siblings who were in higher education and provided college preparation knowledge. Though initially she was focused on attending a

four-year institution, and was accepted to two different four-year public universities, Frankie's plan of attending a university was altered after not accepting the universities offer of admission by the specific university deadlines. Frankie was not fully aware of the significance of a deadline and accepting admission on time. Despite having the AVID program, institutional agent support, and family support, Frankie was not entirely sure of where to attend. For Frankie, it was very important to choose the correct four-year institution. Due to fear of making the incorrect choice, she was unable to select what institution to attend before the deadline. For that reason, she did not attend a four-year institution right after high school. Community college was the only alternative to pursue higher education because waiting another year was not an option.

Dani. Dani received a bachelor's degree in Ethnic Studies and a master's in Education. Dani had a similar experience to Frankie, in that his high school experience was not too challenging. Dani was enrolled in honor classes in freshmen and sophomore years but did not feel motivated nor a sense of belonging. Dani explained, "I was an honor student, but I never really fit in because I really never felt like I received the help that I needed to get. I just felt I was enrolling in these classes because I needed to in order to get to where I wanted to go educational-wise."

In junior and senior year of high school, Dani's grades began to drop and unfortunately had to withdraw from all honor courses. He was aware of the preparation needed to attend a four-year institution but was not too sure if that

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was the way to go. Furthermore, because of the lack of belonging and feeling lost at times, his focus was merely on completing high school. Dani did not have a connection with any teacher during high school but did feel a connection with peers. Dani did have some college preparation while in high school honors but recognized that community college was the route to take to pursue higher education.

Angel. Angel, who came to the United States as an adult from Peru, South America, received a bachelor's degree in Business Administration and Marketing. Angel indicated her family views about attending higher education was that it was not an option, it was expected. The family support was always present when it came to education and degree attainment. Angel was taught English in second grade and was aware of the importance of learning a second language. According to Angel, the educational system in Peru was very bureaucratic and not necessarily student focused. Nevertheless, she knew, and was taught early on, that pursuing higher education was a necessity to succeed.

Angel attended a university while living in Peru but felt as "professors were more likely to favor students that came from better families than students that no one knew their family." Though her family was not rich, they did live a comfortable life. Angel recognized that staying and studying at the university in Peru was not going to be rewarding. Subsequently, she decided to move to the United States in 2012, as an adult. Angel began community college at an institution in Northern California and lived with her extended family. The family

unit, both in Peru and the United States, provided Angel with the emotional and motivational support needed to strive towards success.

Oli. Oli received a bachelor's degree in History with a minor in Education studies, a master's degree in Applied Psychology, and an Educational Specialist (Ed.S.) degree in School Psychology. However, she stated that earning these degrees was not something that came lightly. Beginning with high school, Oli describes how freshmen and sophomore years were an "ordeal of not caring." It wasn't until mid-junior year that Oli spoke to her high school counselor about pursuing higher education. This conversation took place merely because friends were beginning to prepare for their college applications and were taking college admissions exams. Unfortunately, by the time the conversation with her high school counselor took place, Oli was too late to meet course or college admission requirements.

Oli states, "I spoke with my counselor to ask her why I wasn't prepping for the SAT's or the ACT's. She pretty much told me that it was because I hadn't taken the classes necessary." Oli recalls the counselor saying "Well, you can go to community college. I went to community college." Oli remembers crying and replying, "But that was your choice! I did not have a choice because you never told me what I had to do." Feelings of insecurity and discouragement overwhelmed her. Nonetheless, Oli, feeling determined, concluded that it was not the end and was not going to give up. Oli enrolled in courses at her local

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community college and began to seek information independently but, like many participants, felt overwhelmed.

Alex. Alex obtained a bachelor's degree in Anthropology from a research university. The pursuit of a bachelor's degree took a bit longer for him, as the transition to a four-year was delayed for more than three years. The reason behind the deferment, was because Alex kept withdrawing from courses. He was working, at one point three jobs, and had health issues. Alex described feeling overwhelmed and unhappy.

Alex recalled having these same feelings of being lost and unmotivated while in high school. Feeling disassociated with education was prevalent early during his freshmen year. Though Alex' parents and family pushed and supported Alex to do well in high school and pursue a college career, he stated there "was nothing that really kind of, like pulled me towards education." Alex did not have a connection with his high school institution and felt disengaged.

When describing the type of college preparation received during high school, Alex reported, "Zero. I had no one even telling me that I should apply for college, whatsoever." The lack of information prompted Alex to not pursue a college career. Because of this, Alex felt lost without any guidance or motivation. It wasn't until an institutional agent made that initial contact and provided Alex with some encouragement. Alex revealed having a German class teacher who became the only person during high school, who mentored and pushed Alex

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towards higher education. Because of the teacher's support, Alex decided to pursue college and began at a community college.

Milan. Milan's K-12 experience consisted of English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction and a non-existent college preparation experience. Milan explains, "I was kind of like, kind of just graduate high school and then see what happens." Milan did not feel validated nor academically challenged during high school. Her sense of community and belonging came from participating in soccer, which was introduced to Milan in an unlikely way, by being sent to detention. Though Milan found a connection through soccer, the idea of attending a four-year public higher education institution was not a priority.

Milan attended a for-profit, fashion college that was financially straining. "My parent's kind of thought because it was a college… they thought, oh this is what she wants. So they really supported me, but had no idea what it was… I had no idea what I was doing." Milan ended up dropping from the fashion college and began at a community college to pursue transfer to a four-year public university. She transferred to a four-year public university and obtained a bachelor's in Ethnic Studies and in Spanish, continued to graduate school, and is now a Ph.D. student at an ivy league institution researching Chicana/o/x Studies

Preparation for College

The experiences on college preparation in high school were similar for the participants who received support. They received support from high school institutional agents and college preparation programs or courses, such as

admission requirements and information on deadlines. These specific academic experiences in high school stressed the importance of going to college and ensured that the participants strived for good grades. Though not all participants had the same experiences, those who described their high school experiences as positive, had feelings of belonging and were told that they were capable of pursuing and succeeding in higher education. Frankie, Dani, and Angel experienced a more positive K-12 education and received some type of college preparation.

Participants who did not obtain much institutional or organizational support in high school, reported experiencing negative interactions and unsupportive experiences with high school institutional agents. The negative experiences reported left the participants feeling valueless and with no aspirations towards pursuing higher education. The participants reported that they did not feel the support, were not provided the proper information in a timely manner, and/or did not feel a connection. The experiences from Oli, Alex, and Milan, about their high school tenure, lacked encouragement and diminished their capabilities.

Below, Table 3 provides a visual of the type of college preparation all participants reported they received during their high school education. The information received was on college admissions and college preparation.

Table 3. College Preparation Received for All Participants

Participant	No Preparation	High School Program Preparation	Teacher or Counselor	Family and Peer Preparation
Alex	X			
Dani		X		
Frankie		X	X	X
Oli	X			
Angel		X		X
Milan	X			

In summary, participants described various experiences regarding their high school to higher education trajectories. But overall, they stated they did not feel academically prepared nor had the sufficient college awareness for a successful transition to college, and they did not feel a connection with any institutional agents. Nevertheless, once they began their higher education careers and became involved with their specific community college Puente Program, they had a better perspective of navigating through the higher education system.

Family Perspectives and Support

Family was a central theme in participant's perspectives and understanding of higher education. The online Puente Program website highlights how the program functions as a family and encourages involvement

and participation of the family in educational activities, especially during the high school tenure (The Puente Project, 2019). This is critically important when helping students who are first-generation and from underrepresented backgrounds. In this study, all participants identified as first-generation college students who came from immigrant homes with little knowledge of the educational system. Participants reported that many of their parents were very supportive, despite the fact that they did not have a clear concept of the higher education system or the specifics on how to pursue it.

Alex explains, "My parents didn't have this good concept of like education. So I know when I was studying, they thought it was like a form of me trying to escape doing chores or stuff like that." Despite Alex's parents being unaware of the responsibilities that came with attending higher education, and at times accusing him of being indolent; Alex had their support and they encouraged him to keep pushing himself.

On the other hand, Dani states:

My parents have always put the aspect of education down our mindset…They always gave us that notion that if you want to be someone you have to do it through education. You're not going to find anything better than having a college education…My parents always supported me and they guided me... They guided me, but they didn't know how to support me. They didn't know how to sit there and help me and figure out

a math problem. They just told me 'Échale ganas y haz lo que tengas que

hacer.' But that can only take you so long.

Dani's parents were encouraging, though not familiar with the educational system

their child was a part of. They understood that education would benefit Dani in

having a better future and were going to make sure they did everything they

could to assist, with what knowledge they had.

Although the Puente Program encourages family participation and events

are hosted for informational purposes, the participants did not mention their

families participated in specific events or activities. Participants described having

their family's support despite the lack of familiarity with navigating higher

education.

Frankie's familial experience was a bit different than the other participants.

Frankie revealed that her family dynamic was not very strong and their

relationships weren't very close. At home, she recalls being a different person

than at school. Frankie's parents were very strict and the sibling relationship was

strained. When reflecting on family, Frankie stated:

> they just supported me, that's all I can really say because they didn't know
>
> about the college experience or how it is here…And so they don't know
>
> what it's like to be here transitioning, and it's difficult, but to know that they
>
> always had my back. I never had to work to be here. They took care of
>
> that so that I could be here.

Frankie understood that though the relationship with her family was not strong, she could count on them for support. This reflection on her family and strained relationships indicates that encouragement was present but may not have been as straightforward as Frankie would have wanted it.

Similar to Frankie's experience of not having to work while in college, Oli's parents provided her with financial support by paying for tuition and fees, as well as her housing. Throughout Oli's undergraduate and graduate career, finances were not a constraint. Oli explains:

> I think they were just like, 'Okay, go to school. How much does school cost? Okay, we'll pay for it.' My parents were financially able to pay for school…it was just like, 'well, since you're going to school, we'll pay for it, as long as you're going to school and doing well.

Only two of the participants did not have to work while they completed their undergraduate degree because they were fully financially supported by their families.

> Angel revealed that it was expected to attend college. She stated:
> My family was very invested in what I was doing, why, and how would I do it. They would ask me, and even though they wouldn't even understand what I was doing, or how I was doing it, they would always ask me questions, and that would make me feel like I had some sort of support. Moral support.

Angel's family did not let the distance or lack of familiarity with the United States' educational system, interfere with their continuous attempts to make her know they were there. These provided Angel with the validation from those who loved her. She felt encouraged and motivated to keep moving forward. Angel felt that having this support was very important in her higher education trajectory.

Milan explained that family was an important aspect of her college trajectory. Milan, like all other participants, elaborated on how though parents and family did not fully understand higher education they were very supportive. This constant motivation and pursuit for education is part of the knowledge and skills some parents provide their children. The participants also identified that because of this, they were fully aware of how vital it was to make their family's proud.

The theme of family and family support demonstrated that despite not possessing the knowledge of the higher education system, most parents understood the importance of going to college and supported their children while they pursued their degrees. Though parental support was present there was confusion of the academic system, the academic aspirations, and college plans of their children. Furthermore, it is important for higher education institutions to provide the support and understanding so that confusion is not prevalent not only with students but with the families. Based on the narratives of the participants, it was clear that their parents valued education and wanted them to succeed. The

disconnect occurred in relation to the following: selection of a major for a specific career, navigation of the language barrier, and differences in cultural norms.

Shaping Experiences and Trajectories into Higher Education

The Puente Program has long been recognized for assisting students in navigating through the higher education pipeline. It is focused on offering valuable information and resources that will assist its participants with transfer and degree attainment. The program's three major components – academic (English course), counseling, and mentoring – were highly influential in shaping the views of the participants. The interdisciplinary approach allowed participants to relate to the multicultural literature, receive educational support, and be mentored to build networking opportunities. One of the major advantages the Puente Program offered to participants, was providing them with the opportunity to envision a positive future for themselves through the increase of skills and self-worth. In particular, the participants of this study were able to highlight their experiences and the intricacies in which they were able to navigate higher education.

Frankie emphasized the program played a big part in her trajectory from community college to a four-year public institution. Frankie explained the program assisted in many ways, specifically in "being prepared, the time management, the prioritizing, the staying on track, remember what your goal is, keep going with it." This constant encouragement and motivation was vital to Frankie staying focused and determined with attaining all academic goals. She

credited much of her academic and interpersonal validation growth to her experiences with the program.

Dani reported shifting perceptions about pursuing higher education when participating in the program and having feelings of validation. "It wasn't until being in the program where I really saw myself at a higher institute, where I saw myself transferring, where I saw myself, okay, I can actually do this. I can actually get my bachelor's degree." Dani goes on to describe a networking opportunity that arose while participating in the program. He explains:

> I definitely learned how to be a leader. I found my voice, I found how to better express myself. When I was in the program, I was given the chance to attend a 10-day leadership conference. Attending that conference gave me a voice. I not only, I got to meet over 60 other *Puentistas* from all over the state…Just being surrounded by all these amazing individuals that have that similar mindset and those similar goals of myself definitely made me a leader. We have to be our voice so that's one thing that I learned, I found my voice there.

This description exemplifies what participants reported occurred after participating in the program. Being able to visualize their goal and understanding the importance of networking, while also, gaining valuable skillsets were findings they all discovered within themselves.

Milan recalls that it wasn't until participating in the program that the realization of communicating with institutional agents was emphasized. She explained:

> I didn't know how to ask the counselors or professors. Because they would be like, 'Come to our office hours, or come talk to us.' I'm like, 'Yeah, but what do I say, or how do I ask this?' So I felt like that had a lot of setbacks for me to continue.

This type of passive approach "simply affords students the mechanisms (i.e., organizations, tutoring centers, extracurricular activities) to get involved" (Rendon, 1994, p. 43). Reaching out and being involved was not easy. Though it was expected, Milan struggled with where to begin. Milan later understood how vital the student-counselor-faculty relationship was but did not know how to approach her institutional agents.

The Puente Program counselor and English instructor assisted Milan in her transition and provided a better understanding of higher education. In fact, research indicates that validating experiences like encouragement, support, and affirmation positively influence an individual's higher education trajectory (Rendon, 2002). Milan felt a connection and was comfortable with reaching out and obtaining the information necessary for a successful path through higher education.

The institutional agents established the relationships that Milan needed. The responsibility of the counselor was to assist her in successfully transferring

to a university. The role of the English faculty member was to enhance her writing and reading skills. Nevertheless, both the counselor and faculty went beyond their mere responsibilities and were fundamental in increasing the validation and the experiences Milan had with her institutional agents.

Alex emphasized how Puente shaped the views on what family and community was in an educational setting. "That's something that Puente really taught me, you know what I mean? The whole *familia* aspect and stuff like that. And I feel like Puente just opened my eyes more to that, like family and giving aspect of education." Having this connection allowed for all participants to recognize the academic family they had behind them, and that they were not alone. All participants experienced a comfort in knowing that others wanted them to succeed in their educational goals.

The Puente Program shaped the views and understandings of the participants in many ways. Participants acknowledged a shift in the way they perceived higher education and their views on family and community. They recognized their self-worth and increased their confidence. They also understood the importance of community and networking. Furthermore, the program also allowed for the participants to recognize their abilities and capabilities. Angel stated, "Leadership, for sure. I think that leadership was the main thing that I was able to see in myself, once I joined the program… The fact that Puente… allowed me to develop that inner voice, it was a gift."

All participants identified finding their voice and identifying skills within them. The "gift", as reflected by Angel, of finding their voice is important for feeling validated. In fact, finding their voice was essential and a vital component to increasing their self-worth. They saw themselves as more than capable of learning and achieving their academic and career goals. The program and its institutional agents affirmed the value of participants' personal voice (Rendon, 2002.

Effectively Bridging Postsecondary Studies and Beyond

Participants involvement in the Puente Program had an impact on their view of higher education and beyond their undergraduate careers. Specifically, while attending community college they realized they had an opportunity, or a second chance as some of them referred to it, to attain their educational and career goals. Although, one participant was accepted and planned on going straight to a four-year institution, they all started their higher education at a community college. Each participant described being introduced to the Puente Program either through a counselor, a flyer, or another student at their campus.

When describing how the program bridged community college and the four-year institution, prior to participating in the program, Angel identified lacking the understanding and knowledge that transfer was a possibility. Angel reported:

I wasn't familiar either with the transfer process. I didn't even know that I was able to go to these big schools, and they were the ones who introduced me to that. Not only introduced me, but they pushed me to be

there. They made me envision myself being in higher education. To me, being visual, and listening to a lot of encouragement, helped me a lot.

Through campus visits, networking opportunities and events, and reading about her Latina identity, Angel began to envision her future academic aspirations. This was significant with Angel's feelings of belonging and of her identity and culture.

Angel reported being introduced to the program early in her college career. Angel mentioned a cousin who participated in the program and had great things to say about it. The first interaction she had with an institutional agent who was involved in the program was the English professor. Angel described her professor by stating:

The fact that she was a professor and that she spoke Spanish, and even though she was Mexican, she was interested in where I was from. That gave me a sense of warmth and welcoming to the country, in general. I felt like I belonged for the first time.

This early intervention was essential in feeling part of the institution.

This experience of belonging was identified by many of the participants who participated in the program. Early in their college careers they felt the support and motivation, and this aided them in their success of attaining their academic goals. Students reaching their academic goals is Puente Program's mission. As stated in their website, Puente aims to increase the number of educationally underrepresented students who enroll in four-year colleges and

universities (The Puente Project, 2019). Moreover, the cohort model structure assures that students feel a connection and retention numbers increase. Dani reflected on his cohort model experience by stating "we knew we supported one another and what the goal was and the whole aspect of support and being there for one another. That's definitely what motivated me and kept me going."

Another important aspect of how the Puente Program bridges postsecondary education for underrepresented groups is by offering campus visits to its students. This allows participants of the program to envision themselves at four-year institutions. Campus visits capture a glimpse of what can be, should they decide to attend that institution. It also allows them to identify the culture of the institution. The realization of transfer and possibly attending a specific institution, becomes real when they are visiting a campus. Oli explained, "through the Puente Program was the first time I ever went to visit a college, a campus, because I had not gone prior." Milan reflected:

> I remember when we took our North Cal trip, this was the first campus we came to. And it's crazy because it's only 40 miles from where I live, and I've never seen it. But when I saw it here, I remember the first thing that stood out to me was the Chicano student programs, African American student programs, all the ethnic studies centers for students. So I was like, "That's so cool, the space they have." You have great resources, little things like that. You can come and chill in there. That's what captivated my attention. And I was like, 'That's badass."

Arranging campus visits allows students to see the difference between many campuses. They visit California State University's and the University of California campuses. This provides the opportunity to get a sense of the campus culture and conceivably make a connection to the campus who may become their future institution.

When describing the transition into a four-year institution, specifically the way in which the Puente Program influenced this trajectory, Alex explained:

It definitely did. And they definitely gave you like the tools to succeed. But I do feel that, like the tools they gave you, is to get like I said to the door, but it's really hard for like the whole navigation process. Because it's a whole different world and I understand it too. They don't know where you're going, they don't know if you're going to a private institution, they don't know if you're going to CSU, they don't know if you're going to Cal State. I mean, UC.

This quote exemplifies how participants felt once they transferred. The transition was not stress-free, and it led to feelings of being lost. They weren't familiar with their new campus nor its resources. The feelings of not belonging and not knowing resurfaced.

Oli reported the transition to an ivy league school was not easy. The transfer trajectory of each participant differed, but for Oli it was a bit more difficult. Oli did receive important tools and resources from participating in the program while attending community college. But once it was time to attend a four-year

public university it was back to square one. Oli stated, "We're trying to bridge them, but once they get there, well, where do they go? It's like I kind of see, 'Well, there's still another bridge I need to cross.' I don't know what I'm supposed to do."

This explains how vital it is for all institutions to provide a positive campus culture where all students feel welcomed. Though Oli received the skills and resources to transfer, she felt overwhelmed at her new institution. This exemplifies why "validation should be intentional, proactive, and system- atic, not an afterthought or byproduct" (Rendon, 2002, p. 663) at all higher education institutions.

Questions of self-worth and capabilities reemerged. Though participants acknowledged possessing new skills that weren't present when they began higher education, obstacles during the transfer stage arose. The four-year experience at a public university, differed from having a cohort model program while attending community college. They understood that participating in the program assisted in preparing for their future academic endeavors. But the four-year experience was different. Nevertheless, they recognized their newfound capabilities and did not deter from their end goal, attaining their undergraduate degree.

Table 4 below provides a visual of the specific degrees each participant received as well as their current employment. It is important to note, that participants attained their bachelor's degree during different academic years.

Some participants were recent undergraduate graduates – about 3 months – others had graduated ten years from when this study was conducted. As previously mentioned, all participants reported having a better understanding of the higher education system after participating in the Puente Program. For those who moved on to graduate school, they also asserted the program provided them with the navigational tools and resources to move on to their graduate level studies. Those who have not attended graduate school, identified they were contemplating pursuing a graduate program.

Table 4. Degrees and Employment for All Participants

Participant	Degree	Employment
Alex	BA – Anthropology	No Employment
Dani	BA – Chicana/o Studies & M.Ed. in Counseling	Substitute Teacher
Frankie	BS – Business Administration	Legislative Field Representative
Oli	BA – History, MA – Applied Psychology, & Ed.S. – School Psychology	School Psychologist
Angel	BS – Business Administration	Healthcare Worker
Milan	BA – Ethnic Studies, MA – Chicana/o Studies & PH.D student in Chicana/o Studies	Graduate Teaching Assistant

Academic Goals and Feeling Validated

To review, Rendon's (1994) validation theory is "an enabling, confirming, and supportive process initiated by in – and out – of class agents that fosters academic and interpersonal development" (p. 44). Validation occurs throughout the practice of the six elements of validation:

- contact initiated by institutional agents

- increased self-esteem through the validation process

- validation as a necessity to student development

- validation resulting from the interaction between students and multiple agents in – and out – of the classroom

- validation as a developmental process

- validation being present from the beginning of a student's college experience

The findings that pertained to the program and the experiences participants identified as feeling validated and helped them achieve their academic goals to a 4-year institution, were connected to Rendon's (1994) six elements of validation theory. During the interview, the participants reported they received support from the following areas: information was provided early in their community college career, an increase in their self-confidence, growth as an individual, support from institutional agents, family, and peers. As well as, needing more support after they transferred to a four-year institution, and

learning about the program and other opportunities early in their community

college career.

Table 5 provides a visual of Rendon's (1994) validation theory and how

the researcher was able to identify categories and themes pertaining to each

specific element.

Table 5. Categories and Themes

Validation Theory	Category and Themes	Description of Category or Theme
Initiating contact	Receiving Information	Receiving new information about college from institutional agents or peers in the program
Self-worth	Self-confidence	Increase in confidence as a student, as a leader, and as an advocate
Student development	Growth	Participants learned new skills and knowledge that resulted in academic success and motivation
In – and out – classroom interactions	Institutional Agents, Family, and Peer Support	Feeling support from institutional agents (professors, advisors, and mentors) and having family support (financial and emotional)
Continuous developmental process	Continued support	This refers to validating experiences throughout the participation in program and transfer to a four-year
Beginning of college experience	Early intervention and involvement	Validating experiences by program agents early in the participants college career

Initiating contact.

Receiving information about the Puente Program early in their community college career was one of the major findings reported from the participants. Some reported they did not take advantage of participating in the program earlier because they were not too sure if they wanted to be a part of it. Others reported having personal issues which interfered with them being fully engaged in the program. All reported receiving information from a campus flyer, a peer or family member, or an academic counselor. The level in which they became involved was important because this was determined by the way in which they received information on the program. Four of the six participants who had a person or an institutional agent –a counselor, peer, or faculty– approach them, became involved early on. Two of the six participants became involved with the program after a year or more of beginning their community college career. The remaining four were involved the first year they attended college.

Oli, who learned about the program through flyers at school, stated, "I wanted to make sure that I transferred. I wanted to make sure that I was prepared. I had already envisioned myself transferring." Oli knew that joining Puente would help achieve this goal and decided to begin the program after a year of attending community college. Angel reported receiving information from a family member who was previously in the program and had been successful while participating in it. "My cousin had been in community college for three years before I migrated to the United States. She was the one who was introduced by it, so she was the one who introduced me to it."

Alex, Dani, Frankie, and Milan were introduced to the program by a counselor who they either met with one-on-one, or who visited one of their classrooms and gave an information session.

All participants had aspirations to transfer or someone who encouraged them to take part in the program. This initial contact from either institutional agents, peers, or campus flyers, created an early intervention, which was vital to the first element of feeling validated.

Self-worth and self-confidence**.**

By participating in the program many of the participants indicated that there was an increase in their self-worth and in their self-confidence. This boost of self-confidence was something that many participants lacked and were in need of when they began higher education. Many participants referenced having imposter syndrome, a feeling of inadequacy, and not belonging, despite being capable of meeting and exceeding the requirements to continue their higher education career. The confidence they obtained from participating in Puente came in various forms. Participants stated the networking opportunities they received and lifetime connections made, sustained successful academic careers and established personal relationships. Others gained new leadership skills and became leaders of specific groups. Frankie reported, "after being in Puente I was a student ambassador on campus so I was always involved on campus but it had started with Puente and Puente opened up other connections for me." Alex reported:

It really awoke a sense in me to really give back and mentor, in any aspect that I can. Volunteer, if Puente ever needs anything, I'd be more than happy to come back and let them know about my own experiences and how I graduated, but it just really awakened that in me.

Some participants identified becoming more involved in school activities and becoming activist for their communities. Frankie described, "if it hadn't been for Puente for me being part of these other opportunities to make connections. And now I have connections with everyone. I've sat one-on-one with the mayor. You don't get that anywhere else." While others continued their involvement and networking within the Puente community. Dani stated:

We started the Puente Club where we could combine the current cohort and the past cohorts so we can work together. I still have that sense of familial, that sense of familial that Puente is so big about. Forming that familial aspect. So we were not only able to keep the current cohort that was in the program and the past cohort, so that always gave us a sense of belonging.

Frankie described how Puente would make students feel empowered and recalls learning about opportunities that were not available prior to participating in the program. "If it hadn't been for Puente, for me, being part of these other opportunities was to make connections. And now I have connections with everyone. I've sat one-on-one with the mayor. You don't get that anywhere else."

Frankie references the transfer experience and goes on to report:

We get that imposter syndrome where we don't belong. Everyone else here, especially those who have been here, they're already used to it, they know what they're doing and us, we're still trying to figure it out. And I know other people have said they were accepted here from the beginning. Maybe they belong here more than we do but it's like no, we do too. We fought to be here just as much as everyone else did.

Though some participants reported having imposter syndrome, they also emphasized the feeling of validation they had encountered while participating in the program. Milan recounted:

It's my first year. So it was like, imposter syndrome is my identity right now. But I think when I get back with my friends from Puente, because we just all made a trip last month, we kind of just talk about it, and it's like, okay, I'm not the only one. And we're all capable, and we're all smart, and we're here for a reason. And we kind of remember our process, and how everybody is different too. So it's just talking to myself, validating, and then also talking to my community of friends. Because it's hard.

Participants also indicated having the opportunity to be outspoken about their feelings and feeling comfortable doing so. They had counselors and faculty that believed in them, understood them, and pushed them. Dani recalled:

I had Chicano professors, I had professors that were brought up the same way I did, that struggled the same way that I did. Being able to build those

connections and that rapport with those professors is really what was

great.

This feeling of empowerment countered the feeling of imposter syndrome and allowed Dani to envision a future as a leader.

Student development.

Participants learned new skills and knowledge that resulted in academic success and motivation during and after participating in the program. This growth in their development was reflected in both their academic and professional careers. They learned ways of navigating through the system, as well as, building a community.

Alex explains:

I think the biggest aspect that helped me out was just mentoring and having someone to help me navigate through the educational system. I didn't have that. So someone telling me, hey, you need to apply a year before you're done with your classes. I didn't know that was a thing….But it goes back to like other students helping other students. And it just went along with the whole *familia*, I think, helped me build that community, feel that validation from all these other students from there.

Milan described the community college experience and the Puente support system as "an introduction of what a four-year was going to be. So it was like the work academically was going to be heavy." The Puente Program's

academic component, is rigorous and allows students to develop their reading and writing skills. Dani recalls:

> Once they mentioned the whole multi-culturalism, reading authors of Mexican descent, that's really what attracted me. That's what I want to learn, I want to see myself in these types of readings. I never got to see myself in any of the other readings. I couldn't relate myself to Shakespeare, I couldn't relate myself to Hemingway. So I think that's what really attracted me.

Seeing themselves in the curriculum changed the participants perspectives on higher education. Knowing that there were scholars with similar backgrounds as them increased their interest.

Frankie acknowledged that the program had a vital role in her academics, personally, and professionally:

> I learned so much from my professors, from my classmates. The best part about it was having other people just like me in the group because it wasn't just in the classroom, afterwards we would try to study together or we would go out together.
>
> In – and out – of classroom interactions.

All Puente Program participants acknowledged that much of their success with pursuing higher education was due to the support they received both in – and out – of their institution. Feeling support from institutional agents (professors, advisors, and mentors) and family support (both financial and emotional), was

very important throughout their undergraduate studies. Those who continued beyond their bachelor's degree, or are currently in graduate school, also stated that these interactions have been crucial to their success in continuing their education.

Oli describes her interactions with the English professor and the counselor as:

> I remember some of my counselors, some of my professors helping me with my essay, making sure that everything, all my requirements were in. I remember Ms. Shedder, which was the language arts teacher for the class. She was kind of last-minute reviewing it before I submitted it. We were there. She was with me. I feel like what I would probably do for my own son, which would be while he's finishing submitting it, I would be reviewing it. I think that's sort of the role that my professors in the Puente Program took. Where it's sort of there as a supportive role, because they know, they knew how to go to school. They knew what was going to be required.

This description of the dedication of the staff and institutional agents that are part of the program, exemplifies the importance of students having a connection with the institution.

Frankie saw a change in grades because of the support from the Puente professor. Frankie stated that learning new essay writing skills was not easy. She explains:

When I got to Puente, the English professor, he really taught us how to write and it was really difficult because a lot of us had a lot of trouble with it and even though we tried, we would go to office hours, it's like we still couldn't get it. But every time I went, I improved more and then by the end of second semester I think I was the only one with an A in the class.

Angel described how faculty and mentors can become family. After establishing a relationship with the professor/mentor that was assigned to her from the Puente Program, the connection they made was strong. Angel was going through personal dilemmas with her living arrangements. The professor/mentor learned about this and opened up her home for Angel and offered her a room to stay. Angel lived with this professor/mentor for three years. She stated this institutional agent was family.

Angel also described the institutional factors of the program that helped with beginning the transfer process. She explained:

We had to research schools, so school researching. We had to write a lot, so I feel like that helped me a lot. All of the English classes were helpful for me. Financial aid, questions that our counselor would explain, school visits. We were able to go on field trips seeing schools and going to State universities, going to private universities, going to California universities, that was really helpful too. We could see the difference; we can learn the difference of all of them.

Many of the experiences reported by the participants spoke positively of the institutional agents (professors, counselors, or mentors) who assisted them throughout their community college years. Students became empowered by them and were more academically involved because of their continued support. In most instances, the participants expressed appreciation in the ways they were exposed to different four-year institutions and their particular college culture. This assisted them in planning for the future before they made a decision on what four-year institution to transfer to.

Participants also elaborated on meeting many community leaders and the numerous networking opportunities available to them. Alex said:

I think that's one thing they always emphasized was networking. But I think it's a mixture of that, and them kind of awakening this curiosity in you, pushing me personally, academically to just be more curious, ask more questions, network.

Milan expressed the support of the Puente Program and its institutional agents as, "they provided all sorts of support, except financially. But kind of like mentoring, like they would tell you what's going to happen, reality. They would share their experiences. And I think even emotionally and academically more."

The family support was something vital that all participants affirmed as playing an important role. Angel, who came to the United States as an adult, described the familial support by stating:

They knew that I've always wanted to do this. I've always been one to

seek my own success and it was kind of like, if you're happy, we're happy.

There was a lot of questioning in terms of the fact that a lot of students

here live with their families, so they kind of know, you're going to school,

or you're coming back later on, okay, cool. Then because my mom

wouldn't see me, she was like, so were you in school today, or were you at

work today, or where are you going, who are you with? Because they

couldn't see my journey, there was more questions that I had to answer.

Despite the distance, Angel's immediate family who were in Peru,

constantly offered emotional support.

Milan described the family role by stating:

My whole family, my mom and dad, they're very supportive. But they have

no idea why I'm doing this, especially now with the whole Ph.D. thing.

They just think I'm still going to school. But I mean, I think I really surprised

my parents because they thought that I wasn't even going to graduate

high school. So they're super supportive.

Milan's description of her family and the emotional support they provided,

was very similar to that of other participants. Despite parents and family

members having limited knowledge on the specifics of pursuing higher education,

while also not fully comprehending the academic responsibilities of their

students, the support they offered assisted the participants to strive and succeed

in college. Families asked questions and were interested in the academic

experiences of the participants. Nevertheless, many participants identified having

complications with explaining the rigors and obstacles they were facing as first-

generation college students.

Family support plays a crucial role in the success of many community

college students. Additionally, the financial support provided to students from

their family, results in the student's ability to fully concentrate in their academics.

Because many of these students are first-generation college students, from

underrepresented backgrounds, some with families of their own, pursuing higher

education is not an easy endeavor. As can be projected, for those who do not

have the responsibility and obligation to work and provide financial support for

themselves or their family, there is a higher level of success and probability to

transfer and obtain a degree. The ability to attend college full time without the

burden of having to work, allowed many participants in this study to solely focus

on their academics. Those who had to work to be financially stable, struggled at

the beginning of their college career but superseded those difficulties.

Frankie recalls knowing students who had to work while attending school

because their family depended on their financial support. Unfortunately, many

were not able to finish and would drop out of school. Frankie described feeling

lucky for not having to provide any type of financial support for anyone. She

stated, "I was blessed that my family didn't need that or they just told me to focus

on my studies and then also I was able to get a job on campus so being on

campus also helped." Having a campus job also increased the level of validation for her, as well as, feeling connected to the institution.

Oli did not have any financial hardships and revealed that the resources and support received from her family was abundant. Oli expressed, "I think they were just like, 'Okay, go to school. How much does school cost? Okay, we'll pay for it.' My parents were financially able to pay for school." Oli's family provided her with the financial support necessary for her to move away and live by her four-year institution. Though Oli's family was a little apprehensive about her moving away from the family home, they simply requested for her to check in and work hard.

Peer support had a huge impact on the participant's experiences. They recognized the importance of having someone who was transitioning through higher education at the same time as them. The peer support and the cohort model offered by Puente allowed for students to form their communities and establish lifelong relationships. Some participants referenced the Puente motto, "Once a *Puentista,* always a *Puentista"*. This deepened the level of the relationships amongst their peers, as well as, the involvement in their academics. Milan described the connection and community formed with other peers as if being:

> with my friends, we're always sharing things, with the *Puentistas*. And
> everyone, we have a Facebook Puente page, and everyone shares
> everything, even if somebody needs, 'I'm transferring here. Does anybody

know of a roommate?' Just that support of, 'I don't know you. I know you're a *Puentista* though.' As soon as you know you're a *Puentista*, it's like, 'Oh, okay cool.' So it's just like a really strong bond.

Frankie also identified the connections she formed and elaborates on the *familia* aspect of Puente and reflects on her peers:

We also hung out, outside and not only that but anytime I hear anyone's a *Puentista*, not just from my community college but from anywhere, it's like 'Oh my god, you're a *Puentista*, we're like brother and sisters.' Already connections right there.

Dani explains that while at community college, "every class there was always at least six different *Puentistas* from my cohort that we would take classes with one another. We knew we supported one another." Oli also describes building lifelong relationship with a cohort member that has continued to develop over the years.

These important findings of establishing and continuing a community with other *Puentistas,* during and after transfer, showcases the way in which the program increases the navigational capital of its participants. Participants reported obtaining skills and abilities to navigate through educational spaces and empowering one another (Yosso, 2005). Having access to an online community that provided resources and information necessary to navigate through higher education, was described as a welcoming space. This online community provided them with information on gatherings, scholarships, on campus

resources, campus connections, and it continued the Puente camaraderie. Having this community continued the participants cohort model mentality and *Familia*.

Continuous developmental process.

The community college experience for many of the participants was easier because of the valuable skills and knowledge the Puente Program provided for them while at the two-year. They all reflected on feelings of validation and a sense of belonging at their community college. Though, they were successful in completing their two-year requirements, the major dilemmas all participants identified, came once they transitioned to their four-year university. Dani explains:

> I definitely feel that first quarter is always a struggle… My first quarter still wasn't the best quarter, that's my worst quarter I had… just because of that transition. I wasn't used to going from a semester to being on a quarter system. The quarter system is so accelerated and I just felt like everything was going too quit.

Dani continues to state that Puente Program and its institutional agents should "continue to check up on students once they transfer out. I know it's their job to just work on the students that are at the community college, but also to continue checking in on those who have transferred."

Yet despite the struggles of transitioning to four-year institutions, building a strong community and relationships was a common theme amongst the

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participants. Oli described her desire for community and establishing relationships one she transferred to a four-year university. Oli reported:

> I started kind of building relationships. It reminded me a lot of Puente, just that community and like, 'Yeah, I'm struggling, too. Fudge, I didn't pass my class. I have to take it over.' Or those same feelings that I was feeling in terms of inadequacy, they were feeling it, too. Just to be able to talk about that.

Because of the community and networking emphasis experienced with the Puente Program, Oli sought out these types of communities and found one that felt very similar to the experience with Puente. Oli established relationships and found a niche with a Latina club at her campus.

Alex described the programs persistent support as realizing:

> that idea that the only limits that you have is whatever you set on yourself. You never believe that you can do like all these things, like grad schools and your Ph.D. And like Puente really helped me kind of understand that the only limits I have is what I have in my own head or what I created. Beginning of college experience, early intervention.

Feeling a connection with your institution and having a sense of belonging is important for all students beginning their college career. Whether it is at a community college or a four-year university, early intervention is essential. Participants reported starting the Puente Program early in their community college career. This allowed for the formation of relationships and community.

This also resulted in participants obtaining vital information for successful completion of their program and transition to the university. Participants also indicated how the program helped with believing in their capabilities as a student. During the informal observation, many individuals in attendance reported feeling empowered from the beginning of their college career when they first came in contact with the program and its institutional agents.

Milan asserted Puente helped with rejecting feelings of not belonging and the imposter syndrome with "feeling validated, feeling like I am smart enough." Alex also described one of the biggest takeaways from his participation in the program was learning about culture and identity, specifically the history behind where he come from. Alex explains:

> I think the biggest thing I would say is that your K through 12 experience, you've always been taught to learn about someone else's culture, about someone else's society. But it's time for you to learn about like your own culture, your own kind of like society, here, in the United States.

Oli describes, one of the most important things that she gained at the beginning of the program was knowing more about who she was and why she was there. She reports that she was more aware and appreciative of where she came from. The program gave Oli the understanding that:

> Some validation of your sense of self, and who you are, and how you belong wherever you're at. I also think it'll give you an opportunity if you

don't know much about your culture to learn about it and see where you

stand in terms of your own pride, and just your own self.

Dani explains that through early participation in the program, the

realization of concluding higher education at the transfer stage or obtaining a

bachelor's degree, was no longer an option. He stated, "I remember when I went

to the conference, they showed us a flow chart map that there's 100 Latino

students that start... and only 1 of them obtains a doctorate degree." Dani

describes those number as staggering and zealous to change those statistics.

The Puente Program introduction to that data had Dani visualizing early on that it

was important to change those educational figures. Dani become more aware of

the impact education had on community, decided to pursue graduate school and

obtain a master's degree.

Oli also had a similar experience as Dani when hearing specific data and

number on retention and graduation rates. Oli explains:

I remember them telling us, 'Out of all the people at UCLA that were

accepted that year, that only 40% of you are going to graduate in two

years, or at all.' It's like, 'That's kind of scary. Why isn't everyone

graduating? Why are 60% of people failing to graduate?'

Oli decided not to be another statistics or fall in the systematic inequities so

prevalent in the educational system. Oli's willpower and developed skills allowed

for determination to succeed.

Angel also described the overall experience with the program and the significance of it. She stated, "leadership, for sure. I think that leadership was the main thing that I was able to see in myself, once I joined a program… The fact that Puente…allowed me to develop that inner voice, it was a gift."

The significance of motivation, feelings of belonging, and of identity and culture where conveyed by all students. They felt that they were successful because of the constant encouragement and enthusiasm from the program and institutional agents.

Summary of Results

Chapter four provided and overview of the findings made by this research. It also provided the process of analysis and coding process, which resulted in the categories and themes of the study. The descriptions and lived experiences of each participant provided detailed accounts, resulting in specific themes. This interpretive phenomenology study was guided by three research questions that were focused on six Puente Program alumni that identify as Latina/o/x. The interpretive phenomenology study approach allowed for the opportunity to understand the particular lived experiences of the participants who participated in the program. The discoveries made by the researcher through one-on-one semi-structured interviews and document analysis allowed for a better understanding of the support the program provides to its students.

The themes and categories offered in this chapter provided a better understanding of the significant role the program played in the trajectory of higher

education these participants had. Though this research did not offer the experiences of students who participated in the program and did not graduate from a four-year institution, the study was able to capture the unique circumstances of six participants who did. Every participant had a distinctive way of describing their experiences and becoming involved with the program. Though the program taught them a lot, their still remains a very vital component missing. The transition into a four-year public university left all students doubting themselves and lacking the validation they had proudly obtained while attending community college. Nevertheless, they all asserted that their success in higher education was that they formed connections and a *familia.*

In chapter five, the implications of the findings and recommendations for future studies will be discussed, while also providing an overview of what this dissertation and the research sought to accomplish.

CHAPTER FIVE:

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

This concluding chapter offers an overview of the research conducted. First, the researcher will present an overview of what this research sought to understand and accomplish. Second, a summary of the findings and how those pertain to this dissertation research questions will be discussed. Third, a discussion on program transformation and *Puentistas* commendations. Next, the researcher will discuss a discourse of the implications for future scholarship. Finally, the limitations of the research. The concluding remarks will elaborate on how the dissertation and how the program contributed to the higher education lived experiences of the six participants in this study.

Overview and Restatement of the Problem

As the fastest growing group in the nation, Latina/o/x are projected to reach over 111 million people within the next decade, making them 28 percent of the United States population (United States Census Bureau, 2018). This continuous increase in growth has also impacted the higher education realm and the way in which this student population succeeds in it. In fact, higher education is least successful in retaining and graduating the Latina/o/x student population (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2015). Furthermore, most Latina/o/x students begin their college careers at community colleges rather than at four-

year universities (Núñez et al., 2013; University of California Office of the President Puente Project [UCOPPP], 2018). Even more troubling, is that about 15 percent of those who transfer to a four-year university attain their undergraduate degree (Ryan & Bauman, 2016). In fact, in California 2.1 million students are enrolled in community colleges (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2020). 44% (or 1,008,356) of those enrolled are Latina/o/x students (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2018).

Since it has been recognized that higher levels of education are connected with an increase of earnings and capital (Carnevale, Rose, & Cheah, 2011), completion and retention rates for Latina/o/x is significant. Though there has been an increase in college enrollment for this demographic, research suggests that completion rates are low (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2018).

Fry and Taylor (2013) suggest that completion rates are based on the institution, employment status while attending school, enrollment status, and parental education and income. Moreover, improvement upon the educational attainment of the Latina/o/x student through resources aimed at success in higher education, will ensure the educational pipeline supports the fastest growing population.

This study sought to understand the lived experiences of six Latina/o/x students who began their higher education career at a community college. The participants joined the Puente Program while attending community college and

described their feelings of validation prior, during, and after participating in the program. The participants went on to transfer to four-year public universities and obtained their undergraduate degrees, some graduate degrees. This study applied Rendon's (1994) theory of validation as the theoretical framework to examine how the program contributed to the higher education academic success and degree attainment of all six participants.

To understand the uniqueness of the Puente Program and its functions, one must understand the purpose of its creation. The designers of the program found that many Latina/o/x students attending college were not taking the necessary classes, and very few general education courses, needed to meet transfer requirements and/or to obtain their associates degree (Vigil Laden, 1999). Because of this lack of forward movement, the Puente Program was established. It aimed at providing students with the support to transfer to a four-year institution, while also providing an environment where students felt welcomed and that they belonged.

Puente Program functions through three major components: academic (English courses), counseling, and mentoring. Academically, the program provides a year of intensive English instruction that focuses on writing and reading – emphasizing literature on the Latina/o/x culture and identity. The counseling component offers intensive college academic counseling and provides direction of the students' progress towards transfer. The mentoring component establishes relationships with mentors from the professional and

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academic surrounding communities. Through the use of its three major components, the cohort model program aims at increasing the number of underrepresented students attending four-year institutions.

The significance of this interpretive phenomenology study was to assess how participation in the Puente Program increases degree attainment of the Latina/o/x college student, and graduate studies aspirations. Reflecting on the theory of validation was vital to better understand the concept of belonging and the lived experiences of the participants' postsecondary education. Particularly, since the Latina/o/x population is the fastest growing group in the United States, it is crucial to understand their experiences to better serve them in higher education.

Partaking in the Puente Program allowed for the participants of this study, who all identified as Latina/o/x, to feel a connection to their institution and recognize their capabilities. Furthermore, the outcome of the research explained how the participants were able to conquer their struggles and reach their academic goals. All participants attained their undergraduate degrees despite having difficulties during their transition from community college to a four-year institution.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this dissertation was to understand how the Puente Program helped participants in navigating through higher education. Specifically, it aimed at understanding the lived experiences of the participants and how

influential the program was in providing the necessary tools and resources for undergraduate success and beyond. Though at the time of this study all participants had obtained their bachelor's degree, not all had attended graduate school. Three of the participants were recent graduates who had obtained their bachelor's degree within one and a half years from when this study was conducted. Nevertheless, all mentioned aspirations of continuing their education beyond undergraduate studies.

This study employed a qualitative, interpretive phenomenology method using validation theory. Validation occurs throughout the practice of the six elements of validation – contact initiated by institutional agents; increased self-esteem through the validation process; validation as a necessity to student development; validation resulting from the interaction between students and multiple agents in – and out – of the classroom; validation as a developmental process; validation being present from the beginning of a student's college experience (Rendon,1994). Through the application of validation theory as the theoretical framework, this study searched for explanations on the importance of the Puente Program and the ways it served the participants of this study. Specifically, the way the program and validation theory offers a lens on traditional forms of social and cultural capital as it pertains to the Latina/o/x participants. Moreover, how these forms of capital allowed participants to persist in their educational endeavors and feeling validated.

The main data collection sources used were one-on-one interviews with participants and document analysis. Through the in depth, one-on-one semi-structured interviews, interactions, and the sharing of experiences as Latina/o/x students, meaningful conversations surfaced. Subsequently, the researcher explained how the program, influenced the participant's college experience during and beyond their undergraduate careers.

The educational experiences of all the participants varied in many aspects, but they also overlapped in significant ways. Based on the researcher's parameters for selecting participants, the six participants of this study identified as Latina/o/x, first-generation college students, and all began their higher education careers at community colleges. A factor that interrelated between the participants were feelings of being underprepared for higher education. Once they were introduced and joined the Puente Program at their community college, they had a bit more clarity on how to pursue their college aspirations. They went on to transfer to four-year public universities, where they obtained their undergraduate degrees. Three of the six participants continued their pursuit of higher education and received graduate degrees. One is currently pursuing a doctorate degree.

This study was guided by the following research questions:

- How do the Puente Program alumni describe their experiences of their trajectory into higher education?

- From the participants perspective, what components of the Puente

    Program were most effective in bridging their postsecondary

    studies and beyond?

- What elements of the Puente Program did participants identify

    helped with feeling validated and assisted them in achieving their

    academic goals?

The research questions served to help guide this dissertation and the way the Puente Program impacted the participants. The questions also aimed at identifying how the program assists its student population to succeed during their undergraduate and graduate careers.

Shaping Views.

In regard to shaping the views of the participants, the program was influential in providing a better understanding of higher education. The participants reported that the program provided them with the opportunity to envision a positive future for themselves, feeling prepared and having a voice, leadership abilities, as well as, recognizing other capabilities within themselves. In particular, the participants were able to highlight their experiences and the complexities in which they were able to navigate at a community college to a four-year public university. Though participants had difficulty adjusting during the transfer stage of their undergraduate career, the tools and skills they obtained from the program allowed them to feel better prepared and to seek the

information they needed, while also forming communities to better assist one another.

Bridging Higher Education.

Participants of this study elaborated on the varying ways in which the program most effectively bridged their postsecondary studies and beyond. The Puente Program, through the use of its three major components, provided participants with experiences that allowed them to feel like they belonged. Early in their participation of the program, they felt the support and motivation. This impetus assisted in their success of attaining their academic goals because participants began to believe in themselves and their self-worth increased. The program was also successful in participants feeling part of their institution. Since, the mission of the program is to increase the number of educationally underrepresented students who enroll in four-year colleges and universities, feelings of belonging are essential to bridging the higher education trajectory and transfer.

Participants described facing many obstacles once they transferred to their four-year public universities. They described feelings of not belonging, not having a connection to any institutional agent, and having the same doubts within themselves when they initially began community college. Participants mentioned feeling like they did not fit in and not having someone who looked like them. This lack of connection was the reason why some of them were skeptical about whether or not they would successfully attain their degree. Yet, despite the

negative feelings they all acknowledged the skills they gained during their tenure in the program, helped when they transferred to a new institution. These skills weren't present when they began higher education at their community college, resulting in a different approach when they began their studies at a four-year public university.

Though all participants identified feeling alone and not belonging once they transferred, they understood the four-year experience at a public university, was going to be different. Participants described realizing how vital the program was with assisting them in preparing for their future academic endeavors. Gaining new skills played a role in the way each reported navigating through their years at their university, and eventually, in successfully attaining their undergraduate degree and beyond.

Successful bridging the transfer process were the skills participants obtained while participating in the program. They continuity of skills persisted and evolved beyond their community college career and into their four-year experience. This proved to be vital given that the college culture and the institutional structure at the university level were very different to their community college. Specifically, their enduring skills facilitated success and persistence towards degree attainment. Moreover, because the program requires a high level of human contact between participants, faculty, staff, and other institutional agents, they were familiar with the importance of establishing connections.

Puente Program and Validation Theory**.**

To review, Rendon's (1994) validation theory is "an enabling, confirming, and supportive process initiated by in – and out – of class agents that fosters academic and interpersonal development" (p. 44). Validation occurs throughout the practice of the six elements of validation:

- contact initiated by institutional agents

- increased self-esteem through the validation process

- validation as a necessity to student development

- validation resulting from the interaction between students and multiple agents in – and out – of the classroom

- validation as a developmental process

- validation being present from the beginning of a student's college experience

The findings for research question number three, were significant in exploring the specific support system the program offered the participants. The correlation between the three components of the Puente Program (academic, counseling, and mentoring), and validation theory resulted in students feeling connected, motivated, and validated during their participation in the program. Though their experiences changed once they were at their four-year public university, the new skills and knowledge they obtained proved to be essential once they transferred.

Future Program Transformation

It is important for institutions and programs to provide support and pay close attention to students who are not familiar with the ways in which to navigate and pursue higher education. Specifically, first-generation, low-income, underrepresented groups, who may be limited in knowledge or resources, and feel a sense of being lost. In California, community colleges serve 43 percent of first-generation college students, 78 percent receive tuition waivers and/or financial aid, and 44 percent of its students identify as Latina/o/x (Community College League of California Fast Facts, 2019). This data shows that a large percentage of the Latina/o/x student population in California attends community college. Making these institutions vital to the first-year and initial experiences in higher education for this student population. Furthermore, the data also indicates that many Latina/o/x students do not receive the essential information necessary to pursue higher education at a public university or private institution.

Offering adequate and vital information early in a student's educational trajectory, specifically for higher education aspirations, can make a significant difference in how prepared students are, and eventually how they connect to their institution and their academics. More specifically, it is important to understand how institutional structures serve students who have been systematically marginalized. Particularly, because they have unique circumstances and perspectives, which may not correlate with traditional institutional methods of action (Garcia & Ramirez, 2018). The unique

circumstances of non-traditional students suggest different college experiences and interactions (Rendon & Muñoz, 2011). Thus, being conscious that low-income, first-generation Latina/o/x students tend to have less access to transferrable capital in both their higher education and in K-12 educational experiences, is crucial to understand how academic and culturally responsive outreach programs assist them in positively navigating a system that is structured to have negative educational outcomes for them.

Puente Program aims at orienting students pursuing higher education but is limited in what it can offer students once they transfer to a university or selective college. A recommendation is for the program to begin establishing relationships with more four-year institutions. Establishing connections and resources at the institutions where most *Puentistas* transfer, will help assist in the transition phase and begin the institutional connections participants reported were lacking. One approach would be to gather data and reach out to alumni and mentors who work at four-year institutions and begin establishing resources, such as information on specific programs or institutional agents that can help the student navigate. Having tools and information of their future institution for transfer students, will be valuable in making the transition from community college to a university.

Educational aspirations were connected to *familia* and culture. Moreover, the program's sense of *familia*, encourages supporting each other and maintaining a connection. In this study, some participants indicated their families

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played a role in deciding what university to attend once they transferred. However, counter to the narrative that Latina/o/x students stay local because of family, most participants indicated they decided to attend their four-year universities because of the introduction they had to it by way of campus visits the Puente Program established. Additionally, the campus culture and climate they experienced when visiting their university influenced their decision on where to transfer. Though family was played a role in the decision making of where to transfer, through their constant encouragement, the participants made their own choice on where to attend.

Family support played a crucial role in the success of the participants higher education trajectory. Though the Puente Program provides guidance and assistance to the family of *Puentistas*, participants of this study reported that their community college did not provide much information for their family to fully understand the pathway and transitions in higher education. The participants reported that though they had the full support of their parents and family, there was a lack of understanding of the educational system. A recommendation for the program is to also increase the resources available to the family member of the participants so that they may have a better perspective of the different higher education systems and the pipeline from community college to a four-year public university.

Community colleges have a popular negative discourse in academia. The negative connotation tied to these institutions of higher learning is also

embedded in the way the Latina/o/x community views them, as described by the participants. Despite not having much knowledge of the ways to navigate the educational system, participants reported that they were aware of the stigma of attending community college. They were aware that entering higher education by way of community college had the possibility of a lengthier time towards transfer and to complete their degree. This was due to placements practices and availability of courses that were part of the institutional structure at their community college at the time they attended. Though, for many of the participants pursuing higher education meant they had to attend a community college, they felt fortunate that they discovered the Puente Program and reflected on having a second chance. Educational reform is now transforming the California Community Colleges and it would be relevant to know how it will affect the program in the future. Moreover, how, if at all, will the program structure need to change as it pertains to the academic component.

This study showcased the importance of providing students who begin their college career at community colleges, with the support from the beginning. The program assisted the participants in changing their narrative of how they viewed community college as a failure factory. They were introduced to the program within a year of attending college. Those who began the program within a year, were on track to transfer to a four-year university in three years. Their informed decisions, connections to their institutions, and networking opportunities, allowed for a faster transition to a university.

Another important finding was how participants viewed institutional agents and their mentors. Participants' experiences with the Puente Program faculty and counselors were very positive. They reported that both the counselors and professors in the program, helped establish and built confidence in them while also establishing rapport. Faculty in particular, were highly influential in the way the students established their confidence and academic aptitude. Participants self-esteem and self-worth increased, and they were able to continue to persist and strive towards their academic success. Participants reported having great relationships with their counselors, who guided them throughout the transfer process, and pushed them to apply to research one universities. This continued support and motivation did not allow for negativity, which, as described by the participants, made them feel validated.

Though relationships with the institutional agents from Puente was reported as being strong by participants, the mentor component of the program was very limited in the way it influenced the experiences of the participants. Most reported that either their professor or counselor became their mentor, some did not have a mentor during their participation in the program. This study found that the programs mentor component needs to be revamped and transformed. It is important for Latina/o/x students to see themselves in others like them, who are in leadership positions. This allows for them to reflect and aspire to similar roles. It also provides the ability to form positive narratives of the Latina/o/x community. It would be advantageous for the program to consider the mentor component and

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how it is influencing its participants, if at all. It is understandable why this component was implemented, but further data needs to be obtained to comprehend why it is not a strong component in the program.

This research exemplifies the importance of Latina/o/x students having a positive perception of who they are, where they came from, and of their community. In addition, being exposed to role models who they see themselves in, provides a message that they are capable and they too can succeed. This brings about pride and honor to know that you are part of a population that is growing, not only in numbers, but also in educational endeavors and professional attainments. For this reason, it is important that outreach programs similar to the Puente Program, place value to the culture and experiences of the students they serve.

One of the discoveries of this study, was on the question about pride in culture. While all participants acknowledged feeling prideful of where they came from and their background, some participants mentioned struggling with feeling a connection to both their American and Latina/o/x side. All the while, trying to consolidate both sides of their backgrounds, they were also attempting to identify themselves. One participant stated struggling with the definition of pride in culture embedded in the program. Though the program distinguished being Latina/o/x, not knowing what it truly was to be of Mexican descent and American born was conflicting.

Born in the states, to Mexican parents, who were not Catholic or infused in celebrating Mexican traditions, such as *posadas* or *Dia De Los Muertos*, Oli felt like cultural pride and cultural belonging was lacking. For this reason, Oli felt confused as to what to be proud of. Oli was introduced to Mexican traditions once participating in the program. Because the program is deep-rooted with Latina/o/x literature and traditions that Oli had heard about but not practiced, she was not fully engaged in the cultural customs. Moreover, Oli was not accustomed to feelings of patriotism and culture. In fact, she questioned the reasoning behind Puente students being ecstatic and shouting during events things like, "*Si Se Puede,*" and feeling as if it promoted vigilant behaviors. Additionally, Oli mentioned being embarrassed at times during these events when onlookers would stare as Puente students would be in an uproar.

The experiences described by Oli were not what other participants in this study reported. She may have felt this way because of the self-identity struggles that some identified in this study. However, it would be an advantage to understand the reasoning behind these views and recognize if the program itself is shaping the views, either in a negative or positive manner, of students who have not yet joined the program. In addition, identifying the first-impression prospective students develop of the program and whether this view is inspiring or stirring students away from participating in it.

Another important result that came from this study, was from the participant that was not of Mexican descent. Angel, who was from Peru,

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described feeling alienated at times because of dissimilarities with individuals from other Latina/o/x backgrounds, more specifically those with a Mexican background. Angel felt the program was focused on Mexican culture and traditions. Customs that were unfamiliar to her but also very enlightening. Angel reflects on occasions where voicing her opinion was viewed as taboo and brought about disagreement within the group. For this reason, not opinionating on certain topics became habitual for her. This silence was concerning and an unaccustomed response from Angel since the program was supposed to bring out ideas and revelations from all students. Though in the end, Angel reveals how the cohort was welcoming and inclusive to her views and all Latina/o/x traditions, she mentioned that her beginnings in the program were a struggle.

A recommendation for program leadership is to ensure that all students feel comfortable in voicing their sentiments and incorporating varying ideals with other students in the program. Not only is it important for Latina/o/x students to feel they are included, but those from different religious beliefs, sexual orientations, and diverse backgrounds must also feel comfortable. This can also benefit impending program evolution and Latina/o/x academia by discerning the ways in which they respond to diversity within their own population. This is not to say the program needs to change, but merely it must assure that students are comfortable in the safe space the program offers.

Another recommendation is for program expansion to the CSU system. Frankie mentioned being accepted at a CSU right after high school. However,

she did not accept on time because she did not know the importance of accepting before the deadline. While Frankie was not familiar with this information during her high school career, it is important for the program to grow the connection with the CSU system. Currently, the program is not present at any California State University. Research shows that more Latina/o/x students transfer to the CSU system than the UC system (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2018). For this reason, it would be advantageous to begin a Puente connection at a CSU and model it after the UCR Puente connection that already exist.

The University of California, Riverside Puente connection, hosts a residential program that brings together Puente Project participants from community colleges throughout the state of California (The Puente Project, 2019). This conference aims at engaging students and promoting academics. Students learn about leadership and community involvement and discuss issues affecting students in higher education. They also have the opportunity to meet and establish relationships with other *Puentistas* for around the state of California. Having a CSU connection would be valuable for transferring *Puentistas* and would expand their exposure to different systems and institutions.

<p align="center">Puentista's Recommendations</p>

The participants in this study described having a positive understand on how to navigate the higher education system after participating in the program.

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However, they did have recommendations for the program. Frankie explains how it is vital for the Puente Program to be more present at four-year institutions:

> We started PUENTE on campus because we wanted to give the people who transferred just like us that sense of belonging, like 'Okay, we're here for you. We know what you're going through.' Especially for transfer students. Freshmen get a whole week of orientation, they get to stay on campus and we get one day and a campus tour and to pick out our classes and to me that's not enough. It doesn't give us enough time to stress the resources that are on campus, for us to really find a place to be part of is just not ... We're just going in to finish our last two or three years and then we're out. And then everyone here who started as a freshman, they get this whole experience that we never did.

Establishing connections is a major focus of the program. Participants felt that once they transferred that connection was hard to obtain. Though they had skills to navigate at their new institution, they reported it would have been helpful to have established a connection prior to starting.

Alex explains:

> When I was in the program, it was a little difficult because, although we were all Latinos, there was a majority of Mexicans, and I was still in the process of trying to adapt, so it was hard to share some things. I would just listen a lot, trying to not criticize some of the stuff, or correct people. In general, they were a good support system.

Angel describes feeling alone even when she participated in the program. Though she did state that at the end of her tenure in the program she felt welcomed, it is important to understand why she felt alone. If she wasn't as determined as she described herself, she may have withdrawn from the program.

Oli describes her transition to the four-year institution as being a very emotional experience. Oli questioned the capabilities that the Puente Program and its institutional agents had enlightened on Oli when attending community college. The description of the transition stage and transfer is as follows:

> I was a little brown speck in a sea of white, and Asian, and yellow. Sorry, that was a joke, but yeah. It was definitely very culturally shocking to me, especially because there was always...I guess it was just like I was just exposed to, just more diverse people. You can breathe it in the air that you didn't belong. It was like this weird thing. You can literally breathe it. You were in the library working, and I don't know. Maybe it was me, but YMCA was one of my, the hardest times that I've ever experienced. It was really hard for me…I think it's kind of hard, just because once I transferred, I transferred to YMCA, and there I had no support. I kind of went back feeling, to the same feeling like when I was in high school. It was such a culture shock for me that I was like, 'Okay, all of this work that I did was sort of for nothing, because now I don't have, I don't know what I'm going to do.' I pretty much isolated myself.

This description is an example of the ways in which institutional structures can create conditions where students question whether or not they belong there. Rather than a "cooling out" (Clark, 1960) affect, preventing students from high aspirations, the validation experiences participants so proudly gained at the community college, should sustain and continue. Though Oli was validated during her tenure in the program once she transferred that changed. Institutions of higher education have a responsibility to encourage and guide all students toward furthering their educational goals. Oli continued:

> I feel like that little sense of pride that I got while being at CC with the Puente Program was not the same thing when I transferred. It's like I got a boost, but then after that, my sense of being, my sense of self-worth in terms of, do I even belong here?

Oli and other participants did acknowledge the feeling of not being capable and imposter syndrome resurfaced once they transferred. This struggle is an indication of how institutions are failing students of color and students from underrepresented backgrounds.

Future Scholarship

The future of students with high aspirations and limited roadmaps depend on academics and practitioners alike. It is important for future research to focus on the institutional structures and systematic barriers that influence the educational trajectories of underrepresented students.

Relationships with the institutional agents is important in bridging a student's educational trajectory. It is important for Latina/o/x students to have connections and mentors they see themselves in and who are in leadership positions. This also allows the formation of positive narratives of the Latina/o/x community. It would be advantageous for impending research to consider the mentor component of the program. It is understandable why this component was implemented, but further research needs to be obtained on whether or not alumni are returning to mentor future students. The participants of this study reported the mentor component was not strong and very limited in the way it influenced their experiences. Since the program's goals is to have alumni *Puentistas* return as mentors to future program participants, it would be beneficial to explore if this component is serving its purpose for all students.

It is conducive for future scholarship to focus on new laws and the ways community colleges, and programs like Puente, are being impacted. Particularly, considering new laws like Assembly Bill 705, which has changed the placement protocols in the California Community Colleges. Additionally, how these laws are impacting the trajectory of students at community colleges, will be imperative in changing the popular negative discourse of these institutions. Assembly Bill 705 is changing the landscape in assessment and placement practices. It would be beneficial to understand how these new laws are influencing the program. More importantly, if they are breaking down barriers and assisting students in transitioning to four-year institutions.

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A recommendation for future scholarship would be to research where Puente Program students are transferring and the motivation behind it. Particularly, when comparing whether *Puentistas* are attending the California State University (CSU) or University of California (UC) systems. Since the program is administered and funded by the UC system, it may be an indication as to why the participants of this study all attended a UC once they transferred. However, CSU's do have a large population of incoming first-generation, Latina/o/x students, which are the Puente Program's predominant student population. The ivy league institutions did not seem to intrigue the participants of this study. They reported, they felt connections to the institution they attended because of campus visits. Experiencing first-hand, the campus culture provided the Puente alumni with the impetus of attending a specific institution. It would add value to the literature on transfer and transition to understand why students are choosing a specific institution. Particularly, how campus visits influence the decision on where to transfer.

Lastly, while the participants were successful in transferring to the four-year public university and obtaining their degree, they experienced a negative transition that could have deterred them from degree attainment. It would be valuable for future research to understand the transition process and how the hidden curriculum at four-year institutions is connected. The hidden curriculum seems to be associated more with a hidden culture of what is valued and exchangeable capital. The hidden curriculum institutionalized in higher education

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does not always allow for a successful trajectory. It would be vital for future research to obtain the lived experiences of Puente Program participants who transferred but did not obtain their undergraduate degree. More importantly, to investigate if the hidden curriculum was influential in their trajectory. Institutionalizing a transfer receptive culture model on all higher education campuses will encourage more transfer students to feel welcomed and thus successful in various disciplines.

Limitations

Creswell (2014) found researchers hold certain biases constructed by factors such as culture, background, and experiences. Qualitative research studies must expose these biases to allow readers honest insight into the possible influences or limitations in the study (Creswell, 2014). This study was an interpretive phenomenological study of the experiences of six Puente Program alumni who successfully transferred to a four-year public university and obtained they undergraduate degree.

As a researcher, who is familiar with the Puente Program and its major components, these biases are recognized. The goal of this study was to present the specific perspectives of the participants. Furthermore, efforts were made to warrant trustworthiness of the study. Additionally, the methods of collecting data were triangulated and the study was presented in the specific ways in which each participant described their experiences.

Although the sample size of the study was comprised of six participants

(two males and four females), the data and findings reflected their lived experiences, which was the focus of this research. It is important to note, that some participants had recently obtained their degree – about 3 months – while others had graduated ten years prior from when this study was conducted. Furthermore, not all attended the same community college or four-year public university. Therefore, the beliefs and experiences of the participants in this study differed in the ways in which the program assisted them and functioned at their specific institutions.

<p align="center">Conclusion</p>

The goal of this dissertation was to identify the lived experiences of the participants who successfully navigated through the community college system, via Puente Program, to attaining their bachelor's degree at a four-year university. In this study, the researcher highlighted the effects validation theory had in the participant's educational trajectory and how influential the program was in this path. These experiences provided perspectives on the ways in which these first-generation, Latina/o/x students, navigated the educational pipeline.

As the largest growing group in the United States, it is vital to understand the way the Latina/o/x community and student population access and flourish in higher education. Bridging community, culture, and family into pedagogies and in learning environments, invite triumph and opportunity.

This study gave voice to participants, who despite having impediments and barriers, successfully navigated through the educational pipeline. A pipeline

that is structured with discouragement and disillusionment for many with a similar

background. This work informs a construct that can better serve the Latina/o/x

community college transfer student.

APPENDIX A:

SELECTION CRITERIA

SELECTION CRITERIA FOR STUDY

1. Participated in the Puente Program while attending community college and are alumni, *Puentistas*.

2. Transferred to a four-year public institution.

3. Obtained their baccalaureate degree from a four-year public institution.

4. Identify as Latina/o/x.

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APPENDIX B:

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT

College of Education
Office of Doctoral Studies

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT

The study you are being invited to participate in is designed to investigate the influence of the Puente Program on the Latina/o/x college students higher education trajectory. This study is being conducted by Frances Valdovinos, Ed.D. candidate, under the supervision of Dr. Enrique Murillo, Professor and Executive Director – LEAD Organization, California State University, San Bernardino. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board, California State University, San Bernardino.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study is to understand what factors of the Puente Program support and prepare the Latina/o/x student population to facilitate transfer from a community college to a four-year institution. As well as, understanding what factors of the program sustain and supersede beyond a post-baccalaureate education. This study will be used to better understand the intricacy of the program from the perspectives of Puente Program alumni, *Puentistas*.

DESCRIPTION: You will be invited to participate in an interview which will require between 30 to 60 minutes of your time. If necessary, a second interview may be requested, at a later date, for follow-up or for clarification. Interviews will be conducted based on your preference, either face-to-face, or face-to-face via an online Zoom, a video and web conferencing service. The time and location of the interview is at your convenience. With your permission, all interviews will be audio recorded.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Even if you have signed this letter of consent, you can decide not to answer all or specific questions in the interview. You can withdraw from participation in this study at any time. There will be no penalty of any kind if you decide not to participate in this study's activities.

CONFIDENTIAL: To maintain the utmost confidentiality, I will use pseudonyms in lieu of all participants names and institutions attended. Your name will not be used, and your anonymity will be paramount to my research. In addition to using pseudonyms, only I, as the researcher, will have access to the information obtained from all participants. All audio recordings of interviews, observations, and reflective journal entries will remain stored in a locked file cabinet. The audio recordings will be transcribed word-for-word and will be destroyed after the transcribing of data. To safeguard the data, it will be stored in the researcher's home office in a locked file cabinet on a password-protected computer.

DURATION: Individual interviews will last approximately 30 to 60 minutes. However, you may end the interview before the scheduled duration. You do not have to answer every question. If clarification or follow up is needed from the initial interview, a second interview may be requested and would last approximately 10 to 30 minutes.

RISKS: There are no anticipated risks or discomforts for participating in this study as you will not be identifiable by name. But you may experience some inconvenience with completing the interview by taking time out of your schedule to participate in the interview.

BENEFITS: You may not directly benefit from participating in this study. Though, you will be contributing to the overall understanding of the influence of the Puente Program on the Latina/o/x college students higher education trajectory.

AUDIO: As part of this research project, and to ensure accurate data collection for later review, I will be making a digital recording of you during your interview. Please indicate you are willing to consent by initialing below. In any use of this digital recording, your name would not be identified. If you do not want to be recorded, I will only take handwritten notes. I understand that this research interview will be audio recorded. Please initial if you agree: _____

CONTACT: If you have any questions about this study and/or research subjects' rights, please contact Frances Valdovinos, Ed.D. Candidate, at (951) 751-0509 or valdovinosf@coyote.csusb.edu, or Dr. Enrique Murillo, Professor and Executive Director – LEAD Organization, at (909) 936-0113 or EMurillo@csusb.edu. You may also contact California State University, San Bernardino's Institutional Review Board Compliance Officer, Michael Gillespie at (909) 537-7588 or mgillesp@csusb.edu.

RESULTS: The results from the study will be disseminated once they have been finalized and completed. The dissertation will be published in Scholarworks, an online repository of scholarly research established at the California State University, San Bernardino.

CONFIRMATION STATEMENT:

I have read and understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I am over the age of 18 years and have been given a copy of this form.

SIGNATURE:

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name: _____

 (Please Print)

The copy of this consent form is for your records.

APPENDIX C:

RECRUITMENT EMAIL

RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Greetings,

My name is Frances Valdovinos and I am a doctoral candidate at California State University, San Bernardino's Educational Leadership program. My dissertation, "*Si Se Puede! Validation and Puentistas Beyond Undergraduate Studies: Sustaining Latina/o/x College Achievement*", aims to investigate the influence of the Puente Program on the Latina/o/x college students higher education trajectory.

I am emailing because you have been identified as meeting the criteria for the study. I would greatly appreciate it if you participate in my research and would like to schedule a meeting with you. I would like to conduct a one-on-one interview that will last between 30 to 60 minutes. I will be able to meet you at a location most convenient to you. If you are unable to meet in person, I would be happy to set up a meeting via Zoom, a video and web conferencing service.

Please let me know at your earliest convenience if you would be willing to consider my request and participate in my research. Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Best Regards,
Frances Valdovinos, M.Ed.
Doctoral Candidate
Educational Leadership | Cohort 11
California State University, San Bernardino
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APPENDIX D:

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL[1]

Date: _____

Participant Name: _____

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. If at any time you feel uncomfortable during the interview process, please let me know. We can either take a break from the interview or terminate the interview if necessary. I will be taking notes of your responses and ask follow up questions for clarification. As mentioned in the informed consent form, I will be using a digital recording device to record the interview. If you are uncomfortable being recorded, please let me know. I can stop the recording at any point during the interview process and, with your permission, take handwritten notes. Any quotes from this interview may be used in the dissertation publication. Your identity will always remain anonymous and confidential. Only I will know your identity and will protect it. Do you have any questions about the consent form? Having read the consent form, do you still agree to be a part of the study? If so, may I begin recording?

[Start recording]

I would like to begin by getting to know the story of who you are, your educational trajectory, your family, and your community. I will start with your educational history, Puente Program questions, higher education related questions, and finally the family role.

Educational History

1. What was high school like for you?
2. What kind, if any, college preparation did you receive at your high school? (e.g. teachers, counselors, students, other administrators, programs)
3. Did you have a sense of belonging and felt validated at your high school?
4. What factors influenced your decision to pursue a college education?
5. What community college did you attend?

Puente Program Related Questions

1. How did you hear about the Puente Program at your community college?

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[1] Questions and Protocol Developed by Frances Valdovinos

2. Why did you decide to participate in this program?
3. Can you tell me what your higher education experience was like before you began the Puente Program?
4. Did you feel a sense of belonging and validation before you were in the program? After participating in the program?
5. Did you learn anything new while you were part of the program?
6. What are some of the things you learned in the program? Please reflect on the 3 major components of the program (Academics, counseling and mentoring), the personal elements (things you have learned about yourself), and guidance (mentorship, networks, etc.).
7. What was your overall experience in the program?
8. What factors helped you succeed towards transfer and degree attainment?
9. Would you recommend this program to other people?
10. How would you convince other Latina/o/x students to participate in the program? What would you say?
11. How would you describe the culture of the Puente Program?

Higher Education Related Questions

1. Why did you decide to begin higher education at a community college?
2. What was your intended goal when you started community college?
3. Did your goal change as a result of participating in Puente Program? How so?
4. Did you encounter any barriers or struggles as you navigated through higher education?
5. What institution did you transfer to? Why that particular institution?
6. How would you describe the culture of your community college? Your four-year institution?
7. What role did the Puente Program have in this trajectory?
8. Did you know where the resources and programs at your four-year university were?
9. Did you feel a sense of belonging and validation at your four-year institution?

Family Role

1. Do you have any immediate family (brothers, sisters) or other family (aunts, uncles, cousins, family friends) that have attended college?
2. Are you a first-generation college student?
3. What can you tell me about your family's role in advising you about your college career?
4. What kind of support has your immediate family provided?
5. Compare this support to the Puente Program.

Open

1. If you could give other Latina/o/x students who are beginning their college career any advice as to what may help them succeed in college, what would that advice be?

2. What recommendations would you give to Puente Program faculty, counselors, and mentors, to help Latina/o/x students further their education?
3. Is there anything else you would like to add?
4. Would you be willing to review the transcripts from this interview for accuracy?

Interview Probes

Clarification Probes
- In other words, you believe…
- If I'm understanding correctly, your perspective is…
- When you mention (comment or term), can you elaborate on what exactly do you mean by…?
- It sounds like you are saying, "…". Is that accurate?

Elaborating Probes
- Could you please elaborate?
- Why?
- Can you provide an example?
- What factors influenced that?

Redirection Probe
- Going back to the topic we were discussing earlier, would you please elaborate more on…?
- I'd like to better understand our previous discussion on… Can you please talk more about it?

Research Questions

1. In what way did the Puente Program shape students views and understanding of higher education?
2. What components of the Puente Program, if any, were most effective in bridging their postsecondary studies and beyond?
3. What significance did Puente Program have in students feeling validated and helping them achieve their academic goals to a 4-year institution, if at all?

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APPENDIX E:

RECRUITMENT FLYER

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR A RESEARCH STUDY

Si Se Puede! Validation and Puentistas Beyond Undergraduate Studies: Sustaining Latina/o/x College Achievement

Purpose of the Study:

The study is designed to investigate the influence of the Puente Program on the Latina/o/x college students higher education trajectory and post-baccalaureate experience.

You would be participating in an interview that will consist of questions about your participation in the Puente Program, while attending community college and transitioning/transferring to a four-year public institution. Your participation in this study will remain confidential.

Participant Criteria:

1. Participated in the Puente Program while attending community college and are alumni, *Puentistas*
2. Transferred to a four-year public institution
3. Obtained your baccalaureate degree from a four-year public institution
4. Identify as a Latina/o/x

Time Commitment:

Interviews will be conducted lasting 30-60 minutes with the potential of a follow-up interview lasting 10-30 minutes.

IF INTERESTED PLEASE CONTACT:

Frances Valdovinos, M.Ed.
Doctoral Candidate
California State University, San Bernardino
valdovinosf@coyote.csusb.edu

IRB Study #XXX-XXX-XXX

APPENDIX F:

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL EMAIL

August 5, 2019

CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Expedited Review
IRB-FY2019-306
Status: Approved

Mr. Frances Valdovinos and Prof. Enrique Murillo Jr
COE - Doctoral Studies, COE - TeacherEduc&Foundtn TEF
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Mr. Valdovinos and Prof. Enrique Murillo Jr:

Your application to use human subjects, titled "Si Se Puede! Validation and Puentistas Beyond Undergraduate Studies: Sustaining Latina/o/x College Achievement" has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The informed consent document you submitted is the official version for your study and cannot be changed without prior IRB approval. A change in your informed consent (no matter how minor the change) requires resubmission of your protocol as amended using the IRB Cayuse system protocol change form.

Your application is approved for one year from August 2, 2019 through August 2, 2020.

Please note the Cayuse IRB system will notify you when your protocol is up for renewal and ensure you file it before your protocol study end date.

Your responsibilities as the researcher/investigator reporting to the IRB Committee include the following four requirements as mandated by the Code of Federal Regulations 45 CFR 46 listed below. Please note that the protocol change form and renewal form are located on the IRB website under the forms menu. Failure to notify the IRB of the above may result in disciplinary action. You are required to keep copies of the informed consent forms and data for at least three years.

You are required to notify the IRB of the following by submitting the appropriate form (modification, unanticipated/adverse event, renewal, study closure) through the online Cayuse IRB Submission System.

1. If you need to make any changes/modifications to your protocol submit a modification form as the IRB must review all changes before implementing in your study to ensure the degree of risk has not changed.
2. If any unanticipated adverse events are experienced by subjects during your research study or project.
3. If your study has not been completed submit a renewal to the IRB.
4. If you are no longer conducting the study or project submit a study closure.

Please ensure your CITI Human Subjects Training is kept up-to-date and current throughout the study.

The CSUSB IRB has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval notice does not replace any departmental or additional approvals which may be required. If you have any questions regarding the IRB decision, please contact Michael Gillespie, the IRB Compliance Officer. Mr. Michael Gillespie can be reached by phone at (909) 537-7588, by fax at (909) 537-7028, or by email at mgillesp@csusb.edu. Please include your application approval identification number (listed at the top) in all correspondence.

Best of luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Donna Garcia

Donna Garcia, Ph.D., IRB Chair
CSUSB Institutional Review Board

DG/MG

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