Brazilian Middle School Students' College Aspirations: An Examination of Individuals, Families, School, and Society

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BOSTON COLLEGE
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Educational Leadership and Higher Education

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BRAZILIAN MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS’ COLLEGE ASPIRATIONS: AN EXAMINATION OF INDIVIDUALS, FAMILIES, SCHOOL, AND SOCIETY

Dissertation
by

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Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Brazilian Middle School Students’ College Aspirations: An Examination of Individuals, Families, School, and Society

by

Michelle Ann de la Rosa

Dr. Andy Hargreaves, Dissertation Chair

Research often overlooks students who are of Brazilian origin when considering educational equality and opportunity for different racial and ethnic groups. This qualitative study addresses this gap in the literature by examining the experiences and forces that influence the educational aspirations of Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin living in the United States during their eighth grade year of middle school. It specifically considers students’ educational aspirations including the influence of families, the school, and the community on students’ ambitions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with students, their parents, and educators (i.e., teachers, guidance counselors, a social worker, and a principal) from a middle school in the Northeast.

Data showed that many students had developed postsecondary plans by the conclusion of their eighth grade year, including students’ thoughts relating to college, careers, and work. Students’ ambitions were significantly influenced by family members, especially parents, as well as by experiences with their families as immigrants in the United States. Legal status particularly affected students’ intended pathways.
Findings from this study suggest the following three areas of need for Brazilian middle school students: (a) educational planning during middle school, (b) emphasis on the role of family connectedness and engagement for Brazilian families, and (c) adaptation to circumstances related to immigration status. One way of comprehending the needs of Brazilian middle school students and students of Brazilian origin in relation to the development of their educational aspirations is through integrating the theories of family and social capital. Family capital emphasizes the role of families in shaping students’ educational pathways; social capital highlights the need to develop ties beyond close networks as a means for accessing knowledge and resources that further students’ educational opportunities. Therefore, it is hoped that further attention to the family and social capital of Brazilian families in research, policy, and practice will build upon students’ ambitions and improve their educational opportunities.
DEDICATION

To all of the children and youth whom I know and love.

May you keep your dreams alive.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation has been a journey: a journey of self-reflection, a journey of pursuing a passion, a journey of seeking for change, and especially a journey of searching for ways to help others. It was inspired by my faith in God, a god whom I believe is no respecter of persons.

Throughout this journey, I received immense support from many caring individuals. This work would not have been possible without the continual support of Dr. Andy Hargreaves. Beginning days before I officially began my doctoral studies, Dr. Hargreaves took me in as a new graduate assistant on his international research project. He challenged and inspired me to do things that I never before imagined. He provided me with opportunities that built upon my professional interests. He encouraged me to pursue my passions. Andy, thank you for your profound mentorship throughout this endeavor.

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Thank you to all of the students, parents, and educators who willingly participated in this study. Your contributions are indispensable to helping further a cause for greater educational opportunity for Brazilian students.

A sincere appreciation goes out to my wonderful friends who provided encouragement when it was needed most. Thank you for being there for me. Also, to my parents, thank you for instilling a commitment to education from a young age and for showing confidence in me in all that I do.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Fernanda is a United States citizen. She was born in the United States following her mother’s immigration from Brazil. Fernanda is ambitious in her dreams and wants to go to medical school to become a doctor or neurosurgeon. Her mother works as a babysitter trying to make ends meet. While paying for a college education will be nearly impossible on her mother’s income, Fernanda believes that “truly anyone can get a full scholarship if they try.” She is confident that she will receive financial aid to help her accomplish her dream.

Bruno is an undocumented immigrant from Brazil and has lived in the United States for over a decade. The possibilities for his future are not that certain. He has considered doing something with computers or business for a career. He would like to go to college, but his parents are unsure if this will be feasible because of their family’s undocumented legal status. His parents have encouraged him to attend the local technical high school so that he can get a job following graduation. However, if he had legal status and if college were definite, his mother and father would have preferred for him to go to the traditional high school because of their belief that the traditional high school better prepares students for college.

Fernanda and Bruno both have Brazilian roots. However, their plans for the future are notably different because of their respective legal status within the United States. Fernanda is optimistic about her prospective educational and career opportunities, and Bruno seems limited. What, then, can be done to help instill the same type of hope in
Bruno like that of Fernanda? What are the educational experiences of other Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin, and what are the challenges they face to achieving their goals? Moreover, what are those things that are being done to support Brazilian students along their educational pathways? There are no easy answers to these questions.

**Statement of the Problem**

Research has long illustrated examples of racial and ethnic inequality in educational opportunity for Latin American students (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Choy, Horn, Nuñez, & Chen, 2000; Hurtado et al., 1997; Kurlaender & Flores, 2005). For example, in a report published by the United States Department of Education (Aud et al., 2013), statistics from the years 1990 through 2012 indicated that the Hispanic and Latino population had the lowest percentage of 25- to 29-year-olds with a high school diploma or an equivalent in comparison with other racial and ethnic groups. Likewise, with the exception of 4 years during this same time period, Hispanics and Latinos had the lowest percentage of 25- to 29-year-olds with at least a bachelor’s degree as compared to the other racial and ethnic groups (Aud et al., 2013).

Differences in educational opportunity for students have been explained in a multitude of ways and attributed to a variety of causes. For instance, some researchers have proposed that school quality significantly influences students’ opportunities to learn (Adelman, 2007; Huber, Huidor, Malagon, Sanchez, & Solorzano, 2006; Kimura-Walsh et al., 2009; Venezia & Kirst, 2005; Yun & Moreno, 2006), with Latin American students being more likely to attend schools that are underperforming, have fewer qualified
teachers, and are limited in resources (Kimura-Walsh et al., 2009). Other researchers have contended that some students are more predisposed than others to pursue postsecondary education based upon factors such as their socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, and their parents’ educational background (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler & Stage, 1992; Hurtado et al., 1997). Educational opportunity has also been attributed to families’ capital (e.g., social, cultural, economic), with, for example, families’ socioeconomic status or access to resources influencing the educational possibilities for their children (Gonzales, 2010; Israel, Beaulieu, & Hartless, 2001; Monkman, Ronald, & Théramène, 2005; St. John, 2006).

While theories and arguments such as these offer some explanation about the nature of educational disparity, they are often limited in their attention to certain populations of students. One particularly overlooked group in educational research is Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin. The number of Brazilian students in the nation’s schools has risen since the 1980s as families have left Brazil due to increased economic challenges and declining social mobility (Jouët-Pastré & Braga, 2008; Lima & Siqueira, 2007; Margolis, 1998). The Brazilian population within the United States has been considered by some researchers to be an “invisible minority” (Margolis, 1998, 2008; Martes, 2011). For example, many Brazilian immigrants have undocumented legal status which affects them in a number of ways, including the narrowing of employment and educational options (Braga & Jouët-Pastré, 2008; Margolis, 1994, 2008; Martes, 2011). Additionally, Brazilians feel that they are often categorized incorrectly within the United States when, for instance, they are labeled as Latino or Hispanic, terms which they do not
The invisibility of the Brazilian population is also manifest in the dearth of educational research specifically related to Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin. In addition, literature that discusses education in relation to race and ethnicity frequently overlooks the relevancy for Brazilian students. For example, in a report published by the United States Department of Education (Aud et al., 2013) regarding the status of education within the United States, statistics illustrating differences between educational attainment by race and ethnicity were related using the following categories: White, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and American Indian or Alaska Native. Hispanic or Latino was defined as, “A person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race” (Aud et al., 2013, p. vii). Therefore, Brazilian students were likely reported under the broad category of Hispanic or Latino, thus making it difficult to determine distinctions between Brazilian students and other populations within this specific grouping.

The scarcity of educational research on the Brazilian population of students within the United States consequently narrows the resources available to inform the development of educational practice and policy specific to the needs of these students. Given the substantial representation of Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin in schools in the United States, this study argues that it is time to decrease their “invisibility” (Margolis, 1998, 2008; Martes, 2011) through expanded comprehension of
their educational experiences, perspectives, and needs. It is hoped that raising an awareness of the distinctness of the Brazilian student population will enable them to receive the educational services they need in order to widen their opportunities and lead to a future of possibilities.

**Purpose**

The United States Department of Education (2002, 2007) has indicated that *no child should be left behind*, that every student should receive the best possible education, and that equal opportunities should be provided to all. The question, therefore, arises about how to address the educational disparity that exists among different racial and ethnic groups. This study specifically sought to understand the educational experiences of one population of students who is frequently overlooked in educational research but who is significantly represented in the nation’s schools, that is those students who are Brazilian and of Brazilian origin.

The purpose of this research was to examine the educational aspirations of Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin during their eighth grade year of middle school with the intent of discovering ways to better support these students with their educational and career endeavors. As a framework for this objective, this study was guided by the following research question and sub-questions:

*What is the nature of the experiences and the forces that influence the educational aspirations of Brazilian middle school students and students of Brazilian origin in eighth grade?*
1. What are the educational aspirations of Brazilian middle school students and students of Brazilian origin in eighth grade? Are these aspirations connected to postsecondary goals and plans? If so, how? If not, why?

2. How do the experiences, resources, and the forms and distribution of capital (i.e., social and economic) of students’ families influence students’ educational aspirations?

3. What resources and supports are, or are not, provided for students and parents by the school and community relating to students’ aspirations? Do the efforts of school and community adults align with students’ and parents’ needs and goals concerning students’ educational aspirations? If so, how? If not, why?

**Significance of the Study**

There is a dearth of research about the educational experiences of Brazilian students living within the United States, especially during their middle school years. Because there are a number of Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin in schools in the Northeast and in other areas of the United States, this study is significant in that it provides an increased understanding about their educational ambitions and experiences.

This study’s significance also lies in its inclusion of both students and parents in order to comprehend the educational aspirations and experiences of Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin. Research has indicated that students formulate their own worldviews regarding their schooling experiences based upon the “sociocultural contexts
of [their] lives” and then “act upon the meanings they construct” (Booth, 2011, p. 16). Therefore, listening to students’ perspectives can provide insight about students’ needs as well as the forces that influence their schooling and educational decisions (Booth, 2011; Doda & Knowles, 2008). Parents can also shape students’ educational experiences (Hill et al., 2004; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Spera, Wentzel, & Matto, 2009). For example, parents’ aspirations for their children and involvement in their schooling can impact students’ achievement (Bronstein, Ginsburg, & Herrera, 2005; Hill et al., 2004; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Spera et al., 2009). Also, parents’ educational backgrounds have been linked to their children’s aspirations and opportunities in school (Auerbach, 2002; Choy et al., 2000; Hossler & Stage, 1992).

Because of the potential significance of students’ and parents’ contributions to understanding students’ educational aspirations, this study included students and at least one of their parents or guardians, in most cases. Data collected from semi-structured interviews with students and parents suggested that families played a significant role in shaping students’ educational pathways and decisions. While interviews with educators also contributed to an understanding of the educational experiences of Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin, the nature of the data collected from the educator interviews lacked depth about some of the main influencing forces (e.g., students’ legal status) on students’ intended educational pathways and decisions. Therefore, it was only through inclusion of the interviews with students and parents that a more thorough understanding was available about the experiences and forces that influence the educational aspirations of Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin.
Finally, this study is significant because of its focus on students’ middle school years as a time of educational planning for the future (Akos, Konold, & Niles, 2004; Arrington, 2000). Cabrera and La Nasa (2001) maintained that, “Planning for college begins as early as the eighth grade, and by the ninth grade most students have already developed occupational and educational aspirations” (p. 123). Choy (2001) also emphasized how the educational plans of many students become solidified during grades 8 through 10, arguing that the time to provide support for students’ developing aspirations should begin prior to this time period. While this may be true, student’s high school years often receive the most emphasis when it comes to postsecondary educational planning and career exploration, with less attention being placed on college and career preparation during the middle school years (Akos et al., 2004).

This research offers valuable insight on students’ and parents’ perspectives about the importance of educational planning at the middle school level. It also highlights how students’ aspirations during this developmental period are connected to postsecondary goals and plans, suggesting that this is a critical time to nurture students’ developing goals. Additionally, little, if anything, has been written regarding the educational aspirations of Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin during their middle school years. Therefore, this study not only contributes to literature about the middle school period, but provides information about a population of students for whom less is known.

Because of limited research on the Brazilian student population during their middle school years, this study has the potential to inform educational practice, policy,
and future research. It is hoped that this study will provide motivation for future research concerning the educational experiences of Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin. In addition, the desire is for this research to provide an incentive for educational practitioners and policymakers to examine ways to improve educational opportunities for these students.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study integrates the theoretical concepts of social and economic capital in order to examine the educational aspirations and postsecondary pursuits of Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin. Both social and economic capital have been shown to affect students’ educational experiences and opportunities (Aronson, 2008; Berliner, 2006; Gonzales, 2010; Sandefur, Meier, & Campbell, 2006).

One of the defining characteristics of social capital is the role of relationships and connections in providing access to resources and opportunities (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1990; Portes, 1998). For example, Granovetter (1973, 1983) examined the strength of people’s relationships to see how this affected their resources and opportunities. He found that people’s weaker ties, such as their more distant associates, provide more connections to resources (Granovetter, 1983). On the contrary, individuals’ stronger ties are more inclined to be of assistance (Granovetter, 1983). Trust is also an essential element of social capital (Fukuyama, 2001). Fukuyama (2001) maintained that as people’s “radius of trust” expands, so does their access to resources (p. 8). Fukuyama suggested that the radius of trust for Latin American families may be smaller because of stronger ties to family and close friends.
The concept of economic capital also informed this study. Research has connected families’ socioeconomic status to students’ educational opportunities and experiences (Berzin, 2010; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; St. John, 2006). Aronson (2008) argued that students’ social class is like a funnel that affects the course of their schooling, with circumstances such as poverty filtering students away from educational opportunities. Consideration has also been given to funding for education, suggesting that schools with poorer demographics spend less money and have fewer resources (Lee & Wong, 2004). Some people have contended that reduced funding and fewer resources negatively affect student achievement (Hedges & Greenwald, 1996).

The concepts of social and economic capital were used to interpret findings from this study. The theory of social capital provided an enhanced view of the ways that students’ and parents’ relationships affected families’ access to educational opportunities and resources in relation to students’ aspirations. Educational capital offered a useful model for considering the impact of families’ financial means on students’ ambitions, particularly as this related to students’ college goals.

**Summary of Methodology**

This research was designed to be qualitative and exploratory in nature because it investigated a population of students and a topic that is underrepresented in the literature (Patton, 2002). One of the main objectives of this study was to better understand the perspectives of students and parents concerning students’ educational aspirations and the experiences and forces which affect their educational plans. A qualitative
methodological approach facilitated this goal, thus yielding conclusions that provided a deeper understanding of students’ educational journeys (Patton, 2002).

This study utilized mixed purposeful sampling to select students, parents, and educators as participants (Patton, 2002). Students who took part in this study were Brazilian and of Brazilian origin and were in the eighth grade at Clarkston Middle School, an urban middle school located in the Northeast. The rationale for selecting students during their eighth grade year was founded upon the argument that postsecondary planning should begin prior to high school (Akos et al., 2004; Arrington, 2000; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Radcliffe & Stephens, 2008). Because families can also affect students’ educational goals and aspirations (Choy, 2001; Choy et al., 2000; Horn & Chen, 1998; Perna & Titus, 2005), the focus of this study was extended to students’ parents. The majority of students who participated in this study were represented by one or more of their parents, and in the case of one student, their guardian. The inclusion of students’ parents and guardian provided insight about different ways in which families’ experiences and beliefs shape students’ educational ambitions. Additionally, educators’ perspectives were also included because of their work with students who are Brazilian and of Brazilian origin.

Data collection primarily included semi-structured interviews with students, parents, a guardian, and educators (Seidman, 2006). This data were triangulated with student and parent demographic information as well as with other relevant documents (e.g., students’ transcripts, attendance records, and information from the schools; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Data was coded and analyzed using a constant
comparative method, thus leading to several main conclusions for this study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). It is hoped that the outcomes of this research will contribute to an enhanced understanding of the educational aspirations of Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin and the experiences and forces which shape their ambitions.

**Limitations**

While offering valuable insights regarding the educational aspirations of Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin, there are also several limitations of this study which need to be acknowledged. Primary limitations relate to sampling as well as the undocumented legal status of some of the participants.

The objective of qualitative research is to provide insight on a topic in greater detail and not to generalize findings to the population as a whole (Merriam, 2009). Even though the purpose of this research was not to apply the conclusions to all Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin within the United States, it is still worth recognizing the small sample size and single research site included in this study. Findings of this study offer knowledge about the educational experiences of Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin in one middle school in the Northeast. Therefore, this study should be viewed as a building block for future work rather than an all-encompassing explanation regarding the educational aspirations of all Brazilian students. This is especially relevant because there was limited available research about Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin within the United States to inform this study’s design as well as with which to compare the conclusions this research.
Another limitation of this study concerns the recruitment of participants. The initial plan was to gather a maximally varied sample of students which represented the diversity of the eighth grade Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin at Clarkston (Patton, 2002). Therefore, based upon a predetermined set of criteria, only a select group of students and their parents from the entire eighth grade Brazilian student population was invited to participate. However, this attempt yielded few student and parent volunteers. Because of this initially low response rate, sampling procedures were modified, and criterion sampling was used in place of maximum variation sampling (Patton, 2002). The invitation to participate in this study was then extended to all eighth grade Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin at the middle school with the exception of students in a separate academic program due to significant disabilities. These changes in sampling methods resulted in a sufficient number of student and parent participants to reach data saturation (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). It is difficult to determine the degree of impact that these modifications to sampling had on this study’s findings. It may be argued that this detracted from the representative nature of the study’s results to the eighth grade Brazilian population of students at the middle school. However, according to the school’s social worker, students who volunteered to participate were diverse in background and experience. Ultimately, the effects of these sampling changes are unknown on the outcomes of this study.

There were also sampling limitations associated with the recruitment of teachers who taught English as a second language (ESL) at Clarkston. Since many of the students in this study had participated in ESL classes at one point in their schooling, each of the
Portuguese-speaking ESL teachers who worked with eighth grade Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin was invited to participate in this study. However, none of them chose to take part. In addition, one of the teachers on the ESL team who did not speak Portuguese was invited to participate in this research and accepted the offer. Because involvement was voluntary, teachers’ decisions not to participate were respected. Educators in the mainstream program as well as the one ESL teacher who took part shared information about ESL team of teachers’ work with students who were English language learners (ELL) and their parents. While this input provided insight about the resources and supports provided by the ESL teachers for students and parents, the limited participation by teachers from the ESL team likely excluded relevant data related to Clarkston’s efforts in working with Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin at the school.

One of the greatest sources of limitations for this study was the undocumented legal status of some families. For example, families’ undocumented legal status was a possible cause for some parents’ and students’ choices not to participate. One of the parents and a Brazilian educator cautioned me that some Brazilian families might be hesitant to participate in this study or might decide not to take part because of their undocumented legal status. It is difficult to determine to what extent, if any, that families’ undocumented legal status prevented them from being in this research. However, there is the possibility that the population of Brazilian families who were invited to participate was “invisible” and may have been difficult to access for research
purposes (Margolis, 1998, 2008; Martes, 2011). It is unclear how the participation from families who chose not to take part would have affected the conclusions of this study.

An additional limitation related to families’ undocumented legal status concerned the design of the interview protocols for students and parents. Per the district’s request and according to arrangements with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Boston College, direct questions asking participants to reveal their legal status were not included in the interview protocols. While such questions were not asked, most participants shared freely and without prompting information about how legal status impacted their families’ lives and children’s educational decisions. This presented a potential limitation for this study. Because the effects of legal status on students’ educational decisions was a significant finding to this study, the dearth of questions related to legal status in the interview protocols prevented an in-depth exploration of how this aspect of families’ lives influences students’ intended educational pathways.

**Position of the Researcher**

My first substantial interactions with Brazilians began when I moved to Brazil for a little over a year. I arrived in Brazil with limited ability to speak Portuguese, having only a 2-month language training program as preparation. I recall my first few months in Brazil residing with a Brazilian woman who could not communicate in English, and I could hardly speak Portuguese; needless to say, we understood very little of each other during those beginning weeks. I desired to interact with the Brazilian people, and was, therefore, determined to learn the language. I practiced speaking with anyone I could, no matter how unintelligible I sounded. As time passed, I became fluent in Portuguese. I
also developed a love for the Brazilian people and their culture. It was difficult to leave Brazil, a place that I had learned to cherish.

I later moved to the Northeast where I worked in a school with a high concentration of students who were Brazilian and of Brazilian origin. My work also extended to Brazilian families within the community through my service as a regional leader of a religious children’s organization. As I interacted with students and families who were Brazilian or of Brazilian origin within the context of the United States, I observed how many of them had unequal access to opportunities (e.g., educational and employment) and resources. For example, I watched families struggle with decisions concerning students’ postsecondary plans because of limitations associated with their legal status, therefore, causing students and parents to question the reality of college because they were undocumented.

Over time, my experiences with Brazilian families led me to question what changes were needed in the United States’ educational system to provide greater equality and access to opportunities and resources for students and their families. I also wondered what could be done to raise awareness for educators, policymakers, and researchers concerning the needs of students and families who are Brazilian and of Brazilian origin regarding their education. With these questions in mind, I embarked upon this research study in an attempt to find answers that could lead to improvements in educational equality and opportunity for Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin within the United States.
Definition of Terms

Several terms which are used throughout this dissertation necessitate an explanation regarding their meaning in this study. While there may be multiple ways to interpret some of the terms listed below, the purpose of this section is to provide the meanings used in this research. The definitions of these terms were developed by me based upon this study’s focus.

1. **Aspirations and Ambitions**: Aspirations and ambitions denote students’ desires, goals, and plans, particularly in relation to postsecondary education and future careers.

2. **Brazilian or of Brazilian Origin**: For the purposes of this research, individuals who were born in Brazil are referred to as Brazilian. Those people who were born in the United States to Brazilian parents are considered to be of Brazilian origin.

3. **College**: One of the purposes of this research was to examine whether students wanted to attend college. Therefore, in the context of students’ proposed educational pathways, college refers to any institution of higher education including community colleges, 2-year colleges, 4-year colleges, and universities.

4. **Postsecondary Goals and Plans**: Postsecondary goals and plans refer to students’ intents related to higher education, careers, and in some cases employment following graduation from high school.

5. **Undocumented**: The term undocumented refers to individuals who do not have legal status within the United States.
Overview

The first chapter of this dissertation painted a brief overview of this study. It included background information about the nature of the problem driving this study as well as the purpose and significance of this research. Additionally, it addressed the theoretical framework applied to this study, provided a summary of the methodology, and commented on limitations of this research. Finally, the position of the researcher was discussed as this relates to the research topic, and several terms were defined which are used throughout this dissertation.

The remaining four chapters provide details of this research in greater depth. Chapter 2 reviews literature related to this dissertation topic in the following three areas: (a) Brazilians in the United States and the Northeast, (b) early adolescence and schooling, and (c) social and economic capital, which are used as the theoretical framework of this study. Chapter 3 outlines the research design and methodology for this study. This chapter includes specific information about the research questions, applicability of qualitative research to this study, and methods used for sampling, data collection, and data analysis. It also reviews ethical precautions taken to protect human participants. Chapter 4 presents detailed findings from this study. Results of this research were derived from the analysis of semi-structured interviews with students, parents, and educators as well as from relevant documents. Finally, chapter 5 provides an overall summary of this study. It also discusses conclusions from this research and addresses implications for educational practice, educational policy, and future research.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

As the focus of this study is on students who are Brazilian or of Brazilian origin, this literature review begins by providing a general overview of the Brazilian immigrant population in the United States and the Northeast. Literature regarding the Brazilian population was extracted from several fields of study, with a significant number of resources being based upon research from Massachusetts because of the high number of Brazilian immigrants residing within that state. In conducting a review of literature about the Brazilian population, it was discovered that there was a dearth of information available about the educational experiences of Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin, especially during their middle school years. Therefore, this literature review presents an overview of some of the available research related to the Brazilian population, with the understanding that there are gaps in the depth and breadth of the included topics.

This review also discusses early adolescence and schooling. Students’ experiences during their middle school years can have long-term implications for their prospective educational opportunities and careers (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Shapka, Domene, & Keating, 2006). Therefore, an examination of literature considering students’ early adolescent years provides insight regarding the forces and experiences that affect students’ educational pathways during high school and beyond. Little information was available on the topic of early adolescence and educational opportunities for Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin. Because of this, this section of the literature
review draws upon other sources that are specific to the middle school years for other populations of students. Attempts are not made to generalize this research to the Brazilian student population because of distinct differences between racial and ethnic groups. With this caveat in mind, the inclusion of literature related to other populations of students is intended to provide a general framework for understanding the significance of the early adolescent years on students’ prospective educational pathways. Further research is needed to comprehend how this literature specifically relates to Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin.

Finally, this literature review concludes with explanations of social and economic capital. The concepts of social and economic capital were used as the theoretical framework for this dissertation. These theories provided a foundation for examining the resources and supports that were, or were not, available to Brazilian families in relation to students’ educational aspirations. Additionally, the framework of social capital offered insight regarding students’ and parents’ access to opportunities and knowledge concerning students’ schooling.

**Brazilians in the United States and the Northeast**

There are a number of Brazilian immigrants and people of Brazilian origin living within the United States, especially in certain regions of the country (Bergad, 2010; S. Siqueira, 2008). This section provides a basic overview of the Brazilian people with particular emphasis on their experiences within the context of the United States. It begins with consideration of the magnitude of the Brazilian population within the country.
Discussions are also included about the education and employment of Brazilians, the role of relationships and networks as immigrants, and issues surrounding language.

The first substantial Brazilian emigration to other countries began in the 1960s and rose significantly in the 1980s due to increased economic challenges in Brazil and declining social mobility for the middle class (Beserra, 2003; Jouët-Pastrté & Braga, 2008; Margolis, 1998; Martes, 2011). The United States has been the top receiving country for Brazilian immigrants (Martes, 2011; S. Siqueira, 2008). Bergad (2010) indicated that in the year 2007, there was a total Brazilian population of 454,148 in the United States. Of this total population, 365,000 individuals were immigrants from Brazil, and 89,148 were born in the United States (Bergad, 2010). Bergad (2010) explained that between the years of 1990 and 2007, approximately 70% of Brazilian immigrants were 15 to 40 years old, or “within working ages” (p. 5). He further illustrated that “…about 57% of all Brazilian working-age females and 45% of males arriving in the U.S. after 1990 were married suggesting that ‘family’ migration was an important component among Brazilians coming to the U.S.” (Bergad, 2010, p. 5).

Brazilian immigrants in the United States tend to be from the middle and lower middle classes in Brazil (Beserra, 2003; Margolis, 1994, 1998; Martes, 2008). Many of them come to the United States with visions of staying temporarily; they plan to work for a period of time, save money, and then return to their homeland (Beserra, 2003; Margolis, 1998; S. Siqueira, 2008). While some have realized these goals, other people’s plans have changed (Margolis, 1994, 1998; S. Siqueira, 2008). Many end up never returning to Brazil (Beserra, 2003). Others find themselves living between the United States and
Brazil with no real sense of permanency, a pattern identified as yo-yo migration (Margolis, 1994, 1998; C. E. Siqueira & Jansen, 2008). Overall, Brazilians’ perceptions of the United States are positive (Martes, 2011).

Brazilians have manifested certain patterns in their selection of destination locations within the United States. According to the 2009-2011 American Community Survey, the states with the highest number of Brazilian immigrants are Florida, Massachusetts, New Jersey, California, and New York (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). These states are listed in order of those with the most number of Brazilian immigrants to the least.

In addition to immigration patterns, statistics have illustrated an increase in the number of Brazilian immigrants in the United States since the 1980s. Nevertheless, it is less clear how many Brazilians actually reside within the country (Margolis, 1994, 1998; Martes, 2011). Reports from different organizations have led to varying figures regarding the magnitude of the Brazilian population in the United States. For example, Martes (2011) pointed out that there were 94,023 individuals born in Brazil and living in the United States according to the 1990 United States Census. However, she also noted that unofficial data from the Catholic Church at the conclusion of the 1990s suggested that there were approximately 800,000 Brazilians dwelling in the United States (Martes, 2011). Therefore, Martes (2011) contended that these figures highlight potential discrepancies in the actual population size of Brazilians in the United States. Additional efforts to determine the Brazilian population in the United States have considered data from the Brazilian consulate, the number of visas issued, and other sources with little
consensus reached due to extreme variability in the results (Margolis, 1994). There seems to be agreement by many, however, that the United States Census reflects an undercount of the actual number of Brazilian immigrants in the country (Beserra, 2003; Lima & Siqueira, 2007; Margolis, 1994, 1998, 2008; Martes, 2000, 2011; C. E. Siqueira & de Lourenço, 2006; C. E. Siqueira & Jansen, 2008).

Reasons for this undercount and the difficulty in determining an accurate population size may be due to what some researchers identify as the “invisible minority,” a term used to portray the Brazilian population in the United States (Margolis, 1998; McDonnell & de Lourenço, 2008). For example, many Brazilian immigrants have undocumented legal status and, therefore, are underrepresented in population counts due to reasons such as fear of deportation if they participate (Braga & Jouët-Pastré, 2008; Margolis, 2008; Martes, 2011).

The undercount of Brazilian immigrants has also been attributed to their ethnic and racial identification in the United States (Margolis, 1998, 2008; C. E. Siqueira & de Lourenço, 2006; C. E. Siqueira & Jansen, 2008). Labels used in the United States for classifying individuals based upon race and ethnicity are incongruent with Brazilians’ ways of viewing themselves (Martes, 2011). In Brazil, racial identification tends to be determined by skin color ranging from light to dark and includes intermediate descriptions such as brown signifying multiracial backgrounds; on the contrary, an individual’s culture of origin is key to identification within the United States (Beserra, 2005; Martes, 2011). Racial discrimination against those who are Black or from African or indigenous heritages is common in Brazil, with Blacks more commonly representing
lower social classes (Beserra, 2005; C. E. Siqueira & de Lourenço, 2006). Therefore, many Brazilian immigrants who are from more affluent parts of Brazil identify their race as White rather than Black when supplying demographic information within the United States (Beserra, 2005; C. E. Siqueira & de Lourenço, 2006).

Another limitation posed by the classification system used in the United States is the categories used for ethnicity which include Latino, Latin American, and Hispanic (Martes, 2011; McDonnell & de Lourenço, 2008; Suárez-Orozco, 2008). Brazilians generally do not favor these terms, especially that of Hispanic, because they feel that the Spanish language and Hispanic culture do not accurately represent their identity (Martes, 2011; C. E. Siqueira & de Lourenço, 2006). Also, they view the categories of Latino and Latin American as problematic because these terms neglect important distinctions among individuals from various Latin American countries (Beserra, 2005). Ultimately, Brazilians would rather be known for their national identity as Brazilian (Beserra, 2005; C. E. Siqueira & de Lourenço, 2006). However, creating inclusive categories for Brazilians on census forms, school enrollment forms, and other demographic surveys has ultimately not been realized in the United States (C. E. Siqueira & de Lourenço, 2006; C. E. Siqueira & Jansen, 2008).

While it is evident that a number of Brazilians reside within the United States, the actual extent of the population size appears to be unknown (Margolis, 2008; C. E. Siqueira & Jansen, 2008). Because of this likely undercount of Brazilians, this dissertation proposes that there may be more Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin within the nation’s schools than are actually accounted for in the statistics.
Education

When considering the educational attainment of Brazilians living within the United States, statistics from 5-year estimates from the 2006-2010 American Community Survey showed that 32.4% of the population over the age of 25 had graduated from high school or an equivalent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Additionally, of this same age group of people, 16.9% had attended some college with no degree, 5.1% had earned an associate’s degree, 20.4% a bachelor’s degree, and 9.6% a graduate or professional degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2013) indicated that in 2011, of Brazilians aged 25-64 who were living in Brazil

1. 57% had “attained below upper secondary education,”
2. 32% had “attained upper secondary education,” and
3. 12% had “attained tertiary education.” (p. 3)

There are some differences between students’ educational opportunities in Brazil as compared with Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin residing within the United States. Lowe et al. (n.d.) authored a handbook to help raise the awareness of a group of educators in Massachusetts regarding some of these distinctions between the two countries’ educational systems. They focused on the school system in Minas Gerais, a state from which many families emigrated from in Brazil. They described how students in Minas Gerais are required to enter school beginning at age 6 through at least the conclusion of fundamental school; however, efforts to enforce attendance are minimal. They also indicated that a number of students do not go to school because they are
employed. In Minas Gerais, those who continue on to high school have the option of pursuing either college preparatory or vocational paths (Lowe et al., n.d.). Students who desire to go to either a technical or vocational school must pass a selective exam due to a limited number of vacancies in these programs (Lowe et al., n.d.). Likewise, those desiring to attend college or a university must pass the Vestibular, an exam which is extremely competitive and restrictive in the number of individuals who can take it (Lowe et al., n.d.).

A motivating reason for some Brazilians to immigrate to the United States is the chance for increased educational opportunities for themselves and their children (C. E. Siqueira & de Lourenço, 2006). Some perceive education and learning English as preparation for their children to enter the workforce following high school (Margolis, 2008; Sales & Loureiro, 2008). Others desire to pursue higher education (Margolis, 2008). However, the college aspirations of some students are hindered because of constraints associated with their undocumented legal status such as high tuition rates and ineligibility for financial aid (Margolis, 2008).

Both parents’ and students’ availability to attend to school-related matters may be limited (Lowe et al., n.d.; Sales & Loureiro, 2008). Although most parents desire academic success for their children, restrictions, such as rigorous work schedules, can minimize their involvement in their children’s schooling (Lowe et al., n.d.). Likewise, some students’ time to complete schoolwork may be restricted because of the need to work to help support their family or by their choice to have a job to earn spending money for themselves (Sales & Loureiro, 2008).
Lowe et al. (n.d.) advised educators to reach out to parents and include them in school activities because many parents want to be involved in their son’s or daughter’s education. They explained that class sizes are generally large in schools in Minas Gerais. Consequently, teachers are less likely to invite parents to school unless there is a problem, there is an occasional class meeting with all parents, or parents request a conference. Because of minimal outreach from schools in Brazil, parents may not have had as many opportunities to be involved. However, Lowe et al. (n.d.) emphasized that, “Parents are willing to be educated about school and education when they feel safe and welcome” (p. 12). Therefore, Lowe et al. (n.d.) offered suggestions for involving Brazilian parents within schools which included scheduling meetings during evening hours, making babysitting available during school visits, encouraging students to invite their parents to school, asking parents to contribute to classroom events (e.g., bring food to classroom activities), and providing written and verbal contact in Portuguese.

While research about the education of Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin offers some insight regarding their schooling, caution should be used in generalizing this information to all Brazilians due to unique differences that exist among students and populations from various regions in Brazil (Lowe et al., n.d.). Because there is limited research about Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin in the United States, additional research is needed to gain an overall understanding of their educational experiences and to comprehend distinguishing characteristics that influence their schooling.
Employment

Approximately 70% of Brazilians within the United States are of working age (Bergad, 2010). Brazilians from larger cities (e.g., Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo) often have more education and professional experience as compared with those from smaller cities (e.g., Governador Valadares) where people are less likely to have completed education beyond high school (Margolis, 1998). In spite of the professional training and educational backgrounds of some Brazilian immigrants, many are limited in the types of jobs they are able to secure within the United States because of their undocumented legal status and English language abilities (Lowe et al., n.d.; Margolis, 1998).

Research on Brazilian immigrants in Massachusetts demonstrated that they typically work long hours and are commonly employed in low-wage jobs in the service sector, are self-employed, or engage in small-scale entrepreneurial pursuits (Martes, 2011; C. E. Siqueira & de Lourenço, 2006). Lima and Siqueira (2007) noted that that 43% of Brazilians in Massachusetts are employed in the service industry, 15% in sales and administration, 14% in construction, 13% in managerial and professional positions, and 11% in production. High turnover tends to exist in the types of jobs held by Brazilian immigrants, with many desiring self-employment or to become small-scale entrepreneurs (Martes, 2011). Lima and Siqueira (2007) indicated that 15% of Brazilian immigrants are self-employed in Massachusetts which, according to Martes (2011), “becoming self-employed or having their own businesses represents the highest aspiration of social mobility for the first generation of immigrants who have little cultural capital” (p. 128). While the jobs possessed by many immigrants are of lower status as
compared with previous positions they may have had in Brazil, many Brazilians view their employment in the United States as a temporary means for achieving more long-term goals of saving money and returning to Brazil (Margolis, 1994).

**Relationships and Networks**

Brazilian networks often have an integral role in the immigration of Brazilians to the United States (Beserra, 2003). For example, many Brazilians depend on relationships with friends, family, and members of the community for assistance with their transition to a new country (Beserra, 2003; Braga & Jouët-Pastré, 2008; Margolis, 1994; Martes, 2011; C. E. Siqueira & de Lourenço, 2006). The assistance of networks was seen in Margolis’ (1994) study of Brazilian immigrants in New York. She found that many Brazilian immigrants lived with friends or relatives upon their arrival in the United States. Even individuals who did not know anyone in the United States prior to their immigration benefitted from the assistance of the Brazilian community when securing places of residence (Margolis, 1994). Religious organizations and Brazilian businesses have also contributed to a strengthened sense of community among the Brazilian population living in the United States (Martes, 2011).

A stronger sense of unity is sometimes more evident among smaller networks of Brazilians such family members, friends, and religious organizations (Martes, 2011). In Martes’ (2011) study of Brazilian immigrants in Boston, she found that distrust and competition were more prevalent as people’s networks broadened (Martes, 2011). For example, Martes illustrated that some small business owners were more inclined to
employ family members because of a higher level of trust in them as compared to hiring individuals from the community (Martes, 2011).

Following the establishment of Brazilian immigrants in the United States, many individuals maintain close ties with friends and family members living in Brazil (Margolis, 1994, 1998; C. E. Siqueira & de Lourenço, 2006). A number of Brazilian immigrants send remittances to family members and friends in order to help sponsor trips to the United States or to provide financial support (Margolis, 1994; Martes, 2008).

**Language**

One of the adjustments facing Brazilian immigrants when they arrive in the United States is learning English. Children generally acquire English more quickly than their parents because of exposure to the English language at school (Mota, 2008). Sales and Loureiro (2008) argued that the amount of English used by Brazilians often varies by their immigrant generation. They contended that first-generation Brazilian immigrants rely mainly on Portuguese, learning just enough English to survive in their new surroundings. Second-generation immigrants tend to draw upon both Portuguese and English, speaking Portuguese largely at home and in the community, and English at school (Sales & Loureiro, 2008). Third-generation immigrants speak mainly English (Sales & Loureiro, 2008).

In a study of Brazilians in Massachusetts, Mota (2008) examined families’ intentions to stay in the United States as well as their perspectives on bilingualism. She found that no matter whether families intended to remain in the United States, return to Brazil, or were uncertain about their future plan, parents viewed bilingualism as a social
advantage with potential benefits for their children’s future. Notwithstanding, parents in the sample asserted that their children’s native language should also be maintained (Mota, 2008). Parents’ desires for their children to preserve their Portuguese language abilities are often frustrated as their children become more proficient in English at school and gradually shift to using more English (Mota, 2008). Parents may place less emphasis on learning English for themselves, rationalizing that their continued use of Portuguese will help their children retain their native language (Mota, 2008). Children may end up interpreting for their parents in social settings because of a greater ability to communicate in English, thus creating unique social and power differences between parents and their children (Mota, 2008).

Summary

There are a number of Brazilian immigrants residing within the United States, including children who have been born in this country since their parents’ immigration. This section of the literature review provided a brief overview of their educational experiences and employment opportunities. It also considered the role of relationships and networks in the Brazilian community. Finally, it looked at issues associated with learning English.

Early Adolescence and Schooling

This study examined the educational experiences of Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin during their eighth grade year of middle school. Therefore, students who participated in this study were in their early adolescent years. Because of the focus on this specific developmental stage of students’ lives, this dissertation includes
a review of literature related to adolescence and students’ schooling experiences during this time.

There is a dearth of literature on the educational experiences of Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin during this period in their lives. As a result, it was necessary to consult other sources about the adolescent period of schooling. While this establishes a basic foundation for this dissertation, caution should be used in generalizing the research included in this section to the Brazilian population of students.

The adolescent years are a time of development and growth where young people seek greater autonomy (de Bruyn, 2005). This process of maturation is characterized by rapid physical, cognitive, and psychological transformations and frequently reflects shifting dynamics among relationships with families, friends, and teachers (Cushman & Rogers, 2008; Hill & Tyson, 2009). These changes have the potential to directly impact academic success and engagement (Hill & Tyson, 2009).

In many cases, the transition to middle school introduces a complexity of factors for students as they adjust to a new environment and setting (Kingery, Erdley, & Marshall, 2011; Roeser, Eccles, & Freedman-Doan, 1999). Youth, during this time, may be “especially vulnerable to contextual influences” (Molloy, Gest, & Rulison, 2011, p. 31) such as finding themselves in larger schools with organizational differences, being confronted with additional expectations, and experiencing shifting roles (Roeser et al., 1999). Likewise, beginning high school also presents the need for students to adjust to new environments, expectations, and relationships (Barber & Olsen, 2004).
**Academic Achievement and Motivation**

The middle years can also be a time of exploration where youth try to figure out their commitment to education and their future goals (Beal & Crockett, 2010). Students’ degree of engagement in school has been shown to be correlated with their academic achievement and is influenced by forces both internal and external to schools (de Bruyn, 2005; Gonida, Voulala, & Kiosseoglou, 2009; Li, Lerner, & Lerner, 2010). It is not uncommon during the adolescent years to see a decline in engagement, performance, and commitment to school as students, for example, place precedence on peer relationships or exploratory forms of behavior in an attempt at self-discovery (Hill & Tyson, 2009). Adolescence, however, can also be a time of continued academic success and personal well-being for many (Roeser et al., 1999).

In a longitudinal study, Roeser et al. (1999) surveyed participants in the eighth grade after following them from elementary school, analyzing patterns of academic and emotional functioning over time. One of the research goals was to examine whether students’ academic performance, motivation, and emotional well-being in their middle school years were correlated with similar behavior in elementary school. Study results showed that some patterns of behavior and performance in middle school could be linked to students’ elementary years. For example, students who demonstrated positive motivation, achievement, and self-esteem during elementary school likely exhibited these same types of behavior in middle school and high school. Likewise, students who had low motivation, poor grades, and limited self-esteem in elementary school were apt to show similar behavior in their middle and high school years. Roeser et al. pointed out,
however, that there were some areas where different patterns in students’ behavior were manifest from the elementary through high school period. For example, the emotional health of some students improved over time. Therefore, while it is helpful to review the developmental trajectories of students, students’ present performance and needs should also be taken into account (Roeser et al., 1999).

The early educational experiences of adolescents can have far-reaching effects on their achievement and future careers (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Shapka et al., 2006). The middle years of schooling are a critical time where students begin making decisions and exploring options that lead to personal and career development (Akos et al., 2004). It is also a period when relationships and the opinions of others can significantly influence decisions and academic outcomes (Ireson & Hallam, 2009). Students’ academic self-concept may shift as they reassess their abilities and undergo motivational and developmental changes (Parker, 2010).

**Influencing Forces on Students’ Aspirations and Achievement**

The educational experiences and aspirations of middle school students “contribute to an emerging identity that develops during early adolescence” and motivates students’ future educational and career choices (Akos et al., 2004, p. 53). The main objective of this study was to examine the nature of the experiences and the forces that influence the educational aspirations of Brazilian middle school students and students of Brazilian origin in eighth grade. Particular attention was given to students’ ambitions related to high school, college, and their future careers.
There are a number of conditions which are presumed to shape adolescents’ educational aspirations and goals, although research lacks consistency regarding the nature and extent of these influences. These include gender (Blackhurst & Auger, 2008; Lys, 2009), race and ethnicity (Cooper, 2009; Kao & Tienda, 1998), parents’ education levels (Pettit, Tianyi, Dodge, & Bates, 2009; Spera et al., 2009), socioeconomic status (Kao & Tienda, 1998), family and school environments (Bronstein et al., 2005; Kaplan, Liu, & Kaplan, 2005), relationships with others including peers (Molloy et al., 2011), academic experiences and support (Shapka et al., 2006; Yun & Kurlaender, 2004), and personality-related elements (Creed, Tilbury, Buys, & Crawford, 2011). Because a discussion of each of these forces and how they potentially impact students’ aspirations would be lengthy, this section focuses on four main areas. They are the influence of parents, peers, teachers, and the curriculum.

**Parents.** Parental involvement and the educational ambitions parents have for their have been linked to student achievement (Bronstein et al., 2005; Hill et al., 2004; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Spera et al., 2009). Parents’ aspirations for their children can affect “children’s setting of academic goals, persistence in school, course enrollment, intellectual accomplishments, and attendance of college” (Spera et al., 2009, p. 1140). Gonida, Voulala, and Kiosseoglou (2009) found that students’ perceptions of their parents’ and the school’s expectations for them were correlated with students’ own achievement objectives and engagement in the classroom.

It has also been demonstrated that parents’ educational attainment levels can be connected with students’ educational opportunities and decisions (Auerbach, 2002; Choy
et al., 2000; Hossler & Stage, 1992). For example, enrollment in advanced courses leading toward college qualifications has been shown to be related on some level to parents’ educational attainment (Choy et al., 2000). Children whose parents have limited education are less likely to take college preparatory courses (Choy et al., 2000). In addition, parents’ educational backgrounds can influence students’ decisions to pursue higher education (Auerbach, 2002; Choy, 2001; Choy et al., 2000; Hossler & Stage, 1992). Students whose parents have college experience tend to demonstrate an added likelihood of going to college themselves (Choy, 2001; Choy et al., 2000; Hossler & Stage, 1992). Hossler and Stage (1992) argued that parents’ educational levels have a greater impact on college decision making as compared to other factors such as socioeconomic status and student ability. Parents often view educational opportunities for their children through the lens of their own experiences (Auerbach, 2002). Therefore, parents with a college education tend to display higher expectations for their children and are more aware of college requirements (Cunningham, Erisman, & Looney, 2007).

**Peers.** Peer relationships can also affect students’ educational ambitions and achievement (Horn & Chen, 1998; LeCroy & Krysik, 2008; Witkow & Fuligni, 2010). The transition to middle school often introduces new social expectations, increases peer involvement, and reflects changing friendships (Fuller-Rowell & Doan, 2010; Véronneau & Dishion, 2011). The nature of social relationships during the middle school years can also be impacted by developmental changes such as physical and psychological growth and the maturation of students’ cognitive competencies (Cushman & Rogers, 2008). During this period of rapid change, middle school students may find themselves
confronted with “competing expectations” from their peers and teachers (Cushman & Rogers, 2008, p. 16). For immigrant youth, social awkwardness may be intensified due to discrimination by peers and adjusting to a new country, among other things (Fuller-Rowell & Doan, 2010; Valencia & Johnson, 2006).

The values and behavior of youth often reflect that of their friends (Witkow & Fuligni, 2010). Ireson and Hallam (2009) contended that students’ “academic self-concept is formed through processes of social comparison” (p. 202). Friends can have a compelling influence on students’ self-concepts and academic achievement, with peers who demonstrate a greater commitment to their education having a more profound effect on the positive academic achievement and motivation of their friends (LeCroy & Krysik, 2008).

Peers can also influence students’ decisions about postsecondary education (Horn & Chen, 1998; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler & Stage, 1992). Horn and Chen’s (1998) research illustrated that students with friends who were planning on college had the most significant impact on their own decisions to apply to 4-year institutions of higher education. They explained that students with college-bound friends were four times as likely to apply for college, and their chances of enrollment doubled.

**Teachers.** Teachers also have a role in inspiring student achievement and engagement (Li et al., 2010; Marchand & Skinner, 2007). Students who enjoy school are more likely to demonstrate higher academic achievement and to have fewer behavioral problems (Hallinan, 2008). Students’ perceptions of school are more positive when they receive support from their teachers (Li et al., 2010). Marchand and Skinner (2007)
investigated the effects of teachers’ motivational support on students’ help-seeking and concealment behaviors. They found that students’ behavior changed in relation to the degree and type of support that teachers offered to their students. Students who felt a greater sense of assistance from their teachers were more engaged in the classroom, were more inclined to ask for help, and exhibited stronger feelings of competence (Marchand & Skinner, 2007).

Teachers can also influence students’ decisions about college (Venezia & Kirst, 2005). In a national study of the standards of high school exit policies and college entrance requirements, Venezia and Kirst (2005) found that teachers, even more than counselors in some instances, provided valuable assistance to students concerning college preparation. However, the scope of teachers’ assistance was limited because they were not necessarily connected with institutions of higher education and, therefore, they were not current on admission requirements and other related matters. In addition, teachers who taught advanced and college preparatory courses were more inclined to offer assistance to students regarding the college process than teachers who instructed lower level courses (Venezia & Kirst, 2005). Teachers’ qualifications to teach have also been shown to influence students’ educational pathways in a more indirect way (Huber et al., 2006). For example, Huber et al. (2006) contended that teachers should be trained in college counseling which would help promote a school culture reflecting high educational attainment.

Curriculum. The courses that students’ take in middle school can also affect their academic opportunities in high school and beyond (Ballón, 2008; Ma, 2005; Moller,
Stearns, Potochnick, & Southworth, 2011; Spielhagen, 2006). For example, students’ middle school course selection can affect whether they pursue a college preparatory curriculum in high school, thus potentially influencing their options for enrollment in institutions of higher education and postsecondary training (Espenshade, Hale, & Chung, 2005; Moller et al., 2011; Spielhagen, 2006).

In a study by Cabrera and La Nasa (2001), they found that students’ application to college rose in correlation with their attainment of college qualifications during middle and high school. Opportunities for obtaining college qualifications are enhanced when a rigorous curriculum is present (Adelman, 2006; Choy et al., 2000; Huber et al., 2006). Some research has specifically focused on the mathematics portion of curriculums, emphasizing a relationship between college enrollment and students’ participation in advanced mathematics courses (Adelman, 2006; Choy et al., 2000). In some schools with greater ethnic and racial diversity, the curriculum has been shown to be less demanding, with fewer AP courses and educational opportunities being offered which provide the necessary qualifications for college (Huber et al., 2006; Yun & Moreno, 2006).

Particularly relevant to the significance of entering a college preparatory path in high school is the issue of tracking, or the “sorting and grouping of students in schools” largely according to ability (Rubin & Noguera, 2004, p. 92). Moller et al. (2011) argued that the categorizing of students begins in elementary school as students are grouped by ability. They explained the effects of this tracking:
These ability groupings then magnify achievement differentials among students and place them on achievement trajectories in middle and high school because higher ability groups are offered a more rigorous curricula and more highly qualified teachers that enhance achievement test scores. (p. 659)

Other researchers have focused on tracking during the middle school years and the ramifications that this has on opportunities in high school and postsecondary pursuits (Ma, 2005; Moller et al., 2011; Schiller & Muller, 2003; Southworth & Mickelson, 2007; Spielhagen, 2006). For example, studies have shown that students who take algebra in the eighth grade are more likely to be in college preparatory and honors mathematics and science classes in high school (Ballón, 2008; Spielhagen, 2006). Due to the sequential nature of mathematics courses, taking advanced mathematics in middle school and high school can thus have repercussions on postsecondary educational opportunities and training (Schiller & Muller, 2003). The completion of advanced courses in middle school and high school has also been shown to be correlated with an increase in college attendance rates, college selectivity, and college graduation rates (Moller et al., 2011; Southworth & Mickelson, 2007; Spielhagen, 2006).

There is often a disproportionate distribution of students who are ethnically and racially diverse as well as those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds in lower academic tracks (Friend & Degen, 2007; Lopez, 2001; Ndura, Robinson, & Ochs, 2003; Rubin, 2006). For example, Ndura et al. (2003) examined high school students’ cultural backgrounds in relation to taking Advanced Placement (AP) courses. They discovered a relationship between family income and racial and ethnic backgrounds with enrollment in
AP courses, and concluded that minority students and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were inadequately represented in advanced programs and courses.

Likewise, Lopez (2001) indicated that Latino students are underrepresented in college preparatory mathematics courses in high school, thus diminishing their postsecondary opportunities in science, mathematics, and technology.

In spite of measures taken to move away from tracking, this practice persists in many of the nation’s schools (Oakes, 2005; Rubin, 2006; Schiller & Muller, 2003). Students continue to be grouped by ability based upon standardized testing, prerequisite courses, and counselor and teacher recommendations among other things (Oakes, 2005). Problems with tracking may be evidenced in aspects such as the fairness of standardized tests; the influence of factors related to race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status on academic placement decisions; and the limited attention sometimes given to students’ and parents’ perspectives (Oakes, 2005). In addition, the often present confinement between tracks makes it uncommon for students in lower level classes to move into a more advanced path (Rubin & Noguera, 2004). Therefore, issues of educational opportunity are augmented by the tracking dilemma as students’ pathways are limited in movement to higher courses of achievement due to previous educational experiences and disadvantageous circumstances.

**Career Exploration and Postsecondary Educational Planning During Early Adolescence**

When considering students’ educational aspirations, early attention to career exploration and college awareness can help students develop their interests and plan for
the future (Akos et al., 2004; Arrington, 2000; Legum & Hoare, 2004). However, the focus on postsecondary planning and career exploration is often targeted at students’ high school years, even though research has shown that students begin thinking about college and careers as early as elementary and middle school (Akos et al., 2004).

Some researchers have argued that planning for postsecondary education and careers should begin well before high school (Akos et al., 2004; Arrington, 2000; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Radcliffe & Stephens, 2008), with others even indicating that this preparation should start in elementary school (Legum & Hoare, 2004). Akos et al. (2004) explained that during students’ middle school years, it is likely that students will still exhibit uncertainty regarding their postsecondary plans. However, they contended that middle school should be a time for students to explore possibilities and to develop their identities. Akos et al. remarked:

> Although it is developmentally appropriate to be undecided about career aspirations, middle school students should be engaged in the career exploration process by developing a beginning understanding of how their crystallizing identity relates to future career options….Consequently, middle school students who are undecided but engaged in the career development process by learning more about themselves in relation to career options are moving in a direction that is developmentally appropriate. (p. 54)

Wheelock and Dorman (1988) echoed this idea, indicating that, “Counseling in middle grades works best when it starts with an understanding that young adolescents are
experiencing rapid cognitive, physical, and social-emotional changes and are engaged in the daily task of forming a firm self-identify” (p. 26).

According to Beal and Crockett (2010), “Adolescents’ thoughts about their future selves are important because they presumably influence choices, decisions, and activities, which in turn affect subsequent accomplishments” (p. 258). Because of the potential effects of students’ academic achievement and decisions during their middle school years on future opportunities and goals, it is important to provide guidance that will help students build their aspirations and find meaning in their interests (Arrington, 2000). According to Arrington (2000), “Waiting until high school to explore different careers is too late” (p. 106).

**Student Voice and Involvement**

One way of supporting adolescents’ rapid development is to take time to listen to them and to involve them in the school setting (Beane, 2006; Booth, 2011; Doda & Knowles, 2008). This, in turn, raises educators’ awareness of students’ needs and helps students to feel a part of schools (Beane, 2006; Booth, 2011; Doda & Knowles, 2008; Prosser, McCallum, Milroy, Comber, & Nixon, 2008; Whitlock, 2006).

Doda and Knowles (2008) argued that schools need to take time to listen to their students. In an attempt to better understand students’ needs in middle school, Doda and Knowles collected free write responses from approximately 2,700 students with their views on the following question: “What should middle school teachers know about middle school students” (p. 26). They categorized students’ responses and found that students, in general, were seeking meaningful relationships and quality learning
experiences. They wanted adults to listen to them and to respect their ideas and contributions. Doda and Knowles stated

Knowing what students regard to be important rests at the heart of their learning. Learning takes place only if and when a learner chooses to participate in that process…Moreover, learning demands more than participation. It assumes that students have made an emotional and psychological investment in the learning experience. We cannot expect to facilitate high levels of such investment when we fail to partner with young people in shaping what and how they learn. (p. 27)

They advocated for schools to “partner with the young people we serve” by prioritizing student voice (p. 31).

Booth’s (2011) research supported this idea of the importance of listening to students. Booth maintained that teachers need to comprehend the “sociocultural contexts of student lives and investigate how students create, apply, and act upon the meanings they construct” (p. 16). She further argued that, “Educators cannot make assumptions about what young adolescents think about their academic lives” (p. 16). Therefore, when working with early adolescents, being conscious of the cultural and social factors relevant to students’ lives as well as the developmental stages and changes associated with this age group is particularly useful in helping students to develop positive aspirations and achieve high academic success (Booth, 2011). Likewise, incorporating student feedback can lead to improvements in schools that support students’ needs and create a positive learning environment (Booth, 2011).
Beane (2006) framed student voice in terms of creating a democracy, where students have input into the happenings of their school. He asserted, “In a democracy, the principle of human dignity insists that people have a say in decisions that affect them and that their say counts for something” (p. 19). He applied this general concept of democracy and human dignity to the classroom stating that, “Probably no idea is more widely associated with democratic classrooms than the involvement of young people in making decisions about what and how things are done” (p. 19). While the curriculum may be heavily prescribed for teachers, Beane recommended surveying students’ opinions in areas where flexibility exists. For example, consideration of students’ feedback could be applied to the ways lessons are presented or the types of activities and projects required of students (Beane, 2006).

**Considerations of Culture, Race, and Ethnicity**

With growing diversity in the nation, educators likely find their classrooms reflecting a much more heterogeneous mix of students as compared to previous generations (Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney, 2009; Herrity & Glasman, 2010). For example, in reference to students whose second language is English, the National Center for Education Statistics (Aud et al., 2011) reported the following:

The number of school-age children (children ages 5-17) who spoke a language other than English at home rose from 4.7 to 11.2 million between 1980 and 2009, or from 10 to 21 percent of the population in this age range. (p. 30)

Because schools have become more diverse, there is an increased need to understand the backgrounds of students who comprise today’s schools (Hernandez et al., 2009; Herrity
& Glasman, 2010). This process of comprehending students’ distinct cultural backgrounds can begin through careful consideration of families’ reasons for coming to the United States (Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

Ogbu and Simons (1998) developed a cultural-ecological theory and classification system of minority students in order to provide insight regarding their performance in school. Under this classification system, they sorted minorities into three groups: (a) autonomous minorities, voluntary (immigrant) minorities, and (c) involuntary (nonimmigrant) minorities. They explained that, “…autonomous minorities are people who belong to groups that are small in number. They may be different in race, ethnicity, religion, or language from the dominant group” (p. 164, italics in original). They indicated that, “There are no nonwhite autonomous minorities in the United States” (p. 164). According to Ogbu and Simons, the groups that are applicable to people of color are voluntary and involuntary minorities. Voluntary, or immigrant minorities, are individuals who come to the United States by choice (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). They often immigrate to this country in search of improved circumstances and opportunities (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p. 164). On the other hand, “Involuntary [nonimmigrant] minorities are people who have been conquered, colonized, or enslaved” (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p. 165). Therefore, these individuals are compelled to migrate to a new country (Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

According to Ogbu and Simons (1998), knowing whether immigrant minorities voluntarily or involuntary come to the United States sheds light on students’ school performance. They argued that parents of voluntary immigrant minorities tend to have
high expectations for their children and want to support them in their educational endeavors. They may face barriers such as discrimination or unfair educational policies; however, this generally does not produce long-term challenges associated with school achievement (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Involuntary minorities, on the contrary, may hold mixed feelings associated with their educational experiences within the United States (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). While they may value education in theory, they may also feel conflicted when educational experiences do not produce desired economic benefits or when they view schools primarily as “white institutions” (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p. 178).

Ogbu and Simons (1998) maintained that minority students are frequently recognized for their race and ethnicity rather than for their beliefs and behaviors. Woolley (2009) asserted that the values of Latino students and their families help shape students’ performance within schools. He highlighted three important values of Latino families. These are a strong sense of connection to family, respect for familial and interpersonal relationships, and esteem for both formal and informal educational opportunities (Woolley, 2009). Woolley (2009) indicated that these values can be a source of social capital for families that can be enhanced as teachers and schools strive to establish positive relationships with students and families and incorporate these principles into educational practice.

As diversity continues to rise within the nation’s schools, teachers will need to be prepared to educate students from a broad variety of backgrounds (Goodwin, 2002; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Adolescence is a time of trying to understand one’s self-identity (Altschul, Oyserman, & Bybee, 2006). For ethnically and racially diverse
students, this developmental period may be complicated with varying feelings about how they fit in with the rest of the student population (Altschul et al., 2006). Educators and adults can help students with the challenges of adolescence through demonstrating high expectations and positive support (Woolley, 2009).

Summary

Most Brazilian families within the United States are voluntary minorities. Many Brazilians immigrated to this country in search of a better way of life because of the economic situation in Brazil (Jouët-Pastré & Braga, 2008; Lima & Siqueira, 2007; Margolis, 1998). While some research exists about the Brazilian population in general, limited information is available about the educational experiences of Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin, especially during their middle school years. This section of the literature review, therefore, provided a general outline of students’ early adolescent years, drawing on research regarding other populations of students. This part of the literature review provided a foundation for this study, but should not be generalized to the Brazilian population of students at large because of differences between groups of students.

Theoretical Framework

This dissertation draws upon the concepts of social and economic capital as a starting point for examining the nature of the experiences and the forces that influence the educational aspirations of Brazilian middle school students and students of Brazilian origin in eighth grade. There are varying theoretical perspectives regarding social and economic capital (Aronson, 2008; Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1990; Granovetter, 1983;
Hanushek, 2008; Hedges & Greenwald, 1996; Woolcock, 2001). Likewise, research has offered a range of views about the role and nature of these two types of capital in students’ schooling (Berliner, 2006; Broh & Ansel, 2010; Gonzales, 2010; Monkman et al., 2005; Pérez & McDonough, 2008). Because the literature is vast in scope and perspective concerning social and economic capital, this section attempts to narrow the focus by presenting some fundamental characteristics of these two principles.

**Social Capital**

One of the main purposes of this study was to examine how families’ experiences and capital influenced students’ educational aspirations. In addition, this research also analyzed the resources and supports that were, or were not, provided by the school and community in relation to students’ aspirations. Therefore, the concept of social capital provided a useful framework for this dissertation to investigate students’ and parents’ relationships with other people as a means for acquiring resources and knowledge to assist students in their educational journeys (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1990; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000).

Social capital is more deeply founded upon relationships and connections as compared to the actual knowledge a person possesses (Woolcock, 2001; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). Relationships and networks are central to building social capital, especially because of the resources and benefits that are tied to these associations (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1990; Lesser, 2000; Portes, 1998). Coleman (1990) described a “social interdependence” that occurs as people desire and access resources that are possessed by others (p. 300). With this interdependence of societal actors
engaging in “exchanges and unilateral transfers of control” to achieve their respective as well as collective interests and goals, social relationships and networks, which represent various existing power structures, are developed and can be perpetuated over time (Coleman, 1990, p. 300).

Researchers have studied the nature of people’s relationships to see how this influences social capital. For example, Granovetter (1973, 1983) examined the strength of relationships between a person’s close friends, or what he terms strong ties, as compared with their more distant acquaintances, or weak ties. According to Granovetter (1973, 1983), strong and weak ties serve different purposes. He said, “Weak ties provide people with access to information and resources beyond those available in their own social circle; but strong ties have greater motivation to be of assistance and are typically more easily available” (Granovetter, 1983, p. 209). While not all weak ties are beneficial, Granovetter (1973, 1983) asserted that they can serve a greater purpose than strong ties in helping bridge between different groups, thus opening up opportunities for individuals, networking possibilities, and social mobility, among other things. Burt (2005) expounded upon this idea looking at how social capital is increased through connections, or what he terms bridging, between groups of people. He indicated that structural holes can exist in groups making it possible for people to create connections between groups, thus expanding their social capital. According to Burt (2005), “A person whose network spans structural holes has contacts in multiple groups, and that contact across holes can be an advantage in terms of breadth of knowledge, early knowledge, and opportunities for strategically coordinating across groups” (p. 55). Therefore, social
capital is correlated with expanding beyond one’s immediate social network and level of comfort (Burt, 2005; Granovetter, 1973, 1983).

The concept of trust is also integral to the strength of relationships and the degree of social capital. Woolcock (2001) maintained that trust is a measure of social capital and is developed through relationships and associations. Fukuyama (2001) described his thoughts about the role of trust in relationships with other people. He stated, “All groups embodying social capital have a certain radius of trust, that is, the circle of people among whom co-operative norms are operative” (p. 8). He continued, “The final factor affecting a society’s supply of social capital concerns not the internal cohesiveness of groups, but rather the way in which these relate to outsiders” (p. 14). Therefore, according to Fukuyama, social capital is concerned with connections outside of one’s close associations with a larger radius of trust broadening access to resources. Particularly relevant to this study, Fukuyama contended that the radius of trust may be smaller for Latin Americans because of their close ties to family and friends, thus leaving their social capital largely embedded within these relationships. Leana (2011) discussed social capital and trust as it relates to an educational context. She claimed that social capital increases when there are higher levels of trust and more frequent interactions among teachers which, in turn, lead to increased levels of student achievement.

While social capital can be beneficial, it is not without its limitations (Woolcock, 2001; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). Woolcock (2001) indicated that “…social capital has costs as well as benefits, that social ties can be a liability as well as an asset” (p. 4). Woolcock and Narayan (2000) further argued, “Everyday language and life experience,
in short, teach that the social ties individuals have can be both a blessing and a blight, while those they do not have can deny them access to key resources (p. 226, italics in original). Therefore, Woolcock and Narayan (2000) claimed that social relationships and capital can help or hinder “economic development and poverty reduction” (p. 226).

**Economic Capital**

Economic considerations can also shape students’ educational aspirations and intended pathways, affecting areas such as students’ academic performance, opportunities for higher education, or the types of colleges that can they attend (Aronson, 2008; Berliner, 2006). One of the purposes of this dissertation was to examine whether, and how, families’ economic capital influenced the educational aspirations of Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin.

Students and families’ socioeconomic status has been shown to impact educational opportunities and experiences (Berzin, 2010; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; St. John, 2006). Berliner (2006) argued that poverty is a fundamental factor affecting students’ performance and opportunities for growth and is disproportionately representative of immigrant and minority students. Poverty, he claimed, is associated with decreased levels of student performance, limited development of natural talents, and rises in medical issues, all of which impact educational outcomes and experiences (Berliner, 2006).

Aronson (2008) likened the educational experience to a funnel, with class differences influencing students’ educational opportunities. Inequality can be manifest early on in a child’s education and can persist over the course of a student’s educational
career (Aronson, 2008). The educational system has various requirements (e.g., grades, attendance) that students must meet throughout their educational careers, with class differences impacting the ability of students and parents to respond to these demands (Aronson, 2008). Therefore, students who do not meet certain requirements are filtered away from greater educational opportunities (Aronson, 2008). For example, Aronson (2008) argued that characteristics such as students’ low-income status can decrease their opportunities for postsecondary education. Efforts to minimize economic constraints and focus on factors that are moldable, such as educating parents on college funding options and increasing the accessibility of information for students, can lessen the impact of this funneling effect (Berzin, 2010; Broh & Ansel, 2010).

Economic disparity is also manifested in the funding and resources of schools, districts, and even the quality and types of universities students attend (Gándara & Bial, 2001; Lee & Wong, 2004; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). According to Lee and Wong’s (2004) research, schools in poorer areas and with greater numbers of Hispanic and Black students, spend less and have fewer resources as opposed to schools located in affluent communities. Some people have contended that increasing financial resources will improve student achievement, such as illustrated in the program, Race to the Top (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Other people (Betts, 1996; Hanushek, 1996) have argued against tying financial resources to educational performance, claiming that while financial resources may contribute to increases in academic achievement, it is not the primary factor associated with success (Betts, 1996; Hanushek, 1996).
Educational effectiveness has been described by some researchers under the term, education production functions, where school performance is considered using a production model with various inputs into education being compared to the output of student achievement (Burtless, 1996b; Hanushek, 2008). Hanushek (2008) stated

The output of the educational process – the achievement of individual students – is directly related to inputs that both are directly controlled by policy makers (e.g., the characteristics of schools, teachers, curricula, and so forth) and are not so controlled such as families and friends and the innate endowments or learning capacities of the students. Further, while achievement may be measured at discrete points in time, the educational process is cumulative; inputs applied sometime in the past affect students’ current levels of achievement. (p. 3)

Inputs, according to this model, therefore, could include longstanding factors such as poverty, socioeconomic status, and family background as well as more transient factors such as changing political or educational agendas (Hanushek, 2008).

In a large-scale study commissioned by the United States Department of Education, Coleman and others (Coleman et al., 1966) investigated educational opportunity and equality within the United States. They analyzed survey data of over 600,000 students and teachers from approximately 4,000 public schools. Although their report sparked some controversy according to Hanushek (2008), it was influential in that it turned attention to the equality of outputs and student achievement in public schooling.

This idea of considering inputs as they correspond with the output of student achievement has been applied to research related to funding (Hanushek, 1996). In a
study considering data from a nearly 20-year period, Hanushek (1996) examined the association between students’ academic performance and spending patterns in order to determine whether student achievement was related to increases in financial resources. Data represented the years from the 1970s to 1990 and included performance results of 17-year-old students on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and spending data for instructional staff and pupils. Data revealed lower performance among Hispanic and Black students as compared to their White peers and the cumulative performance of all students. It also indicated relatively insignificant improvements in performance among all students over this 20-year period. However, significant increases in per-pupil spending were noted during the 1970s and 1980s even though enrollment numbers and pupil-to-teacher ratios decreased. Aggregated data supported the idea that significant increases in spending were not yielding comparable improvements in student achievement; therefore, Hanushek concluded that the relationship between financial resources and academic performance was not significant. He also argued that although school resources can at times yield positive effects on student achievement, sole reliance on financial means for increasing student performance may not guarantee desired results. Other researchers have also made similar claims that increased funding cannot be tied to direct improvements in student achievement (Burtless, 1996a; Lee & Wong, 2004).

Arguments have also been made which support the idea that school resources and academic achievement are positively correlated (Hedges & Greenwald, 1996). For example, Hedges and Greenwald (1996) posited that Hanushek’s (1996) findings assumed that all other variables associated with student achievement remained constant.
over the study’s duration. They argued that this was not possible, and that changes such as “a dramatic expansion in the level and comprehensiveness of education and a decline in the social capital available in families, which substitute for school resources…confound any simple relation between gross spending and gross achievement” (p. 75, italics in original).

While it may be difficult to siphon out the degree to which specific economic issues influence the educational output of student achievement, it is clear that financial matters cannot be removed from discussions of educational access and equality (Aronson, 2008; Berliner, 2006). Therefore, this dissertation drew upon the concept of economic capital to examine how economic aspects of students’ lives affected their educational plans during their middle school years.

Summary

The concepts of social and economic capital provided a useful framework for examining the forces that influence the educational aspirations of Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin. Social capital aided in understanding how students’ and parents’ relationships were, or were not, a means for accessing resources, knowledge, and opportunities related to students educational endeavors (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1990; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). Likewise, the concept of economic capital provided insight regarding the role of families’ financial assets on students’ educational ambitions, such as their goals for higher education (Aronson, 2008; Berliner, 2006).

Finally of note is the fungible nature of capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Burton-Jones & Spender, 2011; Coleman, 1988). Bourdieu (1986) suggested that certain types of capital
can be converted into other forms of capital. For example, he indicated that social capital can be converted into economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). However, according to both Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988), capital is only fungible under certain circumstances and conditions. Coleman (1988) contended, “A given form of social capital that is valuable in facilitating certain actions may be useless or even harmful for others” (p. S98).

Therefore, this study considered this principle of the transferability of capital to families’ situations as immigrants. Interview questions sought to understand differences between families’ experiences and opportunities in Brazil as compared with the United States. For example, consideration was given to parents’ previous occupations in Brazil and their employment in the United States. For many parents, their transition to the United States brought lower status jobs than what they had experienced in Brazil. Therefore, families’ immigration to the United States caused fluctuation in the types and degrees of capital which they possessed.

**Conclusion**

The literature presented in this chapter provided a foundation for this study. A general understanding of the characteristics, experiences, and needs of the Brazilian participants included in this study was gleaned from existing research on the Brazilian population within the United States. As there was limited research about the schooling of Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin during early adolescence, it was necessary to expand the focus of this part of the literature review to include other groups of students. This research on the early adolescent years offered direction regarding areas
to consider when examining the educational experiences of the students in this study. Finally, this literature review contained an overview of the theories of social and economic capital. These concepts were used as the theoretical framework that guided this study. This provided a frame of reference for analyzing the nature of the experiences and the forces that influenced the educational aspirations of the Brazilian middle school students and students of Brazilian origin who participated in this research.

The following chapter discusses the research design and methodology used for this study. It includes a review of the research questions as well as a more detailed explanation of qualitative inquiry which informed study. Methods used for sampling, data collection, and data analysis are also outlined. Finally, it concludes with a discussion of ethical precautions that were taken in order to protect participants.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research on students who are Brazilian or of Brazilian origin is extremely limited and even nonexistent in certain areas. One particularly understudied topic concerns the experiences and forces that influence the educational aspirations of Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin during their middle school years. Given the substantial representation of the Brazilian population of students in the Northeast and the United States (Martes, 2011; S. Siqueira, 2008; U.S. Census Bureau, 2011), the objective of this study was to address some of these gaps in the literature. The overarching goal was to consider ways that could increase educational opportunity and equality for students who are Brazilian and of Brazilian origin.

Because of the novelty of this dissertation topic in relation to this research population, this study was designed to be qualitative and exploratory in nature (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Patton, 2002). The research design and methodology which were used facilitated a more in-depth examination of the research questions guiding this study (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). This qualitative interview study included the views of students and parents in an attempt to offer insight regarding students’ educational needs and ambitions. It also integrated data from interviews with educators at the middle school as well as two high schools in the area, thus providing perspectives from teachers, counselors, a social worker, and the middle school principal about their work with Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin and their parents.
This chapter begins with a review of the research questions guiding this study. It then discusses the research methodology used, including procedures for sampling, data collection, and data analysis. It concludes with a discussion of precautions taken to protect participants and to promote an ethical investigation.

**Research Questions**

The fundamental goal of this study was to address the following research question and sub-questions:

*What is the nature of the experiences and the forces that influence the educational aspirations of Brazilian middle school students and students of Brazilian origin in eighth grade?*

1. What are the educational aspirations of Brazilian middle school students and students of Brazilian origin in eighth grade? Are these aspirations connected to postsecondary goals and plans? If so, how? If not, why?

2. How do the experiences, resources, and the forms and distribution of capital (i.e., social and economic) of students’ families influence students’ educational aspirations?

3. What resources and supports are, or are not, provided for students and parents by the school and community relating to students’ aspirations? Do the efforts of school and community adults align with students’ and parents’ needs and goals concerning students’ educational aspirations? If so, how? If not, why?
Research Methodology

This was a qualitative interview study which was designed to examine the following main research question: What is the nature of the experiences and forces that influence the educational aspirations of Brazilian middle school students and students of Brazilian origin in eighth grade. This study was primarily founded upon semi-structured interviews with students, parents, and educators and was supplemented with document analysis.

When reviewing relevant literature as a framework for this dissertation, there was limited information concerning the educational experiences of Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin. Because this dissertation addresses a population of students that is relatively unexamined in existing research, it was designed to be a qualitative, exploratory study. Qualitative inquiry is a particularly suitable research design for exploring topics where little is known (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Patton, 2002). Marshall and Rossman (1999) proposed that there are three purposes for exploratory studies. They are

1. To investigate little-understood phenomena;
2. To identify or discover important categories of meaning; and
3. To generate hypotheses for further research. (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 33)

Therefore, the aim of this research as an exploratory study was to investigate the educational experiences of Brazilian middle school students and students of Brazilian origin in greater detail. Specifically, this research sought to understand students’ and
parents’ perspectives about the experiences and forces which influence students’ educational aspirations and proposed pathways. This objective specifically aligned with the purpose of qualitative research. Qualitative research considers the interpretation and meaning placed by individuals on their experiences as well as the development of their worldview (Merriam, 2009). A qualitative approach is also intended to comprehend “real life” by focusing on “naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10). Specific meaning from this study was derived from its findings which highlighted several areas of need for Brazilian middle school students and students of Brazilian origin.

As this study was exploratory in nature, it only begins to lay the foundation stones for understanding the educational needs of the Brazilian population of students. The ultimate hope for this research is that it will ignite a drive for further inquiry concerning the educational experiences and opportunities of Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin.

**Sampling**

This study drew upon purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling allows researchers to study phenomena in greater depth, leading to “information-rich cases” or “those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (Patton, 2002, p. 46). This type of sampling is well-suited for qualitative research designs because it “is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight [regarding a certain research topic] and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 2009, p.
Since the educational experiences and postsecondary aspirations of middle school students who are Brazilian or of Brazilian origin is an under-researched area, this type of sampling approach was particularly relevant because it enabled me to specify boundaries to the case which had the greatest potential to address the research questions (Merriam, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

This study relied mainly upon two types of purposeful sampling. They were criterion sampling and snowball sampling (Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) explained that mixed purposeful sampling, or using a combination of sampling approaches, is useful for addressing different purposes and needs in research studies. Definitions of criterion sampling and snowball sampling are included in a following section about accessing the sample for this research. Likewise, an explanation is offered explaining the rationale for using mixed purposeful sampling in this study. Details of sampling procedures are outlined in the following subsections, with specific attention given to the research site, the sample size, characteristics of the participants, and issues related to accessing the sample.

**Research Site**

The main research site for this study was Clarkston Middle School. Clarkston is located in an urban area in the Northeast and serves students in grades 6 through 8 from a variety of backgrounds. The school was chosen because of its substantial population of Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin. In addition, one educator from Breyborn High School and another one from Saddle Hill Technical School were included because of their work with Clarkston’s eighth grade students in their transition to high
school. Breyborn and Saddle Hill were the two main schools in the area from which Clarkston’s students could choose to attend for high school.

Because the purpose of this research was to better understand the educational experiences of an under-studied population, additional participants and schools were not added to this study. Focusing on a primary research site facilitated a more in-depth examination of the experiences and forces that shaped the educational aspirations of the Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin who participated in this study (Patton, 2002).

Sample Size

A total of 37 people volunteered to participate in this study. The sample consisted of 13 students, 13 parents, 1 guardian, and 10 educators. A minimum sample size of 12 students was sought. This was based upon the rationale described in Guest, Bunce, and Johnson’s (2006) research, proposing that 12 participants are the least number of individuals needed to reach data saturation for qualitative studies. Guest et al. maintained that data saturation is achieved when there is a “solid understanding of a given phenomenon” (p. 77) and when “no new information or themes are observed in the data” (p. 59). They found that the majority of codes in the data analysis process for their study emerged from analysis of only 12 participants.

In this study, each of the students who chose to participate and obtained consent from their parents was permitted to take part, thus yielding 13 students in the total sample. Consideration was given to the necessity of adding additional student participants. However, analysis of the data from interviews with the 13 students, their
parents, and the one guardian reflected data saturation as outlined in the definition provided by Guest et al. (2006) which was previously referenced.

**Student Participants**

For students to be included in this research, they needed to be Brazilian or of Brazilian origin and in the eighth grade. There were 13 students who volunteered to be in this study. Table 3.1 below lists the student participants using pseudonyms in exchange for their given names. It also includes their gender and the length of time that they resided in the United States at the time of data collection.
Table 3.1

*Student Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Length of time in U.S.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andressa</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6-8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruno</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9-11 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fernanda</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Born in the U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilherme</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0-2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juliana</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3-5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larissa</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3-5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leonardo</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6-8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paulo</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0-2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priscila</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12-14 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thais</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Born in the U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thiago</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6-8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victor</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0-2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vinicius</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6-8 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Parent and Guardian Participants*

Literature has shown that familial interactions and experiences influence students’ educational aspirations (Auerbach, 2002; Choy, 2001; Choy et al., 2000; Glick & White, 2004; Horn & Chen, 1998; Hossler & Stage, 1992; Perna & Titus, 2005). Therefore, this study sought to include at least one of the parents or guardians of each of the student participants with the purpose of investigating the role that they had on students’ educational decisions and ambitions. A total of 13 parents, which included three couples,
and one guardian agreed to be in this study. These individuals represented 11 of the students. The parents of two students declined to participate. Information about the parent participants (i.e., parent’s relationship to the student, age, marital status, and length of time in the United States) is included in Table 3.2 below. Pseudonyms are used in place of parents’ actual names.
Table 3.2

*Parent and Guardian Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Parent/Guardian</th>
<th>Relationship to student</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital status</th>
<th>Length of time in U.S.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andressa</td>
<td>Viviane</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>6-8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruno</td>
<td>Cecilia</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>9-11 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ronaldo</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>9-11 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fernanda</td>
<td>Lorena</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>15-17 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilherme(^a)</td>
<td>Milena</td>
<td>Guardian</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juliana</td>
<td>Filipe</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>9-11 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larissa</td>
<td>Regina</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3-5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alef</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>12-14 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leonardo</td>
<td>Sergio</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>12-14 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paulo</td>
<td>Andréia</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>9-11 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priscila(^b)</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thais(^b)</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thiago</td>
<td>Aléxia</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>Living with another person</td>
<td>9-11 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victor</td>
<td>Éverton</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>12-14 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vinicius</td>
<td>Tatiane</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>6-8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robson</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td></td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>9-11 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) The demographic survey was not administered to the student's guardian due to the short duration of the student's stay with her.

\(^b\) The parent declined to participate.
**Educator Participants**

Interviews with educators from Clarkston, Breyborn, and Saddle Hill were also included in this study. Their participation added to an understanding of the educational experiences of eighth grade Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin. Educators who took part in this research study are listed in Table 3.3 below using pseudonyms. Their gender and roles at the school are also outlined in the table.
Table 3.3

*Educator Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educator</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Guidance Counselor Breyborn High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Social Worker Clarkston Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Teacher Clarkston Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabriel</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Principal Clarkston Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gretchen</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Guidance Counselor Clarkston Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Teacher Clarkston Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Teacher Clarkston Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelly</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Guidance Counselor Saddle Hill Technical School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susannah</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Guidance Counselor Clarkston Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tricia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Teacher Clarkston Middle School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Access to the Sample**

This study utilized mixed purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002). At the start of the study, the intention was to use maximum variation sampling to recruit families, and snowball sampling to select educators. However, due to a small response rate from the initial group of families who were identified using maximum variation sampling,
sampling methods were adjusted, and criterion sampling was used instead. There were no changes to sampling procedures for the educators.

The original study was designed to include a maximally varied sample of students from the eighth grade population of Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin at Clarkston. Patton (2002) indicated that a maximally varied sample is purposefully selected and represents the diversity of the research setting from which it is drawn. Patton argued that this approach is helpful, especially with small samples such as in this study. He stated

For small samples, a great deal of heterogeneity can be a problem because individual cases are so different from each other. The maximum variation sampling strategy turns that apparent weakness into a strength by applying the following logic: Any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared dimensions of a setting or phenomenon. (p. 235)

Therefore, it was hoped that a maximum variation sample of students would provide an understanding of the educational aspirations and postsecondary plans of a broad range of eighth grade students who were Brazilian or of Brazilian origin at the middle school and the patterns that existed among these students. The following criteria were predetermined to select this type of representative sample: student’s place of birth (e.g., Brazil, United States), student’s length of time in the United States, educational background of the student’s parents and/or guardians, student’s gender, student’s scores on the state English proficiency exam, student’s placement in the bilingual or mainstream
progam, and for students for whom it was applicable, their formerly limited English proficient (FLEP) status.

With the assistance of educators familiar with the population of Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin at Clarkston, an initial group of students was identified as potential participants according to the criteria previously outlined. These students were asked to attend a presentation where I provided an overview of the study and invited them to take part in this research. A letter (see Appendix F) was also issued to their parents and guardians explaining the nature of the study and asking for voluntary participation. The letter contained instructions for responding by phone, e-mail, or mail if families were interested in being in the study.

Only a few individuals from the first group of students with whom I met responded that they wanted to be in the study. As participation was voluntary, the small response rate necessitated modifying sampling procedures. Therefore, criterion sampling was used in place of maximum variation sampling to select students. Criterion sampling involves selecting a sample of participants who meet certain conditions (Patton, 2002). Patton indicated that, “The point of criterion sampling is to be sure to understand cases that are likely to be information rich because they may reveal major system weaknesses that become targets of opportunity for program or system improvement” (p. 238). As a result of sampling changes, the invitation to be in the study was extended to all eighth grade students who were Brazilian or of Brazilian origin and their parents or guardians with the exception of students who were in a separate program due to significant disabilities. In addition to widening the invitation to more students, an initial criterion to
exclude students whose parents did not want to participate was eliminated which led to
the involvement of two additional students. During the second attempt at recruiting
participants, I also contacted the parents of each student in Portuguese to inform them
about the study and invite them to participate (see Appendix G for the phone script).

In total, 36 students and their parents were extended invitations to participate. Of
these 36 students, 13 students and the parents and guardian of 11 of the students chose
to take part in the study. There were three students who were not invited to be in the study
because they were in a separate academic program at the middle school due to significant
disabilities. The majority of the families were recruited through phone calls I made, with
only three parents responding to the recruitment letter.

One hypothesis for an initially low response rate was the undocumented legal
status of some families and the possible apprehension associated with this. This
hypothesis was formulated based upon several parents’ comments. For example, one
student’s mother expressed how she hoped that I would obtain enough participants for
my study, but feared that I would encounter difficulty reaching families who were
undocumented. In addition, other parents discussed the anxiety they experienced because
of their legal status. This difficulty in accessing student and parent participants is
reflective of the literature on Brazilians which suggests that they tend to be an “invisible”
population (Margolis, 1998, 2008; Martes, 2011). Making phone calls to parents in
Portuguese in order to introduce myself, to inform them about the study, and to invite
them participate yielded the greatest response. It is assumed that this recruitment method
was more fruitful because of the connection I was able to make with individuals in their native language which, perhaps, reduced their initial reservations to respond to a stranger.

Not utilizing maximum variation sampling for the recruitment of most of the students could be viewed as a limitation of this study. However, according to the social worker, student participants ended up representing a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences. This included diversity in places of birth, lengths of time in the United States, educational backgrounds of their parents, gender, and language proficiency. Therefore, even though a combination of maximum variation sampling and criterion sampling was used to select students, according to the social worker, heterogeneity was evident among those who volunteered to participate. The social worker, therefore, indicated that the sample of students provided a good representation of the eighth grade Brazilian population at Clarkston.

Educators were selected through a process of snowball sampling. Snowball sampling draws upon the knowledge and resources of other people who are familiar with the research population and setting to find out their recommendations of people to include in the study (Patton, 2002). In this research study, students were asked if there were any individuals in the school or community who had influenced their educational pursuits. Feedback from the parents and guardian who participated was also solicited regarding people whom they had observed inspire their children’s education. People who were mentioned repeatedly (Patton, 2002) and who appeared to have positively impacted students’ lives were invited to be in the study. Additionally, other educators who worked with Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin were extended invitations to take
part in the study based upon the researcher’s familiarity with the research site and in response to recommendations by school staff. The original intent was to include both educators and community members in this study. However, students and parents only recognized the influence of educators at Clarkston to students’ educational pursuits. Likewise, educators only suggested other school staff to interview. Therefore, no community members were included in the sample.

There were 13 educators who were invited to participate in this study, with 10 of them agreeing to take part. The three educators who declined to participate were Portuguese-speaking ESL teachers at Clarkston. In the end, only one of the ESL teachers (although not a Portuguese-speaker) who worked with the Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin agreed to participate. While this may be a potential limitation of this study, information was gathered from interviews with the other educators about initiatives and resources provided by the ESL teachers.

**Data Collection**

Data collection consisted of a series of semi-structured interviews with students, parents, one student’s guardian, and educators. This was supplemented with demographic information for students and parents as well as relevant documents gathered from the schools. The reliance on multiple data sources provided triangulation of the data which, in turn, increased the study’s internal validity (Merriam, 2009). Internal validity is directly related to data triangulation as the consultation of multiple data sources allows for “comparing and cross-checking the consistency of information derived at different times and by different means within qualitative methods” (Patton, 2002, p.
Methods for conducting the interviews and gathering additional data are outlined below. In addition, information about the pilot interviews is also included.

**Interviews**

The goal of this qualitative study was to study the experiences and perspectives of eighth grade students who were Brazilian and of Brazilian origin in greater depth. This detailed examination was facilitated through purposeful sampling and targeted data collection and analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002; Seidman, 2006). Therefore, the interview techniques employed in this study sought to address depth rather than breadth when answering the research questions (Seidman, 2006).

Individual, semi-structured interviews utilizing open-ended questions were conducted with 13 students, 13 parents, one guardian, and 10 educators. The purpose of the interviews was to consider the experiences and forces that influenced the educational aspirations of the student participants. It was expected that because the students were in middle school, some of them would be uncertain about whether they would pursue postsecondary education. It was also anticipated that students who had undocumented legal status might be unsure about the feasibility of furthering their education following high school. However, such conditions were not grounds for excluding students from the study. The reason for interviewing a sample of eighth grade students was to consider how and to what extent their educational experiences and perspectives at the middle school level were connected to postsecondary pursuits as well as to identify and address limitations to their endeavors.
In addition to individual interviews with students, the original plan was also to include students in several focus groups. Questions for this part of the study were designed to further explore students’ experiences and knowledge about college. However, due to time limitations in the middle school’s schedule because of statewide testing, this was not possible. Because of this constraint in time, questions that were designed to be used in the focus group discussions were incorporated into the individual student interviews, thus yielding the same type of information that was intended from the focus groups. Therefore, this change to the original plan for data collection did not appear to be detrimental to the study results.

Interviews were semi-structured in nature. The content of the interviews was tailored appropriately to the developmental stages and roles of the individuals being interviewed (see Appendices A, B, and C for the detailed interview protocols). While the protocols provided a guideline for the flow and format of the interview sessions, their semi-structured nature allowed the researcher to explore areas discussed by the participants in greater detail and to ask additional questions as they pertained to the research questions and goals of the study (Seidman, 2006). Following the signing of consent and assent forms, interviews were recorded based upon the participants’ permission. Participants were also informed that they could request the recording to be stopped at any point. Interviews were conducted in Portuguese and/or English, with interviewees selecting the language that was most comfortable for them.

There were several components associated with the interview process that needed to be acknowledged during data collection. Of significance were differences between the
interviewer’s and participants’ race and ethnicity. A majority of the study’s participants were from Brazil or were of Brazilian origin, and the interviewer was from the United States. Obvious diversity existed in cultural background, native language, and other characteristics between many of the participants and the researcher.

Assumptions associated with class, race, and ethnicity can impact the interview process and the content of the data collected (Seidman, 2006). The challenge of this insider-outsider perspective is common in cross-cultural research (Ryen, 2002). When this view is allowed to permeate the interview setting, it can result in participants’ reluctance to take part in the study and to question the investigator’s motives for doing the research (Dunbar, Rodriguez, & Parker, 2002; Seidman, 2006). In any interview setting, it is important for the researcher to develop trust and rapport with those being interviewed to minimize negative effects (Dunbar et al., 2002; Ryen, 2002; Seidman, 2006).

Therefore, in this study, the researcher engaged in some self-disclosure about her background and interest in the Brazilian population during initial contact with participants and in the interviews (Dunbar et al., 2002). One goal of the researcher was to create a relationship with participants that reflected equity and reciprocity as closely as possible (Seidman, 2006). While there is never complete equivalency in the interviewer/participant relationship, care was taken to minimize any existing chasms between individuals (Seidman, 2006). One measure that was taken to address this included spending time at the beginning of each interview to become acquainted with each of the participants. In addition, even though the researcher is often the primary
beneficiary of interview relationships, emphasis was placed on the assistance that participants were providing to the future educational opportunities of fellow Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin (Seidman, 2006).

Issues associated with using two languages for the interviews also needed to be considered. For example, exact translation in word and meaning from one language to another can be hard to achieve. This was especially relevant in the translation of consent forms from English into Portuguese and when translating quotes from the Portuguese interviews into English. In these cases, translation was made as closely as possible to the original meaning. Language differences also emerged during the course of the interviews when some individuals found it difficult to express themselves in the language that they had selected for the interview (Patton, 2002). For example, participants often interjected words or sentences using the opposite language.

Documents

In order to more thoroughly understand students’ backgrounds and their educational experiences, several documents were gathered which contained additional information about the schools and families who participated. Students and parents were asked to complete demographic forms (see Appendices D and E for the demographic surveys) which provided information regarding students’ backgrounds and relevant familial demographic data. Students’ transcripts of grades and their attendance records were also collected following consent from the middle school and students’ parents. Additional data sources included information from the websites for Clarkston, Breyborn, Saddle Hill, and the district. Also, literature related to academic achievement,
postsecondary educational and career planning, college awareness and preparation programs, and outreach efforts for families were reviewed. Information obtained through these documents facilitated triangulation of the data, provided further avenues to pursue in the interviews, and was instrumental in building theory (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002).

**Pilot Interviews**

Prior to conducting the actual research for this study, feedback was sought from a Brazilian educator regarding the content of the interview protocols for students, parents, and educators. Based upon this feedback, interview questions were modified to better address the purposes of this study and to reflect greater clarity. Following initial revisions to the interview protocols, interview questions were piloted with a Brazilian eighth grade student, her mother, and two teachers who worked with Brazilian and ELL students. Demographic surveys were also issued to the student and her mother.

The purpose of the pilot interviews was to evaluate whether the interview protocols appropriately addressed the research questions and objectives of this study. These preliminary interviews helped to expose obscurities and areas of cultural difference in the interview protocols and demographic surveys (Harkness, Van de Vijver, & Mohler, 2003; National Research Council, 2002; Seidman, 2006). Therefore, interview protocols and demographic surveys were adjusted based upon results and feedback from these participants.

**Data Analysis**

This study used a constant comparative method to code and analyze the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This section describes the constant comparative method in
greater detail as well as the coding process. Conclusions for this study were reached through the use of these methods.

Prior to beginning data analysis, each of the recorded interviews was transcribed by a transcription company using the language in which it was conducted. Interviews in Portuguese were not translated into English with the exception of direct quotes used for this dissertation and for other outputs of this study.

A constant comparative method was then used to code and analyze the data for this research. This was facilitated by the qualitative research analysis software, ATLAS.ti. Glaser and Strauss (1967) explained that for constant comparative methods, the processes of coding and analysis are done in conjunction with one another, thus leading to theory development. The goal of constant comparative methods is to reach data saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In the case of this study, data saturation was primarily determined from interviews with students, parents, and educators.

According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), the constant comparative method involves the following four stages:

1. comparing incidents applicable to each category,
2. integrating categories and their properties,
3. delimiting the theory, and
4. writing the theory. (p. 105)

The first stage began the process of data coding, category development, and ongoing analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). During this phase, raw data was categorized into domains, and relevant themes were derived from the coded data (Glaser & Strauss,
1967; Merriam, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994). As the coding process progressed, categories emerged across the data sources (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Throughout this process of coding and analysis, memoing was used to record ideas about the codes and emerging themes (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

In stage two, coding and memoing continued, but “the constant comparative units change[d] from comparison of incident with incident to comparison of incident with properties of the category that resulted from initial comparisons of incidents” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 108). Therefore, distinguishing properties both within and across categories were developed in greater detail (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The main task of stage three was that of delimiting the theory and categories which in turn led to data reduction and the development of a more manageable and coherent theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This was accomplished by considering similarities, patterns, and theoretical saturation in the categories and across the collected data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As a result of this stage, modifications were made to some of the categories. For example, some of the categories were merged because they shared similar properties. Other categories were eliminated because they were not significant and did not reach data saturation. In the end, this stage led to the sorting of the coded data into several main categories with sub-themes.

Once the data was coded, the fourth step was to write the theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Writing theory involved consideration of the coded data, the categories that emerged from coding, and the memos written throughout the process of analysis, indicating the “content behind the categories, which [became] the major themes of the
theory” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 113). Theories developed from constant comparative methods tend to be developmental in nature (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As such, the developmental nature of theory gleaned from the constant comparative method was particularly relevant to this dissertation since this was an uncharted area of research.

**Coding Process**

Because coding was an integral and ongoing part of the constant comparative method for this research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), this section discusses the coding process in greater detail. In the case of this research, both open and axial coding were used. Open coding is “the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 61). Initially, open coding begins by reviewing raw data, labeling phenomena that stand out or are significant, and considering similarities across the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As similar patterns and concepts arise, they are grouped into categories that “seem to pertain to the same phenomena” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 65). Strauss and Corbin (1990) emphasized the importance of the words “seem to” in their previous statement, indicating that during open coding, emerging categories are tentative and may change as coding and analysis proceed. Names assigned to emerging categories during open coding are generally more abstract as compared to concepts within categories which tend to be more concrete (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Axial coding is “a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 96). Strauss and Corbin (1990) explained
In axial coding our focus is on specifying a category *(phenomenon)* in terms of the conditions that give rise to it; the context (its specific set of properties) in which it is embedded; the action/interactional *strategies* by which it is handled, managed, carried out; and the *consequences* of those strategies. These specifying features of a category give it precision, thus we refer to them as *subcategories*. (p. 97, italics in original)

As the features of categories and subcategories emerge, they are compared for patterns and relationships between them and can then be linked together (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Continual questioning regarding similarities and differences may prompt a return to the data to check to make sure it supports the emerging theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). It may also lead to the further development of properties related to the categories and subcategories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Strauss and Corbin (1990) indicated that coding involves a process of inductive and deductive reasoning. Propositions about possible relationships among the data are made which are then supported by the actuality of the data collected (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Strauss and Corbin (1990) explained, “Your final theory is limited to those categories, their properties and dimensions, and statements of relationships that exist in the actual data collected – not what you think might be out there but haven’t come across” (p. 112).

During the coding process, memos and diagrams help keep track of emerging categories, dimensional elements within each category, as well as the emerging theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Code notes are memos written to help define general
properties of the categories and the possible dimensional elements within each category (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). These notes are accompanied by theoretical and operational notes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Theoretical notes are a product of deductive and inductive reasoning as well as an extension of code notes as they consider additional properties and dimensions of categories and subcategories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Operational notes pinpoint more specific actions to take regarding sampling and information gathering to further the development of the theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Diagrams can also be useful in outlining the developing theory and identifying relationships among categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Validity and Reliability

Throughout the research process, precautions were taken in order to maintain the validity of this study. Creswell and Miller (2000) defined validity in qualitative research as “...how accurately the account represents participants’ realities of the social phenomena and is credible to them” (p. 124). They further stated, “Procedures for validity include those strategies used by researchers to establish the credibility of their study” (p. 125). Creswell and Miller proposed three ways to address validity in qualitative research. These are (a) continually reviewing the data to make sure that the analysis makes sense, (b) performing member checks with participants, and (c) and engaging people external to the study in a review of the findings (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

This study implemented each of these three suggestions by Creswell and Miller (2000) in an attempt to maximize validity. First, I returned to the data continually during
the analysis process as well as when writing the conclusions of this study. Doing so allowed me to check conclusions with the raw data to make sure that I was accurately depicting participants’ experiences and perceptions. I also performed member checks with each of the educators who took part in this study to ensure that their contributions were accurately conveyed. Addressing Creswell and Miller’s (2000) final suggestion, I consulted two Brazilian students and their parents who had not participated in the original study to seek their feedback about whether the findings of this research made sense. This was done because of the difficult nature of accessing the original families who took part in this study. However, according to Creswell and Miller (2000), having people who were not a part of the original study review the results improves validity. The member checks with the educators as well as consultation with the Brazilian families confirmed the validity of this study’s conclusions.

The reliability of this study was also addressed. Reliability in qualitative research is more about “whether the results are consistent with the data collected” (Merriam, 2009, p. 221). Reliability is increased through the use of data triangulation, consideration of biases held by the researcher, and the maintenance of an audit trail (Merriam, 2009). In order to achieve greater reliability in this study, multiple data sources were included (e.g., interviews, documents). Data triangulation was also addressed through the inclusion of a range of participants (i.e., students, parents, and educators). Consistency in the data was evident among the student participants as well as among the parents and the educators. In addition, consistency was also manifest across groups of participants. For example, interviews with parents confirmed what was discussed with students and vice versa.
Finally, potential researcher biases were identified prior to beginning data collection for this study, and field notes and memos were kept. These measures also enhanced this study’s reliability.

**Human Participants and Ethics Precautions**

Since this research involved the participation of human subjects, particular care was exercised to protect their identity. This was done following strict guidelines outlined by the IRB Office at Boston College. This section discusses the main ethical precautions which were taken including obtaining consent, maintaining confidentiality in the data collected, and addressing issues that emerged related to participants’ legal status.

As with any study including human subjects, informed consent was obtained from participants prior to their involvement. Consent forms contained information about the nature of the study, potential benefits and risks of involvement, and measures taken to maintain the privacy and confidentiality of participants. Additional precautions to protect the students who were considered to be minors and one of the “especially vulnerable groups” were also outlined in the consent forms (see Appendices H, I, J, and K for English versions of the consent forms; Yin, 2009, p. 73). Consent forms also explained that the interviews would be recorded and transcribed for research purposes. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. They were also encouraged to ask any questions they had about the study. The consent forms concluded with requests for participants’ signatures, signifying their consent to take part in the study as well as their agreement to have their interviews recorded. In the case of student interviews, assent forms were used and signatures were obtained from both students and
their parents or guardians. Finally, permission for the researcher to access students’ transcripts of grades and attendance records was requested from students and parents. Copies of the signed consent forms were given to each participant. In addition, parents also received copies of the student assent forms.

Consent for study involvement and recording the interviews was acquired from each of the study participants prior to data collection. Students included in the sample were under the age of 18 and, therefore, were considered minors. This necessitated obtaining assent from the students and consent from their parents in order for students to be able to take part in the study. Parents or guardians who were opposed to their child’s participation precluded student involvement. Due to the primary focus on minors in this study and their experiences and perceptions related to education, it was critical that students were aware of the ultimate responsibility and decision making their parents or guardians had regarding their inclusion in the study. Parents and guardians were informed that they could remove their child from the study at any time, or that they could request the exclusion of transcripts and attendance records from the data. Requests by parents, guardians, and students for partial participation in the study were honored. Therefore, in this study, the parents of two of the students declined to participate and also asked that their children’s transcripts of grades and attendance records not to be used.

Participants were assured that their anonymity would be honored, with names and identifying information being withheld from any outputs of the study. Therefore, pseudonyms were used for each of the participants, the three schools, and the district in this study. Confidentiality was exercised in all regards, and care was taken to secure data
collected from the study. Hard copy information (e.g., students’ transcripts and attendance records) was kept in a locked file, and electronic data (e.g., interview transcripts) was secured using a password protected file. Data from the study were inaccessible to anyone beyond me.

Sensitive issues, such as those related to immigration and legal status within the United States were handled with the upmost care and respected the confidentiality of student and parent participants and their families. During the data collection process, the legal status of students, parents, and guardians was considered to be a private matter. Therefore, no direct inquiry was made regarding individuals’ or families’ legal status. However, during many of the interviews, students and parents voluntarily offered this information, explaining how it directly affected their educational experiences and opportunities.

Because legal status was an important finding to this study in understanding the research questions, this topic could not be removed from the data. Therefore, it was necessary to implement additional precautions to protect the anonymity of families with undocumented legal status. In conjunction with strict requirements outlined by the IRB Office at Boston College, the following actions were taken to safeguard participants:

1. All electronic files and e-mails containing identifying information (e.g., names, addresses, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses) for participants were deleted.
2. All identifying information on student transcripts, student and parent demographic forms, and student and parent consent forms was blacked out
and replaced with participants’ codes. Original documents were then scanned and converted into PDF versions, with the initial version being shredded.

3. All additional hard copy information containing identifying information for students and parents was shredded.

4. All audio recordings of the interviews were deleted. Interview transcripts were retained. However, names of the research participants, the research site, and other identifying information were replaced with codes.

Issues surrounding participants’ legal status were a significant ethical consideration for this study. In the future when undertaking research on particularly vulnerable populations, such as the students and parents who took part in this study, I will consider obtaining verbal rather than written consent from participants. This type of consent would provide an added measure of protection for these types of participants. It would also widen the possibility to discuss sensitive topics (e.g., legal status) in greater depth.

**Conclusion**

This dissertation focused on Brazilian middle school students and students of Brazilian origin, a population of students for whom limited research exists. As such, the qualitative and exploratory nature of this study provided an appropriate framework for examining the educational aspirations of these students (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Value in this study was derived from students’ own perspectives about the forces and experiences that influence their intended educational pathways and ambitions (Seidman, 2006). Likewise, interviews with parents and educators contributed to greater
comprehension of this research topic (Seidman, 2006). The following chapter presents findings from this study. These results are based on analysis of the contributions of students, parents, and educators as well as relevant documents.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

It is common to hear children and teenagers to say, “When I grow up, I want to be…,” and then to fill in the blank with dreams they have for the future. Questions may arise regarding the point at which students’ aspirations and dreams are solidified and transformed into real and concrete plans. Also worthy of consideration are the forces that impact students’ educational and career decisions as well as whether their aspirations and dreams are altered because of family circumstances, perceived limitations, and other influences.

With these questions in mind, investigation for this dissertation was guided by the following primary research question: What is the nature of the experiences and the forces that influence the educational aspirations of Brazilian middle school students and students of Brazilian origin in eighth grade? A primary purpose for studying students’ aspirations during middle school was to consider possible interventions and resources that are developmentally appropriate and encourage postsecondary educational attainment. It is hoped that understanding students’ and families’ experiences will lead to interventions that better address their needs.

This chapter presents findings from this study related to the educational and career aspirations of eighth grade middle school students who are Brazilian or of Brazilian origin. Throughout interviews with students who were Brazilian or of Brazilian origin, questions were designed to elicit students’ perceptions of their ambitions at that specific developmental stage. It was not anticipated that students would have concrete
ideas about their prospective educational and career paths. The intent, rather, was to consider students’ aspirations, thought processes, and rationales for their current courses of action in order to more fully understand what drove their choices and actions at that point in their educational journeys. Interviews with students’ parents and the guardian of one of the students also provided insight into the role of family experiences and expectations on students’ decisions. Likewise, educators’ were also interviewed to consider resources and supports that were or were not available to students and families.

This chapter begins by outlining three educational pathways which students in this study proposed to pursue. Case studies representing a student from each of the three intended pathways offer further insight into some of the experiences and decisions facing students and their families, with some elements of their experiences being pathway-specific and others being common to the sample at large.

A significant finding and focus of this study was the importance of families to students’ decisions. As such, consideration is given to families’ aspirations for the students included in this study. An examination of students’ views of success as well as their high school plans and goals related to college and work is detailed. In addition, families’ perspectives about career exploration and college awareness and their relationship with the school are presented. Finally of significance is the influence of students’ immigration and legal status in the United States on their educational endeavors.

This chapter also examines the role of the middle school in the lives of the Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin. Derived from interview data with
educators at Clarkston and the two high schools in the area, this section highlights educators’ views toward the Brazilian population at the middle school and describes professional development training focused on working with immigrant and ELL students. It also considers advisory efforts related to high school planning, college and career exploration, as well as educators’ perspectives on students’ postsecondary options as immigrants. As English language capacity was an influential part of students’ lives in this study, this chapter presents educators’ observations of how language affected opportunities for immigrant students at Clarkston. It also considers resources available to assist students with their language needs.

This chapter concludes with a synthesis of the findings from the student, parent, and educator data. The needs of the students who participated in this study are examined. Consideration is given to the ways in which Clarkston supports students with these needs as well as areas where more attention would be beneficial.

**Three Intended Educational Pathways**

The purpose of this study was to examine eighth grade students’ ambitions at that specific developmental point in their lives in order to better understand how to support the evolution of their educational and career goals. Students in this study’s sample proposed to follow three different pathways. The three intended pathways were (a) Pathway A: high school and college; (b) Pathway B: technical school, work, and college or the possibility of further education; and (c) Pathway C: indecision about high school and college. The pathways were based largely on students’ high school and postsecondary educational plans at the time of data collection. Pathway B diverged into
Tracks 1 and 2, with the fork in the pathway resulting from students’ varying ambitions to pursue postsecondary education. Track 1 was comprised of students who planned to work and go to college following high school, and Track 2 consisted of students who wanted to work after high school and were unsure about college.

The three pathways reflect students’ thoughts and intentions regarding their high school and postsecondary plans at the time of data collection. However, recognition needs to be given to the possible forces (e.g., policy changes expanding educational opportunities for undocumented immigrant students or students’ changing interests) that could intervene in students’ future lives, thus causing them to potentially modify their plans. Figure 4.1 below outlines the main characteristics of each intended pathway, and Table 4.1 shows the pathway that each student had in mind when interviewed for this study.
Figure 4.1. Characteristics of the three intended educational pathways.
Table 4.1

*Students’ Intended Educational Pathways*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pathway A: High school and college</th>
<th>Pathway B / Track 1: Technical school, work, and college</th>
<th>Pathway B / Track 2: Technical school, work, and possible college</th>
<th>Pathway C: Undecided about high school and college</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fernanda</td>
<td>Andressa</td>
<td>Bruno</td>
<td>Paulo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilherme</td>
<td>Victor</td>
<td>Juliana</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larissa</td>
<td></td>
<td>Leonardo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priscila</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thais</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thiago</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vinicius</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students’ decisions related to their intended pathway were impacted by a number of forces. Forces specific to each of the three pathways will be discussed throughout the remainder of this chapter as well as those factors which were common across the majority of students in the study’s sample.

The following section presents three case studies which highlight perspectives and experiences from a student and his or her parent from each of the three proposed pathways. Variations were manifested in students’ and families’ situations and decisions within the pathways. Therefore, the inclusion of these students’ stories is not done with the intent that they be generalized to the broader population at large. However, presentation of these case studies offers a glimpse into students’ experiences and educational decision making. Further discussion of the three intended pathways and their distinguishing characteristics is addressed throughout the remainder of this chapter.
Pathway A: Fernanda

Fernanda had a lot to say about educational opportunity for herself and others. She had high aspirations and planned to go to college to become a doctor. Her ambitions seemed to be influenced, in part, by her parents’ high expectations and the examples of two cousins who were surgeons in South America. She valued education and suggested, “I think it’s very important to get an education, to be something in your life.”

Nothing seemed impossible to Fernanda. She was optimistic about her possibilities and did not limit herself in thinking about her potential. She was an American citizen and wanted to go to college in the United States. While paying for college was a potential obstacle, she planned to apply for scholarships to finance her education. Fernanda had the belief that anyone could go to college and get a scholarship if they applied themselves and worked hard.

Fernanda’s mother, Lorena, also had high expectations for her daughter which radiated from her comments during the interview. Lorena worked as a babysitter trying to make ends meet. She ended her education with high school, but expected more from Fernanda. She believed that parents should encourage their children to acquire higher education and take advantage of the benefits of school in the United States. She said, “It is a waste not to let a child study in this country [the United States].” When discussing whether she expected Fernanda to go to college, she responded

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1 Quotations drawn from interviews in Portuguese and included in this dissertation are designated by asterisks. They were translated into English by the researcher. Quotations not distinguished by asterisks are from interviews conducted in English.
She has to go to college, graduate school, everything. Because she has the capacity….I will be very frustrated if she quits one day, but I do not believe that she will quit because she likes school. She is competitive. She wants to be the best in her studies and everything.*

As with her mother’s high expectations, Fernanda also described how her father held similar standards for her regarding her educational goals and performance.

All but one of the students in Pathway A planned to go to Breyborn with the remaining student returning to Brazil for high school. Each of the seven students in this pathway intended to pursue a college education.

**Pathway B: Bruno**

Cecilia welcomed me into her home. I sat at the kitchen table sipping Guaraná, a drink common in Brazil, while we discussed the family’s experiences in Brazil and the United States. The family immigrated to the United States because of circumstances in Brazil. Cecília and her husband, Ronaldo, saw the benefit of education for their son, Bruno, and believed that this would lead to a better life for him. Both Cecília and Ronaldo quit school during their elementary years to help with things at home and had seen the challenging impact of a limited education on their lives. They did not want Bruno to experience similar setbacks from a lack of schooling and, therefore, wanted him to go to college and obtain a good job. However, they were also concerned that a college education might not be a possibility due to the family’s legal status. Initially, they wanted Bruno to go to Breyborn for high school since they thought that the traditional high school would better prepare him for college. Nonetheless, they ended up deciding
that he would attend Saddle Hill instead so that he could obtain a job following high school since there was doubt about whether a college education was feasible.

When I met with Bruno, he explained how he planned to go to Saddle Hill. He decided on this path, “Because at Saddle Hill, you already graduate with a diploma in what you’re studying. So that tends to make it faster for you [to] get a job and everything so you could...go to college while having a job also.” He also attributed his decision to the influence of his family including a couple of cousins who had positive experiences at the technical school and were able to obtain good jobs. Bruno indicated that he wanted to go to college but was unsure if he would actually have the opportunity. His uncertainty about college seemed to be based on his legal status.

There were five students who were planning on this pathway, mainly because of the possibility they had to work upon high school graduation. Students in Track 1 wanted to go to college, and students in Track 2 were uncertain about whether they would seek higher education later on.

**Pathway C: Paulo**

Paulo loved soccer. He had been playing since he was 3 years old. His passion for soccer seemed to permeate his thoughts about his prospective career and educational pursuits. If Paulo had it his way, he would become a professional soccer player and forgo higher education. In his own words, he remarked, “I don’t know yet what I want to be if I’m not a soccer player.”

On the other hand, Paulo’s mother perceived a real need for her son to acquire a college education to succeed in life even though that possibly meant that the family
would need to return to Brazil because of their legal status. She insisted, “Whether he wants to or not, he has to go to college because it’s important.” She recognized his passion for soccer, but thought that becoming a professional soccer player was not a valid career choice. She suggested to Paulo that he consider becoming a pilot, but he was not fond of that idea. She explained:

But he says that his second choice is to be a soccer player, and his third choice is to be a soccer player. He doesn’t give up. To him, there are only these three options. I’ve told him that he needs to have other options. But I think that he is still young. He is only 15 years old. Maybe when he is 16 or 17, he will have his head on straight and figure out something.

At the time of the interview, Paulo was undecided about whether he wanted to go to Breyborn or Saddle Hill. His indecision was based mostly on which school had the better soccer team. He stated:

Everyone says that Breyborn’s soccer is better, so I want to play there. But my father wants me to go to Saddle Hill so I can have a job. Something better. In the beginning, I said that I would go to Breyborn, but now I don’t know which I want because I have many friends at Saddle Hill who play soccer. And they say that the soccer is good there, too.

Paulo was the only student who was undecided about both high school and college.

The remainder of this chapter considers the overall factors and experiences that influence students’ educational and career related ambitions, with some of these forces being pathway-specific and others being relevant to the sample at large. The discussion...
is divided into two parts which examines (a) the impact of family and (b) the influence of school.

**Students’ Intended Educational Pathways: It’s a Family Matter**

Families had a significant role in the lives of students in this sample and in their pathway ambitions. This section discusses the effects of families’ expectations on students’ educational decisions. It also examines students’ views of success, their high school plans, and their college and career aspirations. Families’ perspectives about career and college awareness and exploration are also considered as well as their relationship with the schools. Finally, it looks at the impact of immigration and legal status on students’ educational aspirations.

**High Family Aspirations**

A common characteristic across all students in this sample was the importance of their families and the influence they had on students’ educational decisions. The majority of students recognized their families, and particularly their parents, as making a more significant impression on their education than their friends, teachers, or other individuals. In addition to students’ views about the importance of families to their educational lives, parents who participated in this study expressed high ambitions for their children to do well in school and to succeed in life. Families had an indispensable involvement in molding their children’s educational decisions.

During the interviews, students were asked if they felt their family, teachers, and/or friends had certain expectations of them as a means for me to examine the nature and extent of other people’s influences on their educational decisions and intended
pathways. Responses were similar across students in the three proposed pathways, with many students’ emphasizing the influence of their parents’ desires on their own academic decisions. Parents’ anticipations for their sons’ and daughters’ futures, as conveyed by the students, can be categorized into three main areas. Their parents wanted them to (a) do well in school, (b) go to college, and (c) obtain a good job. For the most part, students did not feel that their friends had educationally related expectations of them. About half of the students mentioned that their teachers wanted them to do well in school, with students implying that their teachers’ desires for them were mainly associated with their current academic performance rather than with prospective educational pursuits.

In an additional attempt to understand who influenced students’ educational plans, students were invited to describe individuals who most inspired their decisions related to school. The majority of students referenced family members, especially their mothers. Other individuals, such as friends and teachers, were mentioned with much less frequency suggesting that for many students, families were more fundamental to their educational development. This finding was applicable to students in each of the three intended pathways.

Students’ emphasized how their families wanted them to do well in school and to have success in their lives. For example, Paulo said his mother “wants to see me be something good in the future.”* Leonardo acknowledged that his parents were the greatest help, commenting, “Mom and Dad, they keep telling me that it doesn’t seem like it now, but school’s the most important thing in the world right now.” In addition to her mother’s support, Andressa also discussed the expectations that her sister had for her.

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“She [her sister] tells me to study well because afterward, I can go to a good school and do better in school,” she said.

Parents’ descriptions of the aspirations they held for their children echoed students’ comments. Overall, parents’ wished for better ways of life for their sons and daughters with more expanded educational and employment opportunities than they had experienced. For parents where data was reported, only three individuals had the chance of going to college or professional school, and five parents had dropped out of school at some point prior to graduating from high school. Students’ family histories also reflected a dearth of academic opportunity which was illustrated by the educational backgrounds of students’ grandparents. The majority of students’ grandparents had even fewer occasions for education, with the greater part concluding their formal education prior to high school graduation. Table 4.2 below outlines the educational attainment of students’ parents and grandparents. In addition to minimal schooling, the majority of parents regressed to employment positions of lesser status upon their immigration to the United States as compared with their previous employment in Brazil. Parents’ jobs in the United States were demanding both physically and in the time they required, with parents receiving little pay in return. Table 4.3 below summarizes parents’ jobs in Brazil prior to coming to the United States, their employment in the United States, their annual household income, and the number of hours worked per week.
Table 4.2

Educational Background of Students’ Parents and Grandparents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Parent/Guardian</th>
<th>Highest level of education completed by student's parent(s)</th>
<th>Highest level of education completed by student's grandmother(s)</th>
<th>Highest level of education completed by student's grandfather(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fernanda</td>
<td>Lorena</td>
<td>High school graduate</td>
<td>Less than a high school diploma</td>
<td>High school graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilherme</td>
<td>Milena</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larissa</td>
<td>Regina</td>
<td>High school graduate</td>
<td>Less than a high school diploma</td>
<td>Less than a high school diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alef</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>Professional school</td>
<td>Less than a high school diploma</td>
<td>Less than a high school diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priscila</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thais</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thiago</td>
<td>Aléxia</td>
<td>Higher education (completed university)</td>
<td>Less than a high school diploma</td>
<td>Less than a high school diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vinicius</td>
<td>Tatiane</td>
<td>Less than a high school diploma</td>
<td>No formal education</td>
<td>Less than a high school diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robson</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>Less than a high school diploma</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andressa</td>
<td>Viviane</td>
<td>High school graduate</td>
<td>Some university</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victor</td>
<td>Éverton</td>
<td>High school graduate</td>
<td>No formal education</td>
<td>Less than a high school diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruno</td>
<td>Cecília</td>
<td>Less than a high school diploma</td>
<td>Less than a high school diploma</td>
<td>Less than a high school diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ronaldo</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>Less than a high school diploma</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juliana</td>
<td>Filipe</td>
<td>Less than a high school diploma</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>Less than a high school diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leonardo</td>
<td>Sergio</td>
<td>Some university</td>
<td>Less than a high school diploma</td>
<td>High school graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paulo</td>
<td>Andréia</td>
<td>High school graduate</td>
<td>Less than a high school diploma</td>
<td>Less than a high school diploma</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a The demographic survey was not administered to the student's guardian due to the short duration of the student's stay with her.

*b The student's parent declined to participate.
Table 4.3

*Parents’ Employment in Brazil and the U.S.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Previous employment in Brazil</th>
<th>Current employment in U.S.</th>
<th>Current annual household income in U.S. dollars</th>
<th>Hours of work per week in current employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fernanda</td>
<td>Lorena</td>
<td>Bank</td>
<td>Babysitting</td>
<td>$20,000 - $29,999</td>
<td>25 - 34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilherme(^a)</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larissa</td>
<td>Regina</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Housekeeping</td>
<td>$50,000 - $74,999</td>
<td>25 - 34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alef</td>
<td>Bank</td>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>$50,000 - $74,999</td>
<td>51 - 60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priscila(^b)</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thais(^b)</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thiago</td>
<td>Aléxia</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Housekeeping</td>
<td>$20,000 - $29,000</td>
<td>41 - 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vinicius</td>
<td>Tatiane</td>
<td>Homemaker</td>
<td>Housekeeping</td>
<td>$10,000 - $19,999</td>
<td>41 - 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robson</td>
<td>Security</td>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>$10,000 - $19,999</td>
<td>66 - 80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andressa</td>
<td>Viviane</td>
<td>University student</td>
<td>Salon</td>
<td>$24,000</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victor</td>
<td>Éverton</td>
<td>Security</td>
<td>Restaurant</td>
<td>$30,000 - $39,999</td>
<td>61 - 70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruno</td>
<td>Cecilia</td>
<td>Farming</td>
<td>Housekeeping</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ronaldo</td>
<td>Farming</td>
<td>Landscaping</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juliana</td>
<td>Filipe</td>
<td>Pharmacy</td>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>$30,000 - $39,999</td>
<td>41 - 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leonardo</td>
<td>Sergio</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Maintenance</td>
<td>$50,000 - $74,999</td>
<td>35 - 40; 45 - 50 (Wife)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paulo</td>
<td>Andréia</td>
<td>Medical assistant</td>
<td>Housekeeping</td>
<td>$24,000</td>
<td>51 - 60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) The demographic survey was not administered to the student's guardian due to the short duration of the student's stay with her.

\(^b\) The student's parent declined to participate.
Beneath these broad patterns of limited schooling and lower status jobs were parents who hoped for better lives and opportunities for their children. This quest for a satisfactory life for their children reflected wishes for their sons and daughters to have increased educational opportunities, better jobs, and greater security in their futures. Parents’ persistent struggles to succeed in life inspired the aspirations they had for their children.

Cecilia and Ronaldo are an example of parents who longed for more favorable possibilities for their son, Bruno. Both Cecilia and Ronaldo quit school at young ages to help with work at home. Cecilia recounted the impact that a limited formal education had on her and her husband’s lives, remarking, “A lack of education affects us because we are illiterate.”* Cecilia added, “I really regret not having studied because today, I go to meetings and have papers to fill out. But I haven’t studied. How will I fill them out?”* Expressing similar feelings, Ronaldo lamented, “A person has to study a lot. I write, but I can’t read….I don’t know how to write what a person asks.”* These experiences influenced their perspectives about educational opportunities for their son. They discerned a fundamental need for Bruno to go to college because it would allow him “…to graduate in something. To have a better future. Not to be like us and work so hard and struggle so much” (Cecilia).* Similarly, Tatiane and Robson wanted improved opportunities for their two sons. Tatiane quit school in the sixth grade and noted, “This is my biggest regret. If I went back to Brazil today, I would go back to school.”* She further explained why she yearned for a solid education for her sons.
This is the reason that I want to provide these things for my boys so they don’t do what I did: drop out of school. Today, studying is everything. Learning is for life. So, I don’t want this for them. I really regret this.*

Andréia related similar feelings indicating that she was unable to go to college, but that her son would go. She asserted

Whether he wants to or not, he has to go to college because it’s important. I didn’t have the opportunity to go to college. So, he will have it; he will do it. My husband didn’t have this opportunity either. But if my parents would have had the opportunity to pay for college, today I would be grateful. But for him, we will do everything so he can go to college.*

Many parents wished for a college education for their son or daughter. For the most part, they did not seem to articulate specific expectations about their child’s eventual careers with the exception that their jobs would pay well and sustain a good quality of life.

Irrespective of their intended pathway, the majority of students considered their families to have the greatest influence on their educational decisions. In addition to students’ views of the importance of their families to their schooling, the data also suggested a pattern of high expectations among parents across the student sample regardless of family circumstances and characteristics. The application of these findings to the main research question guiding this study suggests that families were integral to the development of Brazilian students’ educational aspirations as well as for students of Brazilian origin.
Success in the Eyes of the Students

In addition to families’ expectations, students, likewise, had personal goals for their own lives. In order to better understand students’ ambitions, students were asked to define what success personally meant for them as well as to provide examples of people they viewed as successful. These questions were intended to identify what students distinguished as meaningful and worthwhile pursuits for their lives at that developmental stage and to consider how this related to their personal aspirations.

Students’ definitions of success were similar across the three proposed pathways. In the eyes of the students, success did not encompass becoming rich. Rather, their responses focused on the quality of life individuals could have as a result of working hard to achieve one’s goals and the degree of satisfaction and happiness which could be obtained.

For example, Victor maintained that when people like their jobs, they will be successful. Fernanda had a similar viewpoint explaining that, “Success to me is…kind of being happy with yourself. Because you can have any job that gives you a lot of money, but you truly need to be happy for you to enjoy your job.” Thais defined success in terms of achieving further education since her parents had not had this chance. She said

You have a goal…or a dream and that comes true….Because…most of my family, like me and my brother and my cousins…are the only ones that are actually going to college or…high school. ‘Cause my mom and my family, they didn’t even make it into half of middle school….So, I don’t want to follow them, those steps. I want to make it into high school and a good college. (Thais)
While each of the students responded with his or her definition of success, only some of the students described individuals whom they considered to be successful. Students’ responses and their ability to reply varied with their intended educational pathway. Students in Pathway A tended to name individuals whom they regarded as successful based upon people they knew and who had personally impacted their lives, with many referencing parents or educators at the school. Likewise, students in Track 1 of Pathway B also specified individuals they perceived as being successful with one student selecting President Obama and the other student naming her sister’s friend who was a medical student. Students in Track 2 of Pathway B universally responded that they did not know anyone whom they judged as successful. The student in Pathway C initially responded that he was not aware of anyone who was successful but then changed his mind after some thought and picked a Brazilian soccer player.

Data about students’ perspectives of success and their examples of people who reflected this in their lives generate two distinct findings. First, each of the students in the three pathways was able to articulate their own definition of success with ease, with explanations among the 13 students being similar in content. This, therefore, suggests that for this sample of students, their intended pathways and postsecondary goals were not differentiated by their views of success. The second finding relates to the diverging examples of successful individuals which students provided and students’ varying abilities to respond. This latter finding implies distinctions between students’ responses and their capability of replying which varied by their planned pathway. Students who were planning on college, or those students in Pathway A and Track 1 of Pathway B, had
a vision of what a successful person looked like to them. On the other hand, students in Track 2 of Pathway B and in Track C who did not have clear ideas of their postsecondary educational plans were either unable to identify a successful person or hesitated when responding. In view of the main research question, these findings allude to possible associations between students’ pathway choices at that point in their educational development and the examples of success or lack thereof in their personal lives.

Students’ High School Plans

One of the distinguishing components among the three intended pathways was students’ high school plans. Students had the option of going to Breyborn High School, a traditional high school, or Saddle Hill Technical School, a technical school, with their decisions determining, in large part, the educational pathway which they were interested in pursuing. Students’ rationales for choosing Breyborn and Saddle Hill varied with each of the proposed pathways. Students and families were provided with information about the two schools to help them decide which school best fit each student’s needs. However, students and parents wished that they would have received further direction in this area.

Of the students sampled, six planned to go to Breyborn during the 2012-2013 school year (i.e., students were in Pathway A), one student was returning to Brazil for high school (i.e., student was in Pathway A), five intended to go to Saddle Hill (i.e., students were in Pathway B), and one student was undecided (i.e., student was in Pathway C). Reasons for wanting to attend the technical high school differed from those given by students who chose to go to the traditional high school and were, in most cases,
connected with postsecondary aspirations and perceived limitations associated with the accessibility of a college education.

The main motive for students in Pathway A who selected Breyborn was their perception that it was superior to Saddle Hill and that the programs at Breyborn would better prepare them for college. Each of the students in Pathway A wanted to pursue a college education, with over half of them attributing their choice of Breyborn to comments they had heard from other people and to their perspective that the high school had a more rigorous academic program that would better prepare them for college. For example, Larissa asserted, “I just think it [Breyborn] is going to be a better school.” Her opinion of Breyborn was influenced, in part, by a tour she took of the high school with a girls’ group she participated in at the middle school. Vinicius and Fernanda both described how other students had referred to Saddle Hill as a laid-back school with less focus on academics. For instance, Vinicius noted how his brother went to Saddle Hill and “…doesn't do a lot. It’s one week shop, and one week academics, and stuff like that.” For himself, he insisted, “Breyborn, it’s better for me because you just go over there with college already. I'm focusing on college.” Fernanda had also been told by students about Saddle Hill’s weekly schedule alternating between shop and academic classes. Referring to this schedule, she commented, “I don't really like being lazy and not doing anything ‘cause I find it boring.” She, therefore, explained why she planned to go to Breyborn: “Breyborn, they have excellent teachers and classes….It just seems like a very nice school.”
Students in Pathway B who chose Saddle Hill identified their primary rationale as being able to work subsequent to high school. Victor, who had legal status and was a student in Track 1 of Pathway B, was going to Saddle Hill to help fund his college education. Two students in Track 2 of Pathway B felt limited by their undocumented legal status and, therefore, attributed this as the deciding factor in picking the technical school so that they could obtain employment after graduation. For example, Bruno, a student in this scenario, said that he longed to go to college but was not sure if he would be able to because of his legal status. However, frequenting Saddle Hill would open up the possibility for him to work following graduation which would facilitate paying for college if he ended up being able to go. He explained

Because at Saddle Hill, you already graduate with a diploma in what you’re studying. So, that tends to make it faster for like you [to] get a job and everything. So, you could go…to college while having a job also.

Bruno’s mother added that if legal status were not a concern, he would have gone to Breyborn instead. For a couple of students (i.e., one student in Track 1, and one student in Track 2), their decisions to attend Saddle Hill were driven by their interest in Saddle Hill’s technical programs. For instance, Leonardo opted to go to Saddle Hill because of the school’s computer program and the relation this had to his career interest in video game programming. He was drawn toward the opportunity of obtaining a job following graduation from Saddle Hill and did not want to pursue further education unless it was absolutely necessary.
Paulo represented Pathway C and was the only student who was undecided about which high school to attend. His deliberation about picking a high school seemed to be centered on which school had the best soccer team. He claimed that his father wanted him to go to Saddle Hill so he could secure a job following graduation. However, Paulo had heard that Breyborn’s soccer team was better. At the time of the interview, he was having difficulty reconciling these two viewpoints.

In trying to further understand why students selected the high school they did, students and families were asked to describe their experiences of choosing a high school and the resources and information provided by Clarkston, Breyborn, and Saddle Hill. For the most part, information about the high schools was distributed on a wide scale aimed at reaching a greater number of students and parents at a single time. For example, an open house was conducted at Breyborn for parents and students, and students participated in a school tour of Saddle Hill. Less focus seemed to be placed on individual guidance for students and parents about choosing a high school and courses. While individual recommendations were made on students’ registration forms by teachers about the core courses they thought each student should take at the high school based upon students’ performance over the school year, this was carried out, in many cases, with limited involvement of families.

Some students and parents wished they would have had more individual interaction with educators at the school to help select electives, to discuss the courses their teachers recommended, and to confer about their choice between the two high schools. For example, Vinicius wanted more help from the school with his selection of
high school classes. His reason for this was, “‘Cause then it [the high school courses] depends on what I can do. Like it can be better on a college application or the job application.” When asked to describe the input provided by the middle school in helping his son decide which high school to attend, Sergio claimed, “They left [it] completely up to the students and the parents….I mean the guiding counselor should be a little more involved in that, talk to us more about that.” He further expressed how he would have appreciated more direction from the school:

I know they have guiding counselors and career counselors in middle school and high school. In that aspect, I think we should…have been…a little more oriented and directed in that aspect. Because…we know him [our son]…his domestic life. But people who live with him day in and day out at school who know him a little better as a student, it would be beneficial to him if we could get together and we had options according to Leonardo’s abilities and performance....But that did not happen in the middle school.

In addition to wanting greater guidance regarding high school and course selection for their sons and daughters, there were parents who could not attend open houses due to work schedules or other conflicts, and some of them did not receive material about the two schools. These types of situations made it difficult for a number of parents to access the information they needed to assist their son or daughter in making an informed choice about high school.

In spite of a general desire for more individualized assistance with high school decisions, some people, nonetheless, found direction in larger organized events. For
example, Aléxia explained how, originally, she thought that her son should go to the technical high school. However, her opinion changed at a meeting which she attended where Breyborn’s offerings were discussed. She then realized that Saddle Hill’s programs were not the best fit for her son’s interests and skills.

Students’ high school decisions were a constituent part of their intended educational pathways. When considered in view of the main research question for this study, several defining factors emerged which distinguished students’ pathway selections. For Pathway A, the main influence on high school decisions was students’ longing for a college education and the belief that Breyborn, or a traditional high school in Brazil in the case of one student, would better prepare them for this academic course. A contributing element to students’ high school choices in Pathway B was the opportunity to work, with some students intending to use their employment as a financial resource to pay for college. For a couple of students in Pathway B, their pick of Saddle Hill was connected to their legal status. They perceived a college education to be unlikely and, therefore, were drawn to the opportunity to work following high school. In addition to these factors, two students in Pathway B had greater interest in Saddle Hill’s technical programs as compared to the course offerings at Breyborn. These features characterizing the high school decisions for students in Pathway B did not appear to be track specific. The primary factor seeming to influence the student’s high school decision in Pathway C seemed to be the caliber of the two high schools’ sports teams. Common to each of the three proposed pathways, however, was the notion that students and families wanted more guidance from the schools with their high school decisions.
Students’ College Aspirations

Another chief element that differentiated students’ choices about their intended pathways was students’ postsecondary aspirations. This included students’ goals, or lack thereof, to pursue higher education. Each of the 13 students in the sample had thought about going to college. Of these students, the nine of them who were in Pathway A and Track 1 of Pathway B, had plans to go to college. The remaining four students, or students in Track 2 of Pathway B and Pathway C, were considering college but were uncertain if they would follow this course. None of these students had made an ultimate decision that they would not pursue a college education.

Most students in Pathway A and Track 1 of Pathway B articulated more than one reason for their desire to obtain a college education. A common motivator to pursue higher education among most of the students in these two pathways was their parents’ expectations. For example, Victor referred to his parents when outlining his reasons for planning for college. He said, “They want me to go to college and become self-sufficient….They want me to do well, to have a good job with a stable salary so I can take care of a family in the future.” In addition to parents’ expectations, the role of other people on students’ college aspirations was evident in a couple of other ways. For example, three of the students in Pathway A discussed the dearth of educational opportunities for family members and emphasized how this had helped shape their own aspirations. As an illustration, Fernanda referenced the limited educational experiences of several of her family members and how this had driven her plans:
My sister from my mom's side, she doesn't know what she wants to be yet. And she's 22. So, she's stopping college which is a disappointment because she’s teaching me that I should be this great person, but it doesn't matter. But my other two siblings, they also dropped out of high school and college for a few months or weeks. So, I just want to be different.

Also related to the influence of other people, one student in Pathway A and another student in Track 1 of Pathway B attributed their goals for a college education, in part, to the examples of family members who had pursued higher education. For example, Larissa had two brothers in college who were studying engineering and remarked that their examples had motivated her to consider higher education as well.

A couple of reasons unrelated to other people’s expectations, experiences, and examples were also provided by some of the students. A reason common among six of the students in Pathway A and Track 1 of Pathway B for desiring a college education was because of their personal interests and goals. According to Andressa, her plans to attend college were associated with her ambition to become a doctor. Another example was Guilherme who came to the United States with the specific purpose of learning English. He wanted to go to college in Brazil and viewed learning English as a future benefit to his postsecondary studies and career. He said

After I graduate, I want to go to college. That's exactly why I'm learning English because if you know English, you go to college. And afterward, you get a good job. In Brazil, being bilingual and trilingual helps a lot.*
One student in Pathway A and one student in Track 1 of Pathway B also indicated that a college education would help them to have a better job and future. Victor summed up his thoughts about college by stating, “I think that in today’s world, we are nothing without education.”

Students in Track 2 of Pathway B and Pathway C were uncertain about going to college and presented two different rationales for their perspectives. The first reason was articulated by two students in Track 2 of Pathway B who pointed out that they wanted to attend college but were unsure if it would be possible because of their legal status. Juliana regarded her legal status as a deterrent to preparing for college. She said, “I don’t have the chance [to go to college], so I don’t want to get excited about it.” The second reason was expressed by two students, one in Track 2 of Pathway B and the other in Pathway C, who reported that they were undecided about college due to a general lack of interest in pursuing more schooling. However, they indicated that they would possibly consider college in the future if they deemed it necessary. For example, Leonardo explained that he did not really enjoy school, so going to college did not appeal to him. In spite of this, he said that his parents were encouraging him to seek further education following high school. He also realized that he might need more education to obtain a job that paid well and that he enjoyed. As with the students in Pathway A and Track 1 of Pathway B, the parents of students in Track 2 of Pathway B and Track C also wanted their children to go to college.

While each of the students in the three intended pathways had thought about going to college, and with some having plans to attend, they had very little knowledge
about and exposure to what college entails. Only three students from Pathway A and the
two students who represented Track 1 of Pathway B offered vague reflections on what
they thought college was like or provided brief descriptions drawn from information that
other people had given them. According to Priscila, her mother had discussed the
benefits of college with her pointing out that higher education would be foundational to
achieving a favorable job. The majority of students responded that they did not know
how to describe college and that people had not instructed them about its characteristics.

Findings from this portion of the investigation about students’ intentions for
higher education suggest that there was a predominant desire for a college education
among most of the students. Of the 13 students included in this study, only two of them
voiced uncertainty about whether postsecondary education was a path that they were
interested in for the future. The remaining 11 either planned to go to college or wished
they could go if circumstances with their legal status were different.

There were some distinctions among students’ expressed desires related to college
in the pathways that were suggested. Students in Pathway A and Track 1 of Pathway B
wanted to pursue higher education. Their aspirations for college were shaped by parents’
expectations for them, the limited educational experiences of some family members, the
examples of family who had gone to college, their personal interests and goals, and their
ambitions for a good job and successful future. Two of the students in Track 2 of
Pathway B also hoped for a college education, but were uncertain if they would be able to
realize this because of their legal status. They, therefore, had alternate plans to work after
high school in case they were unable to go to college. The only two students who did not want to go to college were in Track 2 of Pathway B and Pathway C.

Students in this study lacked clear ideas about what college entails. Several students in Pathway A and Track 1 of Pathway B who intended to go to college had vague ideas about the requirements and demands of higher education. However, for the most part, even students who were planning on higher education were uncertain about what college is like.

**Students’ Thoughts on Jobs**

As part of further understanding students’ aspirations, students were asked if they had thought about jobs they might want to pursue. Most students had several ideas but were still undecided. Findings highlighted potential differences across the intended pathways in the entry-level educational requirements for jobs selected by students, with overall trends suggesting that students’ employment choices in Pathway A and Track 1 of Pathway B may require more education when compared with the selected employment of students in Track 2 of Pathway B and Pathway C. There were no apparent distinctions in the reasons for students’ choices of jobs among the proposed pathways.

With the exception of two students in Pathway A, students in all three pathways gave examples of jobs they had considered for the future, with the majority of students providing more than one option which they had contemplated. Excluding the two students in Pathway A who were uncertain about possible jobs, the remainder of the students in Pathway A and Track 1 of Pathway B selected vocations that required college degrees such as a doctor, lawyer, psychologist, and something in the areas of math and
human resources. In addition to choosing jobs which necessitated a college degree, one student in Pathway A and one student in Track 1 of Pathway B also mentioned occupations (i.e., dancer, chef) with entry-level educational requirements being a high school diploma. There was more variability in entry-level educational requirements for the jobs specified by students in Track 2 of Pathway B ranging from a high school diploma, technical education, and college degree. Students in this pathway and track recognized jobs that could emerge from their technical training at Saddle Hill. For example, students were interested in computers, owning a business, video game programming, and culinary arts. The sole student in Pathway C wanted to be a professional soccer player which required the minimum of a high school diploma or its equivalent. Therefore, there was a higher likelihood that students in Track 2 of Pathway B and Pathway C could procure employment in their selected fields following high school graduation due to minimal educational requirements for these careers. The majority of students in Pathway A and Track 2 of Pathway B would likely not be able to obtain jobs in their desired fields of employment due to higher entry-level educational requirements.

There were no noticeable differences in students’ reasons for their choices of jobs. One of the rationales for students’ job preferences was their own interests and experiences. For example, Paulo’s dream job was to be a soccer player following a long held passion of his. His mother observed that he began playing soccer when he was 3 years old. His interests were nurtured by a father who was also passionate about soccer and had spent time playing with his son. Fernanda’s idea about being a doctor or
neurosurgeon was based upon a personal experience. She recounted how she started researching the job characteristics of a neurosurgeon while undergoing medical testing because of a suspected brain tumor.

Other students provided examples of jobs based upon similar career pursuits of family members and other close associates. For example, Andressa’s and Larissa’s goals appeared to be connected with the career paths of family members. Larissa had two brothers studying engineering. Likewise, she had considered engineering or a career in the field of math. Andressa said that she has thought about becoming a doctor, “Ever since I was little because my grandmother delivered me.” She also related how her aunt was studying in a medical school in Brazil to become a doctor. Likewise, her mother had been enrolled in a similar program prior to the family’s immigration to the United States.

Some students also discussed the expectations that other people had for them related to possible jobs. In addition to Fernanda’s personal experiences that shaped her desire to become a doctor, her parents’ high expectations also seemed to affect her thoughts about future careers. She explained that her father “doesn’t want me to…just have a usual job.” She said that he wanted her to have a job that “makes enough [money] ‘cause I want to have a nice little family and all.” When asked what would happen if she changed her mind about becoming a doctor, she responded

Well, I probably will feel pressure from my father. But my mother, I don’t know ‘cause my mom is like, “You’re not gonna be a teacher.” And then she’s like, “I know you can do much more than that.” So, to tell you the truth, I don’t think I will change from my mind because a lot of people tell me...“When you’re [a] kid,
you want to be something. But when you grow up, you completely change your
idea.” But I’m so focused on what I want to be in life that I don’t think that
there’s anything that can change it.

Students’ responses about careers demonstrated that they were still considering
their possibilities. Over half of the students identified more than one job which they had
contemplated. Other students depicted a general field of interest such as math and human
resources rather than naming a specific job. Still others described hobbies and interests
they had, but also expressed uncertainty about how this would translate into employment.
This finding that, in general, students were undecided about prospective jobs supports the
literature that designates this time in students’ lives as a period of exploration of
possibilities with unsolidified decisions about potential careers (Akos et al., 2004).

While students’ overall inconclusiveness about their future careers was common
across students in the three intended pathways, there appeared to be a possible correlation
between the entry-level educational requirements for students’ selected jobs and the three
pathways. In general, students in Pathway A and Track 1 of Pathway B who were aiming
for higher education described jobs which needed college degrees, and students in Track
2 of Pathway B and Pathway C specified jobs that potentially required technical training
or less education. There also seemed to be a possible connection between students’ high
school decisions and the nature of employment in which they were interested. Therefore,
students who intended to pursue higher education appeared to be more likely to aspire to
jobs that required a college degree, and students who were going to the technical school
seemed to be more inclined to contemplate jobs that necessitated less education or technical training.

**Families’ Perspectives on Career Exploration and College Awareness**

In addition to examining students’ aspirations associated with high school, college, and jobs, this dissertation also sought to understand what types of interventions were in place at the middle school that promoted career exploration and college awareness. Within this research, the argument is presented that these types of activities should occur during middle school in order to prepare students for the decisions that they will make during high school which are connected to their postsecondary pursuits. It is also argued that waiting until high school for career and college related discussions is too late for many students’ preparation. Therefore, interviews with parents and students included questions that examined students’ exposure to career exploration and their level of college awareness at the middle school level.

In general, discussions and information about different types of careers and opportunities for college were limited at Clarkston. This finding was consistent across students in each of the three proposed pathways. According to students, conversations about these topics mainly included teachers commenting on the value of working hard in school so that students could enter college following high school and secure higher status employment. For example, Victor made the following observation about his teachers’ comments related to students’ future paths:
They say that it’s important to focus on our studies now because life will catch up to us later. So, we need to focus now so that we can have better opportunities in our future to get into a good college. 

Fernanda reported that, up until the point of the interview, she had only been taught one lesson during her eighth grade year that concentrated on different careers. She found the class to be “very useful.” She noted that even though her teachers did not talk about jobs and college during most of her classes, she had individual conversations with her science teacher about these topics. She said

She [her science teacher] doesn't say it in class, but sometimes I have lunch with her just to talk because I like talking to her. And we’ve talked about colleges and private high schools and everything ‘cause her children went to private high schools.

Two of the students in Pathway A had more extensive college discussions and exposure through programs at Clarkston and in the community. Larissa belonged to a girls’ group at Clarkston that toured a state university. When asked what she learned from the visit, she replied, “That I really want to go to college.” Even though she had previously thought about attending college, the college visit increased her determination to go. Likewise, Thiago had discussed higher education with adults at a Christian camp in the community in which he participated. One aspect of the camp’s mission was to reach out to disadvantaged youth and provide them with opportunities for further education. As part of the camp, adults met with youth participants to consider the prospect of college and to help facilitate access to resources such as scholarships.
In spite of these resources being beneficial to the two students who participated, they were limited in their reach to the student body as a whole. Similarly, while conversations that students had with teachers about college and future planning were helpful, they were inconsistent and did not extend to all students. Several students and parents asserted that discussions about career exploration and college did not need to begin until high school. However, most families argued that there should be increased dialogue about these subjects in middle school to help students plan for the future. Therefore, when viewed in light of the research questions guiding this study about the support offered to families, there was a general sentiment expressed by students and parents in the three intended pathways that they desired more guidance in the students’ educational and career decisions.

**School and Family Relationships**

Another area which this study examined was the relationships and interactions between families and the middle school with the primary purpose of determining resources and supports that were or were not provided for families related to students’ educational aspirations. In general and irrespective of students’ planned pathways, students appeared to be more connected to Clarkston than their parents. Additional assessment of school and family relationships revealed varying perceptions by students and families regarding the school’s cultural sensitivity.

In consideration of school and family relationships, students and parents were asked where they would turn if they needed information about their education. Students were more able than their parents to offer ideas about who they could consult for help and
referred to teachers, the guidance counselor, the social worker, the principal, family members, and even the Internet. On the other hand, parents had a more difficult time articulating where they would seek answers. A few parents who had previously interacted with the school indicated that they would ask their son’s teachers, the guidance counselor, and the main office. However, most parents responded that they did not know who they could ask.

While many of the parents did not know who they would consult about educational questions, the parents for all but one of the 11 students where parent data was reported had met at least one of their son’s or daughter’s teachers, counselors, or other staff members at the middle school. Some of the parents had attended open houses or other events at the school. A couple of parents recounted how the only time they had met anyone at the school was when they were contacted regarding behavior issues with their son or daughter. Other parents described how they had received phone calls from teachers or other staff members with information about meetings or notifications about grades or behavior. For example, Alef received a copy of his daughter’s grades each Friday by e-mail. He explained how this had been helpful in tracking her progress in school and working with her to remedy slipping grades. Sergio related how he had frequented the middle school for special education meetings for his son. He was pleased with the services and assistance that his son received. He commented, “Well, the way I see, parents here have the chance to be a lot more involved than they would in Brazil, and schools expect and require parents to get involved in their children’s education.” In spite of efforts by Clarkston’s staff to reach out to families, or notwithstanding some families
own initiated interaction with the school, several families mentioned that extensive work hours limited their involvement and prevented them from becoming more acquainted with their children’s teachers.

Students and parents also discussed educators’ degree of cultural understanding of the Brazilian population, emphasizing that effective understanding of their backgrounds as immigrants made a difference in their experiences at the school. Families felt supported by teachers who comprehended their background as Brazilians. For example, Leonardo explained, “Yes, they [the teachers] understand my background, my Brazilian. Good thing. They don’t treat me differently. They treat me like anybody else.” His father, Sergio, attributed this understanding of students’ backgrounds to having many bilingual teachers at Clarkston, some of whom were Brazilian. Victor pointed out that the majority of his teachers were Brazilian, and he perceived that they understood him. He said

I think this is important because if a person…comes here from a different culture, without knowing the language, without speaking, and if he or she arrives like that, he or she is unprepared to enter another world. If people already have an idea, preparation for this…then it goes more smoothly for him or her.*

Other students thought that some of their teachers did not understand their background as Brazilians, including the adjustment they faced when transitioning to a new country. For instance, Fernanda described the stereotypes that she believed some teachers had about Brazilians and asserted that there was a need for teachers to empathize with students’ backgrounds. She argued
I think teachers need to understand our stories more and know where we come from….And teachers…they don’t discriminate, but…won't give too much attention to Brazilians because some teachers believe that Brazilians are lazy and they don't care about anything; they just wanna get out of school. So, I think that's why they don’t pay much attention to Brazilians. But I don't think that’s true and all.

Some students contended that their teachers did not recognize the extent to which learning English was a challenging demand in their lives and, therefore, concluded that their teachers did not appreciate their cultural background as much as they should. For example, Juliana suggested, “I think it’s important for them [the teachers] to know that my second language is English, and sometimes they need to slow down.” Victor also maintained that his teachers, especially those who were not Brazilian, did not realize his need to speak Portuguese. He explained

Sometimes they don’t like that we…speak a different language and everything. And sometimes, we talk in Portuguese with a classmate, and he [the teacher] doesn’t understand very well. Sometimes, he thinks we're talking about him; he doesn’t like it….But the Brazilian teachers understand better."

When considering the relationship of Clarkston with families, data from this study imply that students perceived an added measure of confidence in their relationship with the school as compared with many of their parents. This was likely due to students’ daily participation at the school and many parents’ limited interactions with teachers and other
staff members. In spite of this and irrespective of the three intended pathways, students and parents expressed a general satisfaction with their experiences at Clarkston.

**Immigration and Legal Status**

One of the most significant findings of this study relates to families’ legal status, with legal status appearing to have the greatest consequential impact on students’ pathway choices. For many families, discussions about postsecondary options and educational opportunity were inseparable from the subject of legal status. While there was no inquiry during the interviews as to families’ legal status within the United States, in most cases parents and students readily offered this information explaining the effect it had on their daily lives, goals, and aspirations. The legal status of students was mentioned for 12 of the 13 students, with 5 of these students having legal status in the United States and 7 being undocumented. The following two subsections describe the influence of students’ legal status on their educational aspirations and proposed pathways as well as their experiences as immigrants in transitioning to the United States.

**Impact of legal status on students’ aspirations and intended pathways.**

Analysis of the data revealed that students’ pathway selections were likely influenced in large measure by their legal status. This pattern in the data was apparent for both students’ decisions about high school and those related to their postsecondary aspirations.

The majority of students who were documented opted to go to Breyborn, and those who did not have legal status to Saddle Hill. Figure 4.2 below represents the 12 students in this sample where legal status was reported. It shows the numbers of students...
with and without legal status for each of the three intended pathways, including the two tracks for Pathway B.

![Depiction of the number of students with and without legal status for each of the three intended educational pathways.](image)

*Figure 4.2. Depiction of the number of students with and without legal status for each of the three intended educational pathways. (Note. Information highlighted in this chart was voluntarily reported and only represents 12 of the 13 students in the sample. The legal status for one student in Pathway A was not disclosed.)*

Information displayed in Figure 4.2 highlights some general trends among the 12 students in the three suggested pathways for whom legal status was reported. Only one of the students in Track 1 of Pathway B who was going to the technical school had legal status, and none of the students in Track 2 of Pathway B or Pathway C had legal status. On the contrary, four of the six students who wanted to attend the traditional high school had legal status. This finding suggests that legal status may have influenced which high school students chose to go to as well as their determination to pursue college. Students
in this sample who had legal status were more inclined to go to the traditional high school and to have college as a goal. The majority of students who did not have legal status resolved to go to the technical school. Only one of the students who had undocumented legal status and who had decided to go to the technical school was planning on going to college, with the remainder of this group of students being undecided about whether they would pursue higher education. Two of the students in Track 2 of Pathway B who had undocumented legal status would have rather gone to Breyborn but adjusted their expectations because of their legal status; they, therefore, decided to go to Saddle Hill instead.

Data from the interviews supported this finding with over half of the families asserting that their legal status would impact students’ opportunities for college and jobs. While some families discussed their uncertainty about how they would pay for college, many of them had deeper concerns about their legal status and how this would affect students’ options. Many viewed their legal status as an obstacle largely beyond their control. There were two students and their parents in Pathway B who emphasized how legal status had been a primary reason for choosing the technical school over the traditional high school. Students who had legal status seemed to have more choices and portrayed greater optimism about their future.

Cecília and Ronaldo provided an example of how their legal status swayed the decision for their son, Bruno, to go to the technical school. Their preference would have been for him to attend the high school. However, since Bruno did not have legal status and they were uncertain about whether college would be a possibility, they thought that it
was better for him to attend Saddle Hill so he could acquire a job upon graduation. Ronaldo explained, “His desire is to study in college, but we don’t have the documents for him to study. If he stays here for 3 years and studies at Saddle Hill, he can learn something in computers, mechanics, anything.” Cecília added that economic matters were not a determining factor as to whether Bruno would go to college, but the biggest obstacle was the family’s legal status. Juliana also chose to go to Saddle Hill for the same reason. Although she desired a college education, she felt that this was improbable due to her legal status and, therefore, was not making plans to go. She was less optimistic about her future claiming that if she was not accepted to Saddle Hill, she would consider dropping out of school. In Juliana’s own words, she did not choose Breyborn for high school, “Cause I’d waste my time learning, busting my butt off to get good grades. And I won’t be able to make anything with it.” She did not see how she could go to college, and, therefore, decided that the technical school would be better for her so that she could get a job following high school graduation.

Several families planned to return to Brazil if they were unable to obtain legal status in the United States so that their son or daughter could attend college. For example, Leonardo and his father, Sergio, remarked that it was unlikely that he would be able to go to college in the United States because of the family’s legal status. Sergio also explained that he and his wife did not have savings set aside for Leonardo to go to college. However, they regarded college as a necessary endeavor and said that they would “figure it out somehow” (Sergio).
A question arose as to why some students in Pathway A who had undocumented legal status still chose to go to Breyborn and maintained college as a goal. Interviews with the two students and their parents in this category revealed that although legal status was a real concern and a potential obstacle for attending college, these families seemed more determined that things would somehow work out even though they were unsure how. For example, Aléxia pointed out that paying for college without Thiago having legal status was unrealistic. However, he and his mother exhibited greater optimism than some of the other families that he might be able to go to college because of the chance he had of obtaining a university scholarship through a Christian camp in which he participated. However, even if he were granted a scholarship, his mother expressed concern about whether he would be able to use it because of his legal status. Vinicius also intended to go to college but did not have legal status. Vinicius’s parents, Tatiane and Robson, immigrated to the United States because they wanted a better life for their two sons. They observed how their oldest son had a deep desire to go to college but had been unsuccessful in his attempts because of his legal status. He, therefore, had become very discouraged. They were concerned that the failed attempts of his older brother to go to college would dishearten Vinicius as well and negatively influence his commitment to achieving his educational goals. However, in spite of such obstacles associated with legal status, they continued to encourage their sons to work toward realizing their ambitions.

Students and families who had legal status were more optimistic about potential educational possibilities. For example, Victor aimed to go to college in the United States
since he was in the process of obtaining citizenship due to his father’s status as a United States citizen. Even though the family did not have sufficient financial resources to pay for higher education, his father attributed his reason for bringing Victor to the United States to his perception that he would have better educational opportunities. He insisted that somehow they would figure out how to fund college. For this reason, Victor resolved to go to Saddle Hill so that he could work following high school and assist with the costs of higher education. Likewise, Fernanda was determined to go to college and considered it a possibility because of her citizenship. Because her mother did not have the financial means to pay for college and medical school for her daughter, they intended to find support through scholarships. To them, higher education was a necessary step to achieving a good quality of life.

Economic issues were a relevant concern for many families in this study. However, those families with legal status appeared to be more hopeful of acquiring financial aid to fund a college education. On the other hand, families without legal status were less confident about their eligibility for financial assistance and acceptance to institutions of higher education in the United States.

Examining these findings under the framework of the main research question guiding this study reveals a possible correlation between families’ legal status and students’ educational decisions and aspirations. In this study, students with legal status more readily expressed a commitment to higher education in the future and a desire to attend the traditional high school as preparation for this goal. Students without legal status had a greater tendency to choose a technical education which, in their view, opened
up possibilities for employment following high school. Therefore, students’ legal status was one of the most apparent influences on students’ pathway choices. Students with legal status were more inclined to make decisions related to high school and college which were representative of Pathway A, and students without legal status were more disposed to choose options from Pathways B and C. This conclusion is clearly a broad generalization with exceptions manifest in each of the three intended pathways. In addition, the small sample size adds some tentativeness to this finding. However, these patterns in the data demonstrate potential trends which should be examined through further research.

Immigration to the United States: Transition and adaptation. Families embarked on their journeys to the United States with a hope for more desirable circumstances and improved opportunities in the future, including for their children. However, many were welcomed with the realities of living in a new country where life was unfamiliar. Students and families faced difficulties associated with learning English, adapting to a new school environment, and being separated from family and friends. Families’ experiences, in this regard, were common across the three proposed pathways. In spite of challenging adjustments and demands in a new country, most of the families expressed a desire to stay in the United States.

There were two main motives which guided families’ decisions to come to the United States. These were (a) to provide a better future for their children and (b) to pursue improved jobs and opportunities. For instance, Lorena explained that she came to the United States in hope of a better life for her daughter. “I already had my oldest
daughter [Fernanda’s sister]. I wanted to give her the best opportunities. This country, we know, offers many opportunities in all areas.”* Cecília came “because of the situation in Brazil.”* She observed how her family worked hard in Brazil but had difficulty progressing. She reflected on her childhood recounting, “We had no assets. We were raised in a large family with many workers. But we weren’t able to buy land, a house, or establish a company.”* She related how a number of her family members moved to the United States and found more successful employment. She held an optimistic opinion of the United States commenting that, “Everybody has a job today. Everyone works with honesty and succeeds here.”* Éverton came to the United States for economic reasons with the intention to only stay for a short period of time. He attributed his immigration to the United States to inadequate circumstances in Brazil. Referring to his situation in Brazil, he stated, “I lost my job, got my termination letter, and bought a house that was in poor condition. My intention in coming here was simply to work a year-and-a-half or two, remodel the house, and return [to Brazil].”* He ended up staying in the United States, obtaining citizenship, and later bringing his son, Victor, so that he could have better opportunities.

Many families began their journeys with optimistic views about their future and about the new opportunities they perceived were awaiting them in the United States. However, both students and parents soon realized the realities that were associated with establishing themselves in a foreign environment where they were unfamiliar with the language, culture, and other aspects of a new country. In addition, they were confronted
with differences in the school system and with being separated from family and friends in Brazil.

One of the hardest adaptations for both students and parents in their transition to the United States was learning a new language. Many students adjusted to the language demands more quickly than their parents as a result of increased exposure to English at school. On the other hand, most parents did not use English extensively in the workplace or at home. (All but one of the families spoke Portuguese at home.)

Larissa was an example of a student who still experienced difficulty with English even though she had been in the United States for over 3 years. When asked to name her least favorite part of school, she replied, “Some English classes ‘cause they can be annoying just reading and reading.” When prompted to describe what she meant by annoying, she explained

‘Cause… when I read out loud, I have a big accent…like I have right now. So, I don’t really feel comfortable reading out loud. And teachers make us read out loud, and that doesn’t really help….This is the first year that I have classes with all Americans; I only have only two Brazilians in my classes….So, it can make it kind of hard [speaking English]. It’s kind of like I feel kind of shy reading in front of everyone.

When Larissa was asked whether she considered people to have certain expectations of her in school, she responded in the affirmative, commenting

Just being someone…that wasn’t born here, that makes a difference. And English classes especially; they expect us to have the perfect English. But we
don't….They correct us. I don’t really care when they correct us. But it's kind of weird ‘cause everyone is up there on their level, and we're down here.

Parents, likewise, described how learning English was one of their greatest obstacles in transitioning to the United States. Cecilia acknowledged, “It was very difficult because we did not know the language here, and there are few supports.” Over time, she and her husband became more accustomed to English, but were still restricted in what they could understand and speak. She stated, “Now, we understand a little. It’s good. We are able to do well at work. When we don’t know something, Bruno helps us because he is fluent.” Other parents also recognized limitations in acclimating to a new country because of their lack of fluency in English due especially to their minimal interactions with individuals who spoke English.

Language preference was evident during the interviews with students and parents. When given the choice of what language to use for the interviews, 9 of the 13 students chose English as opposed to Portuguese. Of the students who wanted to do the interview in Portuguese, three of them had been in the United States the least amount of time of the students sampled. Only one of the parents chose English as the interview language. Based upon the selected language for the interviews, it appeared that students were more comfortable and familiar with English than their parents.

In addition to language, another demanding adaptation for students in their transition to the United States was becoming accustomed to a new school environment where the organization, rules, and instruction were different. For example, Victor and his father observed that rules in school differed in Brazil and the United States. After he
arrived in the United States, Victor was suspended for running in the hallways at school. Victor said, “In Brazil, we run in the hallway. I ran in the hallway here and got suspended. That was a mistake that ended up giving me a serious problem which was to be suspended.”* His father also commented on the experience:

This is all very new to me because I never participated as a father in a school. It has been 3 months now that I have been participating. So, this is new to me, but I believe that the school’s partnership with parents is very important….Three weeks ago, I was called to go to school because he was having problems for running in the hallway. He can’t do this, but school rules in Brazil are different than the rules here. Until he adapts…I know that I will have to go through these situations. I believe that we have to find a way for the school or the teacher to connect with the family. Today, I don’t have a person that can go to school to resolve some type of problem….While I’m working, it’s just me.”

Other students commented on differences they saw in instructional approaches between schools in Brazil and the United States. For example, Juliana noted, “They are totally different because they teach you different stuff….They have different ways to teach. And math problems, you have different ways of solving them.” Several students considered schools in Brazil to be more rigorous. Others regarded schools in the United States as more organized and friendly.

Families also faced separation from both immediate family members and relatives. Of the 13 students in the sample, nine of them had been apart from one or both parents for varying periods of time ranging from several months to approximately 13
years. For these nine students, either one or both of the students’ parents preceded the student and other family members in coming to the United States.

Victor and his father had been separated for nearly 13 years without seeing one another. Victor’s father left Brazil for the United States when he was 2 years old, and they had not been together until 5 months prior to the interview. The only interaction they had during these nearly 13 years was by phone. Victor explained, “I almost didn’t know my father. I only spoke to him by phone.”* He knew life as it was in Brazil and living with his mother. His parents were not married and had separated. His father originally came to the United States with the intention of staying no more than 2 years. However, his plans changed, and he later gained citizenship in the country. Victor’s mother and father decided to send him to the United States so that he could have better opportunities in life and become a United States citizen. Victor commented on how his transition to the United States and living with his father had been emotionally taxing for him. He stated

It was difficult. I was far from everything, right? Because in Brazil, I had friends, my mom, my dog. And everything became difficult because I left everything and started again from scratch. I started a new life by the side of my dad who I wasn’t that close to. It was difficult.∗

His father, likewise, recognized the emotional demands and adjustments associated with bringing his son to live with him after years of separation. He described the experience as follows:
He was frightened as any other adolescent would be because even knowing that I am his father. There was a big distance between the two of us in relation to each other. He was always very close to his mother. Everything was his mother. So, for me, it is about getting closer. He knows that he has a father. We always talk. But there is distance.*

Even though many families had a difficult time adapting to a new country, most students and parents expressed a desire to remain in the United States irrespective of their legal status. Families’ main reason for wanting to stay in the United States was that it had become a place where they had established their family’s life and where there were increased opportunities for education and employment. Tatiane and Robson’s remarks reflected the sentiments of many families. They related how their two sons had practically grown up in the United States and did not want to return to Brazil. Tatiane indicated that their current plans were to go back to Brazil only to see family members. Robson remarked

How can I tell my children that they have to leave with me? It’s the same thing as if I break the legs of the two of them. I mean, it destroys me or destroys them. If I take them to Brazil today, what will they do? How will they study there if their whole life is here?*

Students’ comments mirrored the same reason that their parents had conveyed. According to Vinicius, he wanted to stay in the United States because, “I think I got used to it or something….I just prefer here.” Several students hoped to live in the United States with the flexibility of returning to Brazil to visit family members. For example,
Larissa intended to go to college in the United States, although she wished to remain connected with Brazil and to return for visits.

An element of fear existed for families who did not have legal status and wanted to remain in the United States. Two of the families in this scenario explained that they intended to return to Brazil at some point in the future because of their legal status. However, if legal status were not an issue, they would have rather stayed in the United States than return to Brazil. For example, Cecília commented, “We plan to go back [to Brazil] if we don’t have documents. Otherwise, I would like to live here. But without documents, it’s not worth staying here.” Cecília and Ronaldo, were actively setting aside money in Brazil so they would have the financial means to return to Brazil if needed. Several other families were also reserving money and/or had homes in Brazil because they either planned to return to their homeland or wanted to leave it as an option.

Students’ experiences as immigrants affected their daily lives, including in their education. For example, they faced a new school environment which was unfamiliar to them. They were expected to learn English with many of them having little exposure to this language prior to coming to the United States. They were far from loved ones in Brazil and largely uncertain when they would see their family and friends again. These experiences caused a degree of insecurity and vulnerability for many of the families, especially those who had undocumented legal status. In spite of this instability, many families desired to stay in the United States, especially since their children had grown accustomed to the country and because of their perception that there were greater educational and employment opportunities.
Summary

This portion of the study sought to understand the experiences and forces that influenced the educational aspirations of eighth grade middle school students who were Brazilian or of Brazilian origin. It considered whether students’ aspirations were connected to postsecondary goals and plans as well as the role that families had on students’ educational decisions. Findings derived from the student and parent interviews are summarized below.

A significant finding of this study was the emergence of three intended pathways that were differentiated by students’ decisions about which high school to attend and their postsecondary goals. Students who planned to go to Breyborn (or high school in Brazil for one student) and then college were grouped into Pathway A; those students who were going to the technical school and then intended to work, go to college, or both comprised Pathway B; and the student who was undecided about high school and college represented Pathway C. Students’ pathway decisions were influenced by a number of factors.

Some of the findings from this study seemed to be particular to the three proposed pathways. Students’ high school plans and college aspirations varied and were the primary distinguishing features of the different pathways. Students in Pathway A who wanted to go to college and who were staying in the United States for high school considered Breyborn to offer better preparation for this goal. Each of the students in Pathway B was going to Saddle Hill and had chosen to do so because of employment possibilities, their legal status, and/or their interest in the technical school’s programs.
The sole student in Pathway C was undecided about which high school to attend and what he wanted to do following high school. Students’ choices in Pathway B diverged when it came to their college aspirations. Students in Track 1 planned to go to college and work after high school, and students in Track 2 intended to work and were uncertain about whether they would pursue higher education. There were only two students (i.e., one in Track 2 of Pathway B, and the other in Pathway C) in this study who demonstrated little interest in going to college. The remaining two students in Track 2 of Pathway B desired a college education but were doubtful about whether this would be possible because of their legal status.

Students’ legal status seemed to affect their high school decisions and college aspirations, thus mainly determining their intended pathway. All but one of the students who had legal status was going to a traditional high school (i.e., either Breyborn or a high school in Brazil), and each of the students who was documented intended to go to college. Of the seven students who did not have legal status, two of them were going to Breyborn, and five were going to Saddle Hill. Of this same group of students, three were planning on college, and four were undecided about higher education. Therefore, students with legal status were more likely to go to Breyborn, and students without legal status were more inclined to go to Saddle Hill. Based upon families’ comments, legal status also influenced whether the students were aiming for college. Students who had legal status seemed to be more hopeful about future educational and career prospects, while those without legal status appeared to have greater concerns about how perceived

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2 Conclusions about legal status are relevant to 12 of the 13 student participants since one student did not voluntarily report this information.
barriers would interfere with their ambitions. In addition, students without legal status were more inclined to adjust their aspirations to accommodate for limitations associated with their undocumented state.

Two additional findings appear to be distinct to the three prospective pathways. One of these was students’ views of people they deemed to be successful. Those students in Pathway A and Track 1 of Pathway B were able to provide examples of individuals they perceived as successful. However, students in Track 2 of Pathway B were unable to name anyone, and the student in Track C hesitated in his response. This raises the question about what kinds of models of success students had in their personal lives and whether this impacted their educational aspirations and pathway decisions. In addition to this finding, students’ recognition of possible jobs for the future varied by their intended pathway. As a broad generalization, students in Pathway A and Track 1 of Pathway B more readily identified jobs with college as an entry-level requirement, and students in Track 2 of Pathway B and Pathway C were more inclined to select jobs with technical training or a high school diploma as the minimal qualifications.

Besides findings which were pathway-specific, some of the conclusions pertained to the sample of students at large. First, students’ families were integral to their educational decisions and proposed pathways in general. Nearly all of the students referred to their families as having the greatest impact on their educational decisions, and students’ parents expressed high ambitions for their children. Furthermore, the majority of the students who were immigrants shared similar experiences and challenges as they adjusted to a new country. For example, they struggled to learn English, confronted a
new school environment where things were unfamiliar (e.g., organization of the school, rules, instructional approaches), and were separated from the comfort of family and friends in Brazil. Students and parents who had undocumented legal status felt a measure of instability in their lives and in the way they viewed their educational and career prospects for the future. Students’ visions of success were comparable across the intended pathways, with students suggesting that working hard to reach one’s goals would lead to happiness and satisfaction in a person’s life. Each of the students had thought about going to college, but knew little about what it entailed. However, students wanted to know more about higher education and to have opportunities to explore possible careers for the future. Moreover, the majority of students were undecided about their future careers.

Therefore, from this analysis of student and parent interviews, it was evident that there were individually related forces that influenced students’ aspirations. Additionally, students’ families and their experiences as immigrants helped shape their educational goals. Some of these factors yielded differences in students’ planned educational pathways, while other forces seemed relevant to the students in general. The following section examines the impact of the middle school on students’ aspirations.

**Brazilian Students and Clarkston: Educating a Diverse Population**

While the main focus of this study was on students and their families who were Brazilian or of Brazilian origin, interviews were also conducted with educators with the goal of considering their roles in the education of these students. This section presents

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3 A list of the educators who participated in this study and their roles can be found in Table 3.3 in chapter 3.
findings related to the school’s efforts of working with immigrant and ELL students, with particular emphasis on students who were Brazilian and of Brazilian origin. Conclusions from this portion of the study are not specific to students’ intended pathways, but rather highlight several factors that educators viewed as significantly impacting immigrant students’ educational experiences.

This section begins with an overview of the educators’ perspectives about immigrant students, especially those who are Brazilian and of Brazilian origin. It also looks at educators’ preparation for working with diverse students through professional development. Career advisory efforts at the middle school level are considered which includes discussions about high school planning, college awareness, and career exploration. Finally, it examines the influence of language proficiency on ELL and immigrant students and the types of support offered through the ESL program and other language resources.

**Who are the Brazilians? Perspectives on Identity**

Some researchers have suggested that the Brazilian population is an “invisible minority” because of the considerable number of people without legal status, thus making it difficult to determine how many Brazilians actually reside within the country (Margolis, 2008; Martes, 2011). In like manner, the classification system commonly used within the United States for identifying individuals’ race and ethnicity generally excludes the option of Brazilian as an identifier which, arguably according to some people, makes it hard to accurately define the Brazilian population (Beserra, 2005; Margolis, 1998; Martes, 2011). The concept of invisibility for the Brazilian population
was evidenced in data from this study in two main areas: (a) the manner in which students were demographically categorized within the district, and (b) the views educators held about their immigrant students. In addition to a measure of invisibility for Brazilian students, educators observed the following areas of Brazilian students’ lives which affected their schooling and contributed to the manner in which their identity was viewed within the school: their previous educational background, their home experiences, separation from family and friends in Brazil, and the degree to which their parents were involved within the school.

The first area of noticeable invisibility for the Brazilian students within the district was the manner in which they were classified by race and ethnicity. Examples of this were apparent on the enrollment form for new students in the district and on the application form for Saddle Hill. When enrolling their sons or daughters for school within the district, parents were issued a registration form which asked them to identify their child’s race and ethnicity from the options that were provided. Table 4.4 below outlines the choices given to parents for noting race and ethnicity.
Table 4.4

Options for Racial and Ethnic Categorization on the District’s New Student Registration Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race (select one or more)</th>
<th>White</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black or African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity (select one)</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Hispanic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parents were not requested to provide further information if they believed that none of the options applied. The form also inquired about students’ birthplace and native language. A similar selection was included in a voluntary section for the application to Saddle Hill which asked students to indicate their race and ethnicity. Table 4.5 below shows students’ choices for race and ethnicity.
Table 4.5

Options for Racial and Ethnic Categorization on Saddle Hill’s Application Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race (select one or more)</th>
<th>White: a person having origins in any of the original people of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black or African American: a person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native: a person having origins in any of the original people of North and South America (including Central America), and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment.</td>
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<td>Asian: a person having origins in any of the original people of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam.</td>
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<td>Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander: a person having origins in any of the original people of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands.</td>
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<th>Ethnicity (select one)</th>
<th>Hispanic or Latino: a person of Cuban, Mexican, Chicano, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture origin, regardless of race.</th>
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A comparison of the enrollment form for new students in the district and the application form for Saddle Hill raised several questions about identity and how Brazilian students were viewed. Amy explained that the majority of Brazilian families classified themselves as White. However, according to the definition of White on Saddle Hill’s application, this option for race may not have accurately represented the Brazilian population. It was not possible to identify all students within the district database who were Brazilian or of Brazilian origin based upon the classification system used at the time of the interviews. The only way to determine those students who were Brazilian was to search for individuals whose native language was Portuguese or birthplace was Brazil.
Amy highlighted potential flaws with this. She illustrated that students whose native language was Portuguese may have been from another country where Portuguese was also spoken. Likewise, as evidenced in this study’s sample, some parents were from Brazil. However, their children were born in the United States and primarily spoke English. Therefore, students’ identities as Brazilian or of Brazilian origin may have been inadequately portrayed in district and school data reported by race and ethnicity.

The second area where the issue of invisible identity was evident was in some of the educators’ views of their immigrant students, including their perceptions of factors that influenced students’ educational opportunities and personal lives. When educators were asked about the immigrant students with whom they worked, half of them responded that they did not see their students as immigrants or were not aware of their legal status and rather considered them from the standpoint of their language needs. For example, when asked about the number of immigrant students in her classes, Tricia replied

I couldn’t tell you [how many students are immigrants]. I could tell you which kids speak more than one language. I couldn’t tell you where they were born because a lot of them were born here. You know, so I don’t really see them necessarily that way….I see them more as second language learners because that more affects how I teach them.

Likewise, Ben emphasized how language was a significant barrier to students’ progress in math. Therefore, he saw immigrant students and ELL students in terms of their
struggles learning English as opposed to where they were from or when they immigrated to the United States.

Even though cultural background was not necessarily the first point of reference when discussing Brazilian students, educators’ comments reflected an acknowledgement of the effect that students’ experiences had on their education. This included inconsistencies in their education, the influence of family life, separation from family members and friends in Brazil, and the degree of parental involvement within the school.

One obstacle for students, as described by the educators, was gaps in their educational background. These gaps were attributed, in part, to differences in curriculum between the schools that students previously attended in Brazil and their current courses of study within schools in the United States. For example, Gabriel explained, “Students may not have all of the preparation that our school needs in order to be successful within this curriculum. They may have had a different curriculum.” Ben pointed out how these curricular differences were manifested in his classroom. He said, “They [the students] always tell me that Brazilian math is different. I always laugh because it's really not different; it's just there's different ways of teaching.”

Another significant theme noted by educators was the influence of family life on students’ schooling. Educators observed that students’ schooling was often disrupted by a number of demands associated with family life. Melissa’s comments accentuated some of the main family obligations noticed by other educators as well:

So, we very often have kids transitioning back and forth, moving back and forth. They will have been here for a half a year…[and] move back to Brazil…. [Then]
they come back…halfway through the year. Or they’re taken out for 3 weeks because they’re going home for a vacation….Or they’re out because if a family member doesn’t speak English, then they’re providing translation services. Or they’re working a second…job to provide for their family, and their schoolwork suffers.

Educators expressed the view that the transitory nature of some students’ stays at Clarkston and interruptions in students’ school days hindered their academic performance and made it difficult for them to keep up with the work.

Educators also depicted the challenging impact that separation from family members and disruptions in caregiving had on immigrant students’ lives. Gretchen, in her work as a guidance counselor, described the effects that she witnessed on students’ lives as a result of being apart from family members:

We've had a lot of students who come to us from Brazil, and they haven't seen their families who have been here in the U.S. for many years. So, they come. And they're a 12-year-old kid. And they're living with their parents, the parents whom they don't necessarily see as parents. And it's hard both for the kids and the parents to kind of bridge that gap. And that's a lot of what we do, too, is talking to the parents about how to get to know your child even though the last time you saw them was they were a baby….It's an emotional roller coaster with the kids who come. And they miss their grandparents or aunts or uncles or whoever has been taking care of them in Brazil….It's an awkward situation to have to get to know somebody and live with them who you don't really know that well.
Another area that affected students’ lives was the degree and nature of parents’ involvement within the school and with their child’s education at home. While it was admittedly a generalization by several of the educators, they discussed an overall trend of reduced participation by immigrant parents at the school. Tricia and Susannah, in their work with a Brazilian group of girls, remarked that they gained insight into the familial factors influencing students’ abilities to focus and to place full attention on school. Tricia related some of the things she learned about parent involvement from her role as a teacher and as a leader of the Brazilian girls’ group:

I think the one thing I’ve learned in this job is that everybody loves their kids and wants the best for their kids. So, sometimes lack of parent involvement is because parents are working three jobs. Sometimes lack of parent involvement is because they don’t speak English, and they are intimidated to come to a meeting….Sometimes lack of involvement is because they’re not educated. I think that if you’ve had a second grade education, it’s hard to really be involved in your child’s education….which doesn’t mean they don’t care about their kids.

She acknowledged that this was a broad statement and clarified that it did not apply to all families. She stated, “That being said, I’ve had plenty of immigrant parents who had high achieving kids who come to open [houses].” Susannah identified some of the responsibilities she had seen many students assume at home because of their parents’ busy work schedules. She observed

The students I see are really caregivers. And that’s what came out in the group that they have responsibilities after school because the parents are working – you
know, the cooking, the cleaning. They have so many responsibilities. If they had the opportunity to be just a kid, a student, and that be the primary focus, I think…the profile would look different.

In spite of the minimal engagement of some parents, educators also recognized the high aspirations that most parents had for their children regardless of their background and educational experiences. For example, Gretchen noted, “The majority of the parents that I have met have been really big supporters of education. I think most parents of any culture appreciate education and want better for their children.”

Overall, there was a measure of invisibility (Margolis, 1998, 2008; Martes, 2011) in the way that some educators regarded their students who were Brazilian or of Brazilian origin. This was apparent in the way in which students were classified according to race and ethnicity within the district as well as some educators’ reduced acknowledgement of students’ immigrant status. For many educators, their awareness of the identity of Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin was more readily molded by their views of students’ fluency in English, their educational background, their home life including separation from family members, and their parents’ involvement at the school.

**Diversity and Professional Development**

Some of the educators at Clarkston had an enhanced understanding of working with diverse populations because of their own roots as immigrants or from previous experience with diverse groups of students. Others, however, were limited in their practice of teaching immigrant and ELL students. In order to strengthen teachers’ skills, professional development at the school was directed toward working with ELL students.
Educators benefitted from this training, but also felt that the professional development program had some limitations.

Because of a significant number of ELL and immigrant students at Clarkston and within the district, a portion of professional development trainings were designed to improve educators’ skills in working with diverse populations. Much of this instruction was specifically related to language acquisition and included teaching strategies that could be used with students whose native language was not English. In addition, district professional development opportunities included study groups and initiatives aimed at incorporating best practices for ELL students within the district and its schools. For example, Amy belonged to a task force comprised of educators throughout the district who collaboratively considered the needs of ELL students. She explained

We’re actually developing guidelines about how to look at English language learners, like struggling students whose first language is not English….We are digging deeper, looking at the data, what their first language [is]….How are their skills, so that we can make sure that we’re providing proper supports and interventions.

While professional development opportunities were helpful in building skills for educators in their work with Clarkston’s diverse student body, educators also pointed to limitations associated with the professional development program. For example, Ben mentioned that he had not received specific training related to teaching Brazilian students. Rather, when needed, he sought advice about working with these students from a colleague who previously lived in Brazil. Tricia explained that professional
development related to teaching ELL students had centered mainly on language. Even though Tricia found this to be helpful, she wanted more instruction about cultural characteristics and differences among the various groups of students at the school. Amy sensed a need for there to be continual professional development concentrated on teaching diverse populations. She commented

But it’s also the type of training that I think has to be ongoing both because it’s a regular part of our school day, [and] it’s part of who our school community is. So, it’s not just like a one-shot thing….Just like for the students, it’s good – repetition. For staff, it is also. Plus there’s always new staff and changes, so I think it’s a really important thing to keep fresh on [strategies for working with ELL and immigrant students].

From the interviews, it was evident that Clarkston and the district organized professional development activities that focused on developing educators’ skills to teach ELL students. Although this was beneficial in building educators’ repertoire, it did not appear that professional development on topics relevant to teaching ELL students was consistent, that there was coverage on the range of subjects seen as relevant by teachers in their work with ELL students, or that it reached all teachers and staff members. Therefore, educators felt that there were areas where the professional development program could be improved to better prepare them for their roles in working with a diverse student population.
Career Advisory in Middle School

Each of the students in the sample had thought to varying extents about their postsecondary aspirations. Some students seemed determined about the general course they wanted to pursue, such as college, while others were uncertain about the direction they would take. I expected that most eighth grade students would still be undetermined in many aspects of their future plans. However, this study presents the argument that career advisory programs should begin before students’ high school years in order to help them begin exploring their options. This section considers the advisory efforts at Clarkston in the areas of high school planning, college awareness, and career exploration. It also presents educators’ observations about the options they saw for immigrant students following high school.

High school planning. One of the developmental milestones for eighth grade students at Clarkston was choosing which high school they would attend, with students having the choice of going to Breyborn or Saddle Hill. Both schools reflected somewhat different approaches in their recruitment strategies and in their dissemination of information to students and parents. Notwithstanding the schools’ extensive endeavors to provide sufficient information to families so that they could make informed decisions about which high school best met their needs, the schools’ efforts had limited outreach to all families.

Saddle Hill reached out to all eighth grade students including those who were not interested in attending the technical school. This was accomplished by a daytime tour of the school for all eighth grade students which showcased the different vocational
programs. In addition, students and parents were invited to attend an open house to learn more about the school’s various programs. Students who were interested in attending the technical school were considered for acceptance based upon their grades from seventh and eighth grades, attendance record, discipline record, and an interview with a member of Saddle Hill’s guidance department.

Breyborn High assumed a slightly different approach to dispensing information to middle school students and parents. Information about the high school was presented by Breyborn’s principal in an assembly held at the middle school for all eighth grade students. Students and their parents were also invited to attend an evening open house at the high school to foster familiarity with the school and course offerings. All students, regardless of whether they planned to attend the high school, were required to complete a registration form selecting the courses they wished to take. As the high school was the default school for all students to attend, having every student register for courses ensured that a schedule was in place if they chose to go to Breyborn, if they were not accepted to Saddle Hill, or if they changed their minds about going to the technical school.

In spite of Saddle Hill’s and Breyborn’s efforts at acquainting students and parents with the two schools, interviews with students and especially parents highlighted the fact that information did not necessarily reach all families. One possible reason that some families did not receive this information was described by Amy who remarked that high school material was mainly filtered through the students who may have neglected to pass it on to their parents. Additionally, a number of students and parents were unable to attend open houses and informational events at the two schools due to work schedules,
lack of knowing about the events, or for other reasons. Several students felt that all students should have an opportunity to tour Breyborn during the school day as they did at Saddle Hill in order to see what Breyborn was like. Some families took the initiative to visit Breyborn and Saddle Hill; however, many parents had not visited either school, and a large number of students had not been to Breyborn. Data from this study showed that not all parents received information about the two schools. Therefore, some of the families’ decisions about which school to attend were based more heavily on perceptions and information provided by friends, relatives, and the Internet.

During eighth grade, students at Clarkston began to be confronted with choices that were consequential to their future educational and career paths, such as which high school to attend. For the majority of students, picking a high school was one of the most influential decisions related to their education that they had made until that point in their lives. Because of the implications that their decisions would have on their future choices and pathways, many students and parents wanted to be able to discuss their options for high school with educators at Clarkston. The middle school and two high schools provided information about selecting a school which was directed toward helping students choose the high school that best fit their needs. However, this information did not reach all families, and some families felt a need for additional assistance from the educators as they navigated this process.

**College awareness and career exploration.** In addition to choices about high school, students had thought to some extent about what they wanted to do after they graduated. Interview questions with educators examined the resources available to
students and families that were designed to assist them in exploring possibilities for further education and careers. Most staff members shared the viewpoint that students should begin planning for their future while they were in elementary or middle school. While not expecting students to make specific plans concerning college attendance and careers, educators believed that this should be a period of exploration and exposure to various options with opportunities for students to discover their interests and possibilities. In spite of this prevailing belief as well as several programs which supported this cause, educators, for the most part, saw a need for more effort to be focused on helping students explore their options.

Some of the educators interviewed in this study maintained that the elementary and/or middle school years should be ones of exploration and discovery rather than involving concrete decisions about postsecondary plans. For example, Jane said, “I think it’s exposure and just maybe talking about different paths that you can take to different goals.” Amy explained that this is a “period of discovery” for students where “people don’t know when they’re 12 to 15 what they want to do.” Throughout these formative years, she indicated that students need supportive adults with whom they can consider different prospects and discuss their goals.

For the most part, educators maintained that not all students should go to college but ought to be given the opportunity. Likewise, people asserted that students should also be presented with other options such as technical training. Gabriel observed how many second language learners had “gravitated towards the trades” rather than a college education as a result of the “limited exposure” they had to postsecondary possibilities.
He perceived a need to “expose” students to the opportunity of both college and technical training. Some people discussed misperceptions about a technical education pointing out that it was often viewed as a hindrance to college acceptance or that it limited students’ career choices. Shelly disagreed with this perspective emphasizing that students who attended Saddle Hill also had opportunities to go to college and to acquire good jobs. Educators expressed the need for students to be aware of their possibilities and to be prepared for college should they choose that path.

There were several programs and initiatives at Clarkston designed to expand students’ knowledge of different types of careers and postsecondary options. For example, Gabriel referenced partnerships that Clarkston had with a handful of community organizations that provided opportunities for students to explore different careers in an afterschool program. He described one partnership with a nearby business where students interacted with scientists by doing experiments with them which, in turn, opened their minds about possible jobs for the future in that field.

Another example of a program focused on helping students explore their possibilities was an afterschool group consisting of approximately eight Brazilian girls. One component of this group was to expose students to educational opportunities through activities such as a fieldtrip to Breyborn and a nearby university. Susannah and Tricia, who co-led the group, as well as other educators at the school, maintained that additional students could also benefit from participating in similar activities. However, because of limitations in resources and capacity, educators at the school were unable to provide
resources such as this group that would have enabled them to reach a greater number of students.

Educators also discussed a newly created mentoring program and its potential to facilitate educational and career exploration for students. This program began the year after the students in this sample graduated from Clarkston. As mentors, teachers were assigned small groups of students to advise throughout the school year. This included meeting with students on a regular basis to track their progress, help them set goals, and reach out to their parents. Although there was no data on the program’s impact at the time of data collection, educators were optimistic that it would have a positive influence on students due to the individualized attention teachers offered to them during the school year and the opportunities it would create for discussing students’ goals and options for the future.

Even though educators believed that students should be exposed to career and educational possibilities during elementary and middle school, and there were some programs in place, there was a general consensus that more needed to be done to assist students in planning for life after high school. People mentioned that efforts related to career development and college awareness were inconsistent at Clarkston and did not necessarily reach the student body as a whole. For example, Melissa indicated, “There isn’t any kind of real program in how each kid can really choose a path.” Some people proposed that one way to address this need would be to incorporate more structured programs about career awareness into the curriculum. For example, Susannah, Gretchen, and Gabriel had talked about the possibility of organizing a school-wide career fair which
would provide students with the opportunity to explore different careers. Others asserted that career awareness needed to begin by helping students understand the reasons behind their schoolwork and the connection to real life. For example, Gretchen identified a common sentiment she heard articulated by students: “I hear kids here in my office saying, ‘I don't know why we're learning this in math. It's so boring. I'm never going to use this.’” She stressed the importance of “making those connections to real life” by telling students such things as, “This is why you're learning this right now. Even if you may not use it in your job, you may use it when you're balancing your checkbook or paying bills when you're an adult.” Therefore, educators contended that career awareness needed to address both exploration of educational and career options and the connection of school to real life.

When considering college awareness and career exploration efforts at Clarkston, it was apparent that educators believed in the value of helping students examine their educational and career possibilities for the future. However, there were few programs and structured resources in place which facilitated this exploratory process for students. Therefore, the majority of educators perceived a need for additional services of this nature.

**Postsecondary possibilities as immigrants.** Educators, particularly those at Breyborn and Saddle Hill, had the opportunity to watch as students planned for life following high school. From these observations, educators noticed the influence of students’ legal status, their educational background including that of family members,
and their experiences as immigrants (e.g., ability to speak English) on their postsecondary decisions.

Educators described some of the ways that they had seen students’ experiences as immigrants affect their educational opportunities. For example, they remarked that families without legal status had greater difficulty accessing financial aid as well as knowing how to complete application forms. They also noted that students often viewed their educational and career options in terms of what their parents and siblings had achieved. Some educators maintained that students with parents who had attended college were more likely to consider going to college for themselves. Gabriel asserted

I think there is a higher probability of students going to college if their parents did because it’s an expectation….I think that the families who do not know that this is an option may not even consider it. So, they gear the students towards the choices of life that are the ones that are familiar to them.

In addition, Gretchen commented that for some students, their unfamiliarity with the English language complicated the college search and enrollment process.

Both Shelly and Adam in their positions at the high school level seemed more aware of postsecondary options for immigrant students as compared with educators at the middle school. Shelly, who worked with students at Saddle Hill to help them plan for life after high school, explained how immigrant students and families without legal status needed to exercise more creativity when making decisions about their future. She outlined some of the options that she had seen immigrant students pursue when they did not have legal status:
I’ve seen a lot of community college just because of the low cost. I’ve seen working mixed with some courses at a community college. I’ve seen some kids go right for a 4-year school, but they live at home and they’re paying the out of state tuition rates….And it’s kind of heartbreaking when you’re working with a student and they’re kind of up against some things that are beyond your control.

Likewise, Adam had also witnessed many immigrant students at Breyborn without legal status go to community colleges following high school. He commented that without legal status, these students were ineligible for government sponsored financial aid.

Educators at both the middle school and high school levels had observed a number of factors that limited immigrant students’ educational experiences and opportunities, especially for those students who had undocumented legal status. In spite of some restrictions for undocumented students, several educators contended that there were postsecondary possibilities for these students and that they needed to keep an open mind about their options. Even with this hopeful viewpoint, most undocumented families in this study had a narrow understanding of their options. Several families indicated that I was the first person to discuss with them topics related to postsecondary education and their experiences as immigrants in the United States. They expressed a desire to have further dialogue with educators and individuals familiar with the college process and immigrants’ rights in order to help them plan for the future. Therefore, when considering the resources and supports available to Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin, students and parents at the middle school level seemed less aware of their possibilities than some of the educators believed they were.
Language

A common theme discussed by educators was the significant effect that a students’ ability to speak, read, and write English has on their academic experience and personal lives. Susannah observed that a primary focus for the school in their work with immigrant students was to assist them in developing their capacity to understand and use the English language. She stated, “They [immigrant students] are here learning English when they first arrive. And that’s the primary focus, helping them have that language…[so] that they can join the rest of the community. And that’s a really tough process.” Educators suggested that a student’s fluency in English greatly enhanced or reduced students’ educational opportunities.

There were a number of resources which Clarkston had to support immigrant and ELL students including an ESL program and a number of bilingual educators. These resources benefitted students and promoted an environment at the school that was sympathetic to their language needs. However, educators also expressed a need for more language resources and bilingual staff to expand the school’s capacity to work with immigrant and ELL students.

Language: A gateway to opportunity. A major finding drawn from educators’ work with ELL students was that proficiency in English appeared to be a gateway to opportunity for students. Students, who were less proficient in English due to such things as their short-term residence in the United States, were often more restricted in their opportunities as compared with students who had greater proficiency. Educators noticed
the influence of language for students in three main areas: (a) their social interactions, (b) the courses they took, and (c) the resources available to them.

Language impacted students’ social interactions. Several staff members referred to a social divide they saw among Brazilians and other students in the school which they attributed, in part, to language barriers and cultural differences. For instance, Ben explained that there are “a bunch of different cliques” in the school. When asked if there were things the school did to break down these groups and encourage diversity, he responded that while that would be “ideal,” the “major problem” was that, “They [students in low levels of ESL classes] don’t speak English….They just can't talk to each other.” Gretchen observed how a number of immigrant students struggled to feel integrated within the school. She said

I think just feeling a part of the school as a whole, especially for our newcomer population, that has just come from another country. And it’s understandable that they would want to feel comfortable and be with kids that speak their same language. But I see in the cafeteria, it's very segregated. We have our Portuguese-speaking students, our Spanish-speaking students, and our English-speaking students. And you can pick them out in the cafeteria. I think I would like to see more of the kids mingling and learning from one another and trying to feel comfortable teaching their friends about where they come from. But it's challenging. They kind of go in groups around the school....They want to be comfortable and be with people who are similar and come from similar backgrounds and speak the same language.
Another area where language influenced students’ opportunities was in the courses they took. For example, Ben saw language fluency affect students’ math placement. He noted that because of students’ varying abilities to speak English, there were often fewer immigrant and ELL students in algebra courses, a gateway course to advanced math courses in high school (Ballón, 2008; Spielhagen, 2006). He proposed, “I think that maybe…they're just not at that algebra level yet because of the language. It's not that they can't do the algebra. It’s the fact that there's just a lot more in terms of the vocabulary.”

The effect of language on Brazilian students’ opportunities was also evident in the restricted number of resources and programs available in Portuguese. This had a particular impact on students and families who were limited in English proficiency. Amy outlined the consequences which she had seen because of fewer language resources in the school and community for ELL students. She noted

There’s definitely some inequities. For example, basic things. Like a lot of times, some of the supports. Like if we have an immigrant student who recently arrived from [Brazil and]…maybe needs some math remediation in Portuguese. We have the equivalent of a Title I program in math, and then we don’t have that in Portuguese. So, there are differences. In terms of like, let’s say it’s somebody who we have concerns with their language processing, and we want to do a speech screening. We have an English speaking psychologist who works at the school [and a] bilingual Spanish [psychologist] who comes occasionally. The
Brazilian/Portuguese-speaking one, it’s much more difficult for her to provide services.

Amy also observed a need for more social services in students and families’ native languages. She explained:

I think one area of need...[is] access to counseling in different languages because especially...for so many people when you’re uprooted and living in a new country and culture, there can be so many issues that come up. Especially, too, if there was a separation from caregivers and then [being] reunited. It can be very challenging. And that’s something that is lacking: access to services...especially in Portuguese. For example, I had a student who [is]...living with his dad. Dad’s primarily Portuguese-speaking. And it was such a long wait to get services for [them]. And so, that’s really challenging because so often when you’re going through a hard adjustment, if you can get support services in the moment, you can alleviate a lot. But then if you’re not able to get them and it goes on longer, it becomes more of an issue.

These limited resources and programs seemed to have a greater impact on students who were less proficient in English as compared to students who had more experience with the English language. Students who were more competent in English were able to access resources in English which were available in greater abundance and variety.

Due to the significant number of ELL students at Clarkston, many educators recounted actions the school had taken to address students’ language needs. Amy
recalled how she had advocated for more immigrant students to take higher level courses in spite of language difficulties:

One of the things that I’ve tried to work hard for is…to make sure that all kids get access to the upper level math classes. So, if kids have the good math skills but maybe not the English, what can we do to support them to get them to take algebra….And so one of the things I started doing was talking to them early on, “Wow, you’ve got really good math skills. I really want you to take algebra next year. But you’ve really got to work on your English skills.” And they were really then motivated. And they were like, “Wow, I can do this.” So, I think that the more we can have those conversations and engage [them]….Also…talking to…the teachers, too, about, “This is really good if you think they can do it, but they’re going to need extra support. And how can that happen.”

Teachers were also instructed in professional development trainings about working with students who had language needs. Many teachers consciously incorporated teaching strategies that were designed for working with ELL students. For example, Ben showed his students in math how to break down word problems so they could understand them more easily. Teachers also drew upon special education strategies which they described as being useful not only for special education students, but also for students learning English.

In summary, Clarkston gave considerable attention to the language needs of the ELL and immigrant students within the school. While language ability influenced some students’ opportunities and experiences, efforts were taken by educators to support them
and to build their own professional knowledge about working with that population of students.

**ESL program and language resources.** Clarkston had an ESL program which was a significant support for ELL students and their parents. Teachers on the ESL program assisted students’ with their language needs so that they could become more proficient in English. Likewise, teachers on the team reached out to parents to encourage them to become involved at the school. While the ESL program was a support for students and parents, there were some limitations at Clarkston in reaching out to bilingual families. This was manifested in a limited number of language resources including those in Portuguese, the length of time that some students remained in the ESL program, and in a shortage of bilingual staff within the school.

Many of the students in this study had been a part of the ESL team either in elementary school, in middle school, or at both levels. At the time of data collection, four students were actively participating in ESL classes and in the program. Teachers on the ESL team were diverse in background and experience which was an asset to their work with the immigrant student population and increased their cultural understanding. Immigrant and ELL students who participated in the ESL program received language support and benefitted from having classes from bilingual teachers.

In addition to offering students language support, the ESL team actively undertook multiple positive initiatives to assist immigrant and ELL students and their families at Clarkston. For example, people referenced the impressive focus of the ESL team in working with families to increase their involvement at the middle school. The
efforts of Ingrid, the team leader, were specifically mentioned as educators credited her for her tireless work to contact parents in an attempt to increase their participation at the school and in the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO). The ESL team was also commended for activities they had organized for the parents of Clarkston’s ELL students. For example, they coordinated an informational event for parents about issues related to adolescence. At this event, presentations were given by the school nurse, school psychologist, and the vision center, and discussions were had about being more involved at the school. Translation was available for those who needed it as well as babysitting services for parents with younger children. People commented on the success of the event and the number of parents who participated.

In spite of notable efforts of the ESL team in working with ELL students and their families, they were also restricted in the services they were able to provide, particularly as a result of limited resources. One of these constraints was related to the transition of students from the ESL program into mainstream classes. During the 2011-2012 school year, modifications to policy requirements reduced the amount of time that students remained in the ESL program. These alterations necessitated the movement of students into the mainstream program at an earlier point in their academic programs. With this change, students who would have received previous language support in language arts and social studies were required to complete these courses at a mainstream level with the support of an ESL immersion specialist in the classroom. Jane indicated that this had been an adjustment for many students as well as for some teachers in “accommodating their [students’] needs.” Likewise, Amy expressed how it would have been helpful to
have more training and professional development to make this update to police more successful. In addition to increased demands on educators as they attempted to help students become accustomed to the mainstream program at an earlier point, many students also experienced academic difficulty as they left the support of the ESL program and entered the mainstream program. Susannah observed how this experience influenced students, stating:

A lot of our students struggle when they reach the mainstream. Once they’ve left the cushion of the bilingual program..., they’re in their own world. When the student transitions to the mainstream level of ESL, they feel more isolated...less seen. They blend in, and that’s a hard transition. They don’t feel the same kind of support. And the thing is that it’s hard to build that kind of connection....A lot of them have a lot of insecurities. They’re with these Americans. They say that a lot. “We’re with these Americans, and here I am Brazilian.”

Another restraint of the ESL program was that some students remained in ESL classes for extended periods of time. Gretchen recognized a need for a more thorough examination of why this was happening. Other educators described the academic difficulties that some ELL students experienced. A complex task for educators in these situations was to determine whether students’ academic weaknesses were a result of learning a new language or because of learning disabilities. This was further complicated when students were new to the district and schools were unfamiliar with students’ educational backgrounds. Furthermore, demands on teachers’ instructional methods occurred when classes were combined with students of extreme variability in academic
competence and needs (e.g., classes consisting of both students who were proficient in English and recent immigrants with limited language ability).

Lastly, even though efforts had been made to hire staff members who had cultural understanding and spoke the main languages of the immigrant students, many educators noted that there was a shortage of people who were bilingual. ESL teachers did most of the translating in the school for teachers who needed to contact families in Spanish or Portuguese. However, this was oftentimes burdensome for the ESL teachers as they had full teaching loads and responsibilities of their own. In addition, at the time of the interviews, there were no members of the guidance department or administrative team who spoke Portuguese. Because of this, educators expressed a need for more bilingual staff at Clarkston.

Clarkston was clearly a school which reflected diversity in its student body with many immigrant students and students with language needs. Because of the significant number of ELL students within Clarkston and the district, efforts were taken to address students’ varying language needs. Students were supported through the school’s ESL program and other language resources; nonetheless there was a need to further strengthen the school’s capacity in this regard.

**Summary**

Findings from the interviews with educators suggest that the identity of Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin was somewhat ambiguous at Clarkston and within the district. For example, students did not have the option of indicating that they were Brazilian on new student registration forms or on the application for Saddle Hill.
Additionally, many of the educators did not appear to be aware of students’ status as immigrants. They seemed more cognizant of such things as students’ language ability, educational background, and the degree to which their parents were involved at the school.

Educators at Clarkston and within the district had professional development opportunities that were designed to improve their skills and teaching strategies for working with diverse groups of students. Often, this training focused on language acquisition for students. This was an asset to educators in their work with students whose second language was English. However, some of the educators felt that there needed to be more consistent and comprehensive training in other areas in addition to language which were specific to working with immigrant student populations (e.g., training about students’ cultural backgrounds).

Educators at Clarkston, Saddle Hill, and Breyborn were also engaged in preparing students in eighth grade for high school. They provided informational sessions at the middle school and offered opportunities to tour the high school and technical school so that students could make decisions that were aligned with their educational pursuits. While there were efforts to assist students with their high school decisions, educators at the middle school recognized that there was little that was done to expose students to different careers and to facilitate their exploration of different postsecondary educational possibilities. They felt that more should be done in this regard.

Consistent with students’ expressions about the difficulty of learning English, educators observed how limited fluency in English impacted students’ educational
opportunities. They noted that students seemed to have more opportunities as their fluency in English increased. Resources, such as an ESL program, were available to support students with their language needs. In addition, a number of staff members were bilingual and were able to work with families whose primary language was Portuguese. In spite of these language resources, educators maintained that they were limited and that more attention was needed in this area.

Conclusion

This study sought to answer the following primary research question: What is the nature of the experiences and the forces that influence the educational aspirations of Brazilian middle school students and students of Brazilian origin in eighth grade? As subsets to this question, this study also examined families’ influences on students’ aspirations. In addition, the resources and supports which were or were not provided by the school regarding students’ aspirations were considered. Data was primarily gathered through semi-structured interviews with students, parents, and educators. Even though the perspectives of parents and educators were included in this study, this research is ultimately about the students, with particular emphasis on their aspirations, experiences, and educational needs.

Each of the students had thought about their future to varying extents and their choices about high school, college, and their future careers. Some students were decided upon their educational courses in one or more of the previously named areas, while other students were uncertain about what they would do. From discussions with students and parents about students’ educational aspirations, three main themes emerged for which
students’ needs can be categorized. They were (a) educational planning during middle school, (b) emphasis on the role of family connectedness and engagement for Brazilian families, and (c) adaptation to circumstances related to immigration status.

One of the areas of need which was of significance to the students in this study is connected to their educational planning. Students who had legal status seemed more confident in their postsecondary educational aspirations and in their determination to pursue higher education. Students who were undocumented tended to feel limited in their educational options and saw their legal status as a barrier to a college education.

Students’ views of successful people also varied. Most students who intended to go to college had ideas of people whom they considered to be successful. However, students who were unsure about college had a difficult time identifying individuals whom they deemed to be successful, thus raising the question about models of success in their lives. Overall, students in this study were largely unclear about the characteristics and requirements of college as well as their possibilities for jobs in the future. Many students and families wanted additional guidance from the educators in selecting a high school.

A second area of need for students in this study is related to family connectedness and engagement. Most students relied upon their parents to some extent for support with their educational decisions. Parents had high expectations for the students in this study, with parents being a primary example of success for some of the students. Families provided what assistance they could to their children throughout their educational journeys. Many students referred to family members as the people to whom they would turn with questions associated with their education. Additionally, students’ experiences
with their families, such as their immigration to the United States, profoundly impacted their lives.

A final area of need for students was related to their adaptation to the United States. With the exception of two students who were born in the United States, 10 of the students in this study’s sample had emigrated from Brazil, and one student had come to the United States for a period of time to learn English. Their transition to a new country could be defined as a period of dislocation and instability which necessitated adaptation on the part of families. During this time of change, students had to learn a new language and to adjust to an unfamiliar school environment. They also dealt with challenges from being separated from family members and friends in Brazil. Students and families without legal status experienced insecurity and fear within the United States. Their legal status also presented perceived limitations related to students’ educational aspirations and future career options.

Clarkston’s efforts aligned with students’ needs in several areas. One of the primary goals of the educators in this study was to help these students develop their English language skills. Through Clarkston’s ESL program and the employment of teachers with diverse backgrounds (e.g., educators with bilingual capability, from another country, trained to work with ELL students), language and academic support was provided for immigrant students as they transitioned to the United States. In addition, bilingual staff members were able to reach out to parents whose native language was Portuguese through efforts such as phone calls and parent meetings. Educators were also trained through professional development workshops on how to improve their work with
ELL and immigrant students, thus enhancing their ability to teach a broad range of students from various backgrounds.

Students were also offered support in the process of choosing a high school through information provided by Saddle Hill, Breyborn, and course recommendations from their teachers at Clarkston. All eighth grade students toured Saddle Hill, and families were given the opportunity to attend an open house at Breyborn, thus exposing them to the two schools’ programs. Information provided by the schools was helpful for many students and families who otherwise may have known little about their options for high school.

While Clarkston did address many of the students’ needs in this study, there were also areas where students and families could have used additional support. These needs will be discussed in further detail in the following chapter, and recommendations will be offered about how to address these areas. However, they are also mentioned briefly in this chapter.

Because of the importance of family connectedness in the lives and intended educational pathways of the students in this sample, there was a need for the middle school to figure out ways to further involve parents at the school and in students’ education. Students and parents wanted more assistance with educational planning, especially as it related to high school decisions, postsecondary education, and career options. Finally, teachers largely recognized students in this study by their language ability. Students were not necessarily seen for their Brazilian heritage as was evidenced in areas such as how they were categorized within the district. Students’ identification
using primarily language may have masked some of their additional needs such as the dislocation and instability they experienced from adjusting to a new school environment and being separated from family and friends in Brazil. Additionally, students’ legal status was not formally revealed to educators. However, this aspect of students’ lives significantly affected their educational decisions and pathway goals.

Having a less direct effect on students, educators at Clarkston and within the district had professional development opportunities which were designed to improve their skills and teaching strategies for working with diverse groups of students. Often, this training concentrated on language acquisition for students. In addition to focusing on language, educators wanted more consistent and comprehensive training in other areas also specific to working with this student population.

Because the sample size of students was only 13 individuals, findings from this study should not be overstated. Also, as this research was exploratory in nature due to its focus being an under-researched area, further examination is needed about the forces that influence the educational experiences and aspirations of Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin, including the effects of current immigration law on students’ educational endeavors.

The final chapter will discuss these conclusions in further detail. It will examine the meaning of these findings using the framework of this study’s research questions and the literature review and will then outline the implications that this has on educational opportunities for students who are Brazilian and of Brazilian origin. It will conclude with
recommendations for working with middle school students who are Brazilian and of
Brazilian origin concerning their educational aspirations and postsecondary pursuits.
CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

Students who participated in this study were Brazilian or of Brazilian origin between the ages of 13 and 15. As young adolescents, they had their futures in front of them. They would have opportunities to decide what interests to pursue, including whether they would go to college and what they would do for a career.

I am particularly interested in this group of students because they are a frequently underrepresented population. I see students who are Brazilian or of Brazilian origin in terms of their potential to achieve academic and career success. However, I have also witnessed the challenges that some students face which hinder their educational dreams. I want students who are Brazilian and of Brazilian origin to be able to realize their goals and find fulfillment in their lives. I also want them to have opportunities in early adolescence to explore their interests and to receive support with their goals.

With these objectives in mind, this dissertation marks the beginning of a journey to discover how I, and others, can better assist the Brazilian student population in attaining their aspirations. Through this research, I set out to examine the experiences and forces that shape the ambitions of students who are Brazilian and of Brazilian origin. I wanted to hear firsthand from students about their goals. I also sought to understand their perspectives concerning the help they receive and the challenges they encounter to their educational pursuits. In addition, I wanted to know more about the role that parents have in shaping their children’s goals, as well as how the middle school influences students’ ambitions.
This chapter begins with a brief summary of this study, including the key findings. This is followed with a discussion of the main conclusions derived from the study’s findings. Finally, the chapter concludes with implications for educational practice, policy, and research.

**Summary of the Study**

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the following research question and sub-questions:

*What is the nature of the experiences and the forces influencing the educational aspirations of Brazilian middle school students and students of Brazilian origin in eighth grade?*

1. What are the educational aspirations of Brazilian middle school students and students of Brazilian origin in eighth grade? Are these aspirations connected to postsecondary goals and plans? If so, how? If not, why?

2. How do the experiences, resources, and the forms and distribution of capital (i.e., social and economic) of students’ families influence students’ educational aspirations?

3. What resources and supports are, or are not, provided for students and parents by the school and community relating to students’ aspirations? Do the efforts of school and community adults align with students’ and parents’ needs and goals concerning students’ educational aspirations? If so, how? If not, why?
Because this study concentrates on an under-researched area, it was designed to be qualitative and exploratory in nature (Patton, 2002). This approach allowed me to examine students’ perspectives about their educational experiences and aspirations. It also provided a framework for considering parents’ and educators’ influence on students’ educational experiences. Primary research methods consisted of semi-structured interviews with students, parents, and educators as well as the collection of demographic information and other relevant documents.

This study is supported by research in three main areas. First, a review of literature about the Brazilian population in the United States was included with information about the education and employment of Brazilians, the role of relationships and networks, and issues surrounding language. The next area of research that was addressed was about early adolescence and schooling. This section specifically focused on students’ academic achievement and motivation; influencing forces on students’ aspirations and achievement; career exploration and postsecondary educational planning during early adolescence; student voice and involvement; and considerations of culture, race, and ethnicity. Finally, the concepts of social and economic capital were outlined since these theories were used as the theoretical framework for this dissertation.

The main research question guiding this study focuses on the experiences and forces that influence the educational aspirations of Brazilian middle school students and students of Brazilian origin in eighth grade. Answers to this question are addressed through the sub-questions that concentrate on students’ aspirations, the influence of their
families, and the role of the school and community. Findings from this study are articulated below using the framework of the sub-questions.

**Students’ Educational Aspirations**

The first set of sub-questions was the following: What are the educational aspirations of Brazilian middle school students and students of Brazilian origin in eighth grade? Are these aspirations connected to postsecondary goals and plans? If so, how? If not, why? A primary reason for this specific inquiry was to examine students’ decisions about which high school to attend as well as whether they intended to pursue postsecondary education after high school. Also of interest were the rationales that motivated students’ ambitions.

The educational decisions for the students who participated in this research can be categorized into one of the following three intended pathways: (a) Pathway A: high school and college; (b) Pathway B: technical school, work, and college or the possibility of further education; and (c) Pathway C: indecision about high school and college. These proposed pathways reflected students’ high school plans and postsecondary educational ambitions.

All but one of the students had decided where he or she was going for high school. Of the 13 students included in this study, six of them planned to go to Breyborn, one student was returning to Brazil for high school, five students were going to Saddle Hill, and one student was undecided about where he would go. Students’ decisions to attend Breyborn and the high school in Brazil were connected with their desires to go to college. Students who chose to go to Saddle Hill were doing so because they wanted to
be able to work after high school, because of their legal status, and/or because of their interest in the programs at the technical school.

In terms of postsecondary education, 9 of the 13 students intended to go to college. The remaining four students had contemplated higher education as a possibility, but were unsure if they would pursue this course. Students who wanted to go to college were influenced by one or more of the following things: their parents’ expectations, the educational experiences of family members or lack thereof, their personal interests and goals, and/or their desire for a successful career and future. Students who were tentative in their commitment to higher education were either uncertain about the possibility of going to college because of their legal status, or they had little interest in pursuing more schooling.

Families’ Experiences and Forms of Capital

Another purpose of this research was to examine the role of families on students’ educational aspirations. This objective was addressed by the following sub-question: How do the experiences and the forms and distribution of social and economic capital of students’ families influence students’ educational aspirations? Findings from this study illustrated that families were involved in students’ educational decisions. Families’ experiences and possessions of capital seemed to make an impression on students’ educational ambitions.

There were several experiences that were common among the majority of families in this study and which had an effect on students’ intended educational pathways. Perhaps the most defining experience for a number of students, however, was their
family’s immigration to the United States. In particular, families’ legal status appeared to shape a number of students’ high school decisions and aspirations for college. Students who had legal status were more likely to go to Breyborn (or high school in Brazil in the case of one of the students) and to plan on college. On the contrary, more than half of the students who were undocumented intended to go to Saddle Hill. The majority of undocumented students who were going to the technical school were also uncertain about whether they would pursue college, with some of them attributing their indecision to their legal status. Some students and parents also mentioned how their undocumented legal status would affect students’ future opportunities for jobs. The limited educational and career experiences of many parents also seemed to mold the expectations that they had for their children. While many parents wanted better educational and career opportunities for their children than they had experienced, several students recognized the economic and educational limitations of family members such as the challenges associated with their parents’ lower status jobs (e.g., working many hours with limited pay). Consequently, these students indicated that they wanted something different for their lives.

In addition to considering the impact of families’ experiences on students’ educational aspirations, this study also examined the social and economic capital possessed by students’ families. For example, interview questions sought to understand the relationships and resources available to students and parents that provided guidance concerning students’ educational endeavors. Likewise, questions also addressed whether families’ finances would affect students’ opportunities for higher education. Findings
suggest that families’ social capital was more relevant to students’ educational decisions than was their economic capital, at least at the point in students’ educational careers at the time of the study. While the costs of higher education were a potentially relevant matter for families, other issues, such as legal status, seemed to be more pressing concerns. It is hypothesized that economic capital may become more significant as students near the time when they apply to and enroll in higher education.

For the purposes of this study, social capital was viewed as the knowledge, resources, and associations that were, or were not, available to families that provided assistance to students along their planned educational pathways (Bourdieu, 1986; Burt, 2005; Coleman, 1990; Granovetter, 1973, 1983). The majority of parents in this study appeared to have few connections and networks outside of their immediate family relationships and the Brazilian community to assist them in supporting their children’s educational endeavors. Also, many parents were limited in English proficiency, which, therefore, restricted their associations. On the other hand, students seemed more confident and clear in terms of whom they could consult about their schooling. This could be because of their relationships with the educators at Clarkston and their greater competence with English.

Findings from this study suggest that the social capital of parents may have relied largely on stronger social ties, thus limiting these parents’ access to resources and knowledge related to educational planning for their children that were available through weaker associations (Granovetter, 1973, 1983; Woolcock, 2001; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). Even though students knew more educators at Clarkston than their parents did,
results of this study also show that students’ ties at Clarkston did not necessarily provide all of the resources and support that students felt were needed with respect to their educational planning (e.g., there were few opportunities for career exploration).

**Resources and Supports from the School and Community**

The final group of sub-questions was the following: What resources and supports are, or are not, provided for students and parents by the school and community relating to students’ aspirations? Do the efforts of school and community adults align with students’ and parents’ needs and goals concerning students’ educational aspirations? If so, how? If not, why? Findings from this study showed that the school appeared to have a more influential role than the community in supporting students in their intended educational pathways.

There were several areas where Clarkston offered resources and supports related to students’ educational aspirations. As described by families in this study, Clarkston and the two high schools provided guidance concerning students’ transition to high school. This included information that was distributed to families about the two high schools and personalized recommendations for the courses that students could take at Breyborn. Clarkston also had several programs that were designed to expose students to the possibility of college and to different occupations, although these resources were limited in the number of students that they were able to reach. At the time of the interviews with the educators, Clarkson was also piloting a new mentoring program intended to provide individualized academic advising for students.
When examining whether the efforts of school and community adults aligned with students’ and families’ needs and goals as this related to students’ educational aspirations, data showed that there were areas where students were supported in their educational endeavors by the middle school and high schools in the area. For example, students and parents benefitted from the information provided about the two high schools. In addition, students who had the opportunity to participate in programs that considered various postsecondary and career options found them to be useful. However, some of the students and parents wanted more personalized assistance with selecting a high school as well as further opportunities to investigate postsecondary educational and career options.

The primary purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the educational aspirations of Brazilian middle school students and students of Brazilian origin. This study specifically focused on students’ middle school years because of the belief that educational planning concerning postsecondary pursuits needs to begin prior to high school. Through this research, the intent was to better comprehend the experiences and forces that influenced students’ proposed educational pathways during this developmental period. With this objective in mind, the sub-questions were designed to address these specific goals. Findings from this study suggest that students did have aspirations for the future, and that there were experiences and forces that influenced their decisions, including families’ immigration experiences and legal status, parents’ expectations and support, families’ social capital, and educational guidance provided by the school.
Conclusions and Discussion

There are three main conclusions that were derived from the findings of this study and which highlight the needs of the student participants. They are (a) educational planning during middle school, (b) the role of family connectedness and engagement for Brazilian families, and (c) adaptation to circumstances related to immigration status. These conclusions were informed by interviews with students, parents, and educators. They are discussed in further detail below, drawing upon relevant literature and results from the study.

Educational Planning

This study examined the role that the middle school years had on students’ educational planning. Findings from this research emphasized how students in middle school had thought about what they wanted to do following high school. Students’ goals were influenced by their relationships with other people, particularly family members and educators at Clarkston.

This study is founded upon the argument that the middle school years are a critical developmental period in the lives of adolescents. During this time, students’ decisions and opportunities can affect their prospective educational and career pathways (Akos et al., 2004; Arrington, 2000; Hill & Tyson, 2009). Because middle school is a period where students are establishing their self-identity and where their decision making can influence future options, some researchers have argued that the middle school years should include opportunities for exploring different educational and career possibilities (Akos et al., 2004; Arrington, 2000). While it is likely that students will be undecided...
about their postsecondary plans during middle school, this study proposes that it is too late to wait until students are in high school to begin discussions about postsecondary planning (Akos et al., 2004).

During this period of academic and career exploration and development, adolescents’ relationships with other people provide guidance and support with choices related to their educational pathways. Based upon his study of Mexican high school students who had undocumented legal status in California, Gonzales (2010) concluded that adolescents are at a developmental stage where they are gaining independence but still require a great deal of guidance and help in opening doors. Most adolescents, whether documented or undocumented, require adults to shepherd them through important transitions. School provides students with the first opportunities to form important relationships outside the household. The development of these relationships is critical to gaining guidance and support. (pp. 482-483)

Therefore, Gonzales’ comment suggests the importance of students’ relationships with educators to help guide them through the transitions of adolescence.

Findings from this study suggest that the educational planning that occurred at Clarkston focused mainly on students’ immediate educational needs. Little emphasis was placed on exploring postsecondary educational opportunities and potential careers. Students and families were appreciative of the educational support that they received from the middle school, but had a desire for more guidance regarding high school selection and postsecondary planning.
This study drew upon the theoretical framework of social capital to examine students’ relationships with their families and educators at the middle school. The intent was to see how these connections influenced students’ educational aspirations. The theory of social capital considers how people’s relationships and networks facilitate access to knowledge, resources, and expanded opportunities (Burt, 2005; Fukuyama, 2001; Granovetter, 1973, 1983). Relationships can vary in strength, thus yielding different outcomes (Granovetter, 1973, 1983). A person’s closer associations are generally more available and inclined to be of assistance (Granovetter, 1973, 1983). However, as people move beyond their immediate social networks, they tend to have greater access to resources and information that are not necessarily accessible through their closer ties (Burt, 2005; Granovetter, 1973, 1983). Trust in relationships has also been linked to an individual’s degree of social capital (Fukuyama, 2001; Woolcock, 2001). According to Fukuyama (2001), as a person’s radius of trust increases, so does his or her access to resources.

Results from this study suggest that families’ social capital rested primarily with their stronger ties (Granovetter, 1973, 1983). Students’ main relationships appeared to be with their families, friends, and the educators at the school. Parents’ social ties seemed to be predominately centered on their families, friends, and associations at work. Also, most families did not seem to be heavily engaged in networking beyond their immediate spheres of influence. For example, the majority of parents were limited in their interactions with educators at Clarkston. Additionally, many parents struggled with communicating in English, which also restricted their interactions with those outside of
their immediate networks. Based upon several parents’ comments, families who were undocumented may have also been hesitant to establish relationships with individuals outside of their immediate network of family and friends because of fear that their legal status would be discovered.

Fukuyama (2001) contended that the radius of trust for Latin American families may be smaller because of their close connection to family and friends, thus leaving their social capital linked mainly to these relationships. This claim appears to have some relevancy to the families in this study. Families’ limited ties to social networks outside of their immediate connections, including parents’ minimal involvement with the middle school and organizations in the community, may have narrowed their access to information and resources that could have provided support with students’ educational planning. Woolcock and Narayan (2000) argued that a person’s social relationships can be a medium for tapping into valuable resources. However, the connections that people do not have can also preclude them from useful assistance (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000).

This study suggests that both families and the middle school played a role in students’ educational lives. However, when considering the importance of the early adolescent years related to students’ choices about their educational pathways, and when viewing families’ relationships with the school and community, several questions emerge about areas of possible need for students and parents. For example, how could stronger ties among families and school and community organizations increase families’ access to resources and strengthen parents’ capacities to support their children with their educational aspirations? Additionally, what could be done to fortify the weaker ties or
connections between families and schools, whether according them equivalent priority or
drawing them into parents’ webs of stronger ties? Findings from this study also suggest
that there was limited communication between the middle school and families about
students’ longer-term goals and needs (e.g., the impact of legal status on students’
aspirations). Hence, this raises the issue about how better communication between
families and schools could provide greater direction for students throughout their
educational journeys. Finally of note is the way that many students’ educational
ambitions were connected to postsecondary plans. Many students had discussed ideas
about college and possible careers with their parents and family members. However,
little emphasis was placed on college preparation or career exploration at the middle
school. Therefore, the question becomes how schools and families can work in a more
collaborative and united way to provide guidance related to students’ aspirations.

Family Connectedness and Engagement

A second area of importance in this study was the role of families in students’
schooling. This study illustrated that families, especially parents, provided guidance for
students concerning their aspirations and, thus, cannot be removed from the process of
educational planning. Families possessed their own ambitions, strengths, and resources
which affected students’ educational decisions and intended pathways. Therefore, the
family unit was also a source of capital for students.

Social capital theory is of importance to this study because it provides a
framework for examining sources of support for students and parents. However, the
concept of social capital seems to be more attentive to relationships outside of the family
unit, thus minimizing the function of families in students’ educational aspirations and goals (Belcher, Peckuonis, & Deforge, 2011; Gofen, 2009). Discussions of social capital often claim that weak ties, generally implying relationships and networks beyond the family unit, provide the greatest access to resources which promote social mobility and expanded opportunity (Burt, 2005; Fukuyama, 2001; Granovetter, 1973, 1983). While there may be truth in this, reliance on the theory of social capital to understand students’ educational endeavors has a tendency to diminish the role of the family and the strength and influence that students can derive from familial relationships.

Findings from this research suggest that the family unit can be a source of capital for students in their pathway decisions, even in spite of challenges that they confront. Some researchers have considered how a supplemental concept to social capital, known as family capital, enhances the understanding of families’ experiences and the resources and capital that families have within their own family unit (Belcher et al., 2011; Cohen, Ooms, & Hutchins, 1996; Gofen, 2009; Parcel, Dufur, & Zito, 2010; Swartz, 2008). In her study of first-generation Israeli college students, Gofen (2009) indicated that discussions related to the value of social capital in educational attainment frequently overlook the integral role of families in students’ educational pursuits. She explained

Unlike the term social capital, which focuses on interpersonal relationships and does not explicitly refer to the family – the term family capital both acknowledges the unique and vast influence a family exerts on its children and reflects additional channels through which the family influences its children, such as priorities, habits, and values. (p. 115)
Gofen (2009) further argued that many previous studies about first-generation college students depict them as “as succeeding despite their family background” (p. 114). However, her research demonstrated that “…although they [families] face many material challenges, the families of first-generation students are often a key resource rather than a constraint” (p. 114). Even though Gofen’s study was based upon a population of students from Israel and may not be entirely generalizable to students and families who are Brazilian or of Brazilian origin within the context of the United States, her conclusions raise relevant considerations about how families are involved in students’ choices related to their educational pathways.

Family capital was defined by Cohen et al. (1996) as the “resources and relationships needed to create and sustain strong families” (p. 8). Cohen et al. further explained that, “Family capital represents the resources that a family develops to help its members function effectively: the capacity to master its developmental tasks, meet its social functions and responsibilities, and mobilize the formal and informal resources in the community” (p. 8). In their work on families, both Swartz (2008) and Gofen (2009) related family capital to families’ investments in resources, particularly those that are non-materialistic, for the benefit of the family’s future. Therefore, families continually make decisions based upon their resources and limitations (Belcher et al., 2011; Moen & Wethington, 1992). Oftentimes, the focus of families’ investments is on the children in the family with the purpose of supporting their achievement, growth, and success in the future (Gofen, 2009; Parcel et al., 2010; Swartz, 2008). Family capital can have a cumulative effect on the lives of family members (Belcher et al., 2011; Cohen et al.,
Cohen et al. (1996) explained that families are constantly changing and adapting as they experience the developmental stages of life. Investments in family capital during these life stages can affect families’ “social and economic productivity” at later points (Cohen et al., 1996, p. 5).

In some instances, discussions about educational attainment label some students “at-risk,” emphasizing how certain characteristics of families can decrease students’ likelihood of achievement (Choy et al., 2000; Horn & Chen, 1998). Such viewpoints may divert attention away from what families have to offer concerning students’ schooling. This study showed that families who may be deemed to have low levels of social capital still wanted their children to experience success in life. Families’ undocumented legal status and their access to few social networks beyond the family unit did not mean that parents did not want their children to go to college and to have a good job. Rather, parents hoped to provide the best opportunities for their children within the confines of their circumstances. In fact, parents were even willing to make sacrifices (e.g., to remain in the United States in spite of their undocumented legal status) for their children to help them to take advantage of what they perceived to be the best possible opportunities for their lives.

This study demonstrates a need to further consider the role of the family in relation to the educational decisions and intended pathways of Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin. This chapter introduces the concept of family capital as an additional way of looking at families’ influences on students’ schooling (Belcher et al., 2011; Cohen et al., 1996; Gofen, 2009; Swartz, 2008). Educational research often
considers what connections and resources families have outside of the family unit as sources of capital. However, findings from this study suggest that attention also needs to be given to the internal functioning of the family unit as a source of capital. This research shows that parents held high aspirations for their children, with many of them giving up personal ambitions in hopes of providing a better future for their children. Likewise, most students esteemed their parents and family members as having the most profound influence on their educational decisions. Therefore, conclusions of this study suggest that students’ families cannot be removed from the educational journeys of the students.

Adaptation

Results from this study also highlight the notable influence that students’ experiences as immigrants in the United States had on their educational decisions and intended pathways, especially in terms of their families’ legal status. Families who had undocumented legal status confronted limitations to their children achieving their educational goals, with many students needing to adapt their aspirations to varying degrees.

Literature on the Brazilian population within the United States is scarce when it comes to addressing the implications of families’ legal status on the educational and career opportunities for Brazilian adolescents. Consequently, it is necessary to turn to other sources that offer insight on the ramifications of undocumented legal status for the lives of youth within the United States. Research of this nature is particularly relevant.
because legal status profoundly impacted the educational decisions and proposed pathways of a number of students in this study.

Some researchers have shown that there are differential educational opportunities afforded to undocumented immigrant students in K-12 education as compared with higher education (Frum, 2007; Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012; Gonzales, 2010, 2011). Students in grades K-12 are entitled to a free public education whatever their legal status (Frum, 2007; Gonzales, 2011; Olivas, 1986). However, once students graduate from high school, education becomes increasingly difficult to access for many students who have undocumented legal status (Frum, 2007; Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012; Gonzales, 2009; Menjívar, 2008). While immigrant students may encounter multiple barriers to pursuing higher education, two main limitations include students’ undocumented legal status and their financial situation (Frum, 2007). For example, students’ undocumented status precludes them from receiving financial aid in most states and makes them ineligible for federal financial assistance (College Board, 2012; Frum, 2007; Gonzales, 2010). Additionally, many states require undocumented students to pay non-resident tuition at public colleges and universities (Frum, 2007; Gonzales, 2010). Therefore, these conditions augment the cost of higher education for undocumented students, thus diminishing the feasibility of attendance for many individuals (Frum, 2007; Gonzales, 2010).

Legal status is frequently underemphasized in primary and secondary schools as a relevant matter for students’ decisions related to their educational pathways (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012). However, Gleeson and Gonzales (2012) argued that inattentiveness to
this crucial economic as well as aspect of the lives of undocumented immigrant students may leave them unprepared for a future in the United States. Students may expect to remain in the United States after high school to pursue college and work, only to find that they are confronted with impediments to their plans because of their undocumented legal status (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012). Gonzales (2011) referred to this period of leaving the protection of K-12 education and transitioning into adulthood as “developmental limbo” for undocumented students, explaining that this is a time when these students confront the reality of their legal status (p. 616).

Educators at the middle school viewed immigrant students mainly in relation to their language needs. As a result, other relevant characteristics and circumstances of students’ lives (e.g., their transition to the United States) were minimized or overlooked by the school. Also, there appeared to be few discussions with students and parents about educational possibilities for immigrant students following high school.

Many of the students and their parents who were undocumented seemed to be aware of some of the potential constraints of their legal status and how this might affect students’ educational and career possibilities. However, very few of the families associated these inherent obstacles with economic concerns. One hypothesis for families’ lesser consideration of the financial obligations of higher education could be related to students’ developmental stage as middle school students at the time of data collection for this study. As students were in eighth grade when this research was being conducted, economic limitations may have seemed less restrictive, relevant, or imminent than the more tangible and immediate concerns connected with families’ legal status. One
conjecture derived from this hypothesis is that economic capital may become more important to families as the time nears for these students to apply to and begin college.

Students’ uncertainty about future possibilities because of their legal status also raises the question of whether the educational goals and plans for undocumented students can really be defined as aspirations. Students in this study differed in their intended pathways, with some students basing their decisions upon ambitions and dreams, and other students modifying their pathway choices in light of perceived limitations. Even though students were only in middle school at the time of this study, this research demonstrates that students were already aware of potential impediments to their educational dreams and ambitions. Referring to undocumented students, Gleeson and Gonzales (2012) stated

…an education in the absence of a pathway toward legalization prepares students for certain failure while leaving them unprepared for the day-to-day undocumented adult life that awaits them once they leave the protections of school. Survival requires them to mute the expectations and aspirations they developed in school and to learn how to get by in harsh labour markets. In essence, these students must prepare belatedly to join their parents as members of an exploitable labour force. (p. 14)

While students’ aspirations may not be completely quelled as Gleeson and Gonzales (2012) proposed is possible, this conclusion does give rise to an area worthy of attention about how and why students’ educational plans can change based upon their legal status. Because this research is not longitudinal in nature, it is difficult to assess
whether those students without legal status will encounter the obstacles referenced in the research included in this section. However, the literature and this study’s findings suggest that there is a need to further investigate the implications of undocumented legal status on students’ intended educational pathways and to consider possible solutions.

The main conclusions of this research concentrate on the needs of students who are Brazilian and of Brazilian origin, especially as this relates to educational planning, family connectedness and engagement, and students’ adaptation as immigrants within the United States. Since this study draws upon data collected from a single research site and was limited in the number of participants, caution should be exercised in making excessive generalizations on the basis of these results. In addition, because few, if any, studies exist on the Brazilian population of students during their middle school years in relation to their educational aspirations, further investigation is needed to examine how the conclusions of this research may or may not apply to other groups of Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin. However, in spite of these limitations, conclusions from this study provide a starting point for understanding the needs of these students during their middle school years.

**Toward a Theory of Understanding Brazilian Middle School Students’ Aspirations**

One possible theoretical approach for better understanding the needs of Brazilian middle school students and students of Brazilian origin in developing their educational aspirations is through integrating the theories of family capital (Belcher et al., 2011; Cohen et al., 1996; Gofen, 2009) and social capital (Burt, 2005; Granovetter, 1973, 1983). Uniting these concepts highlights two primary areas where emphasis should be
given when working with Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin and their families to advance students’ educational aspirations. First, family capital highlights the important role that Brazilian families have on molding students’ intended educational pathways. Second, the theory of social capital emphasizes the need for Brazilian families to develop weaker ties beyond their close networks of family and friends as a means for accessing knowledge and resources that further students’ educational opportunities (Burt, 2005; Granovetter, 1973, 1983).

As introduced previously, the concept of family capital provides a means for examining how families’ experiences, resources, and beliefs shape students’ educational decisions and aspirations (Belcher et al., 2011; Cohen et al., 1996; Gofen, 2009). Data from this study show that for most students, their families had the most significant influence on their educational decisions. However, the family capital of Brazilian families seemed to be regarded as an underestimated asset by the middle school and community. For example, data showed that there was minimal interaction between the middle school and families, thus suggesting that the school organization was largely unaware of families’ contributions to students’ educational decisions and endeavors.

While families did provide guidance and resources for students’ throughout their education, many families also contended with limitations and restrictions when realizing students’ aspirations. In his research on undocumented migrants in the United Kingdom, Sigona (2012) explained that undocumented participants in his study experienced a “continuous negotiation between their needs and aspirations and the constraints because of their lack of status” (p. 62). Data for this study suggest a similar dilemma in the lives
of undocumented Brazilian families. Many of the undocumented students and parents who took part in this study continually tried to reconcile the limitations of their families’ legal status with students’ educational needs and aspirations. This “continuous negotiation” (Sigona, 2012, p. 62) was realized within a dynamic that centered on students’ families.

While Brazilian families are a strong influencing force on students’ educational aspirations and intended pathways, family capital for many families may not be a source of sufficient capacity for families to remedy problems of educational inequity and opportunity. For example, families with few weak ties may be limited in knowledge and resources that would further develop students’ educational aspirations and assist them in preparing for college (Burt, 2005; Granovetter, 1973, 1983). Therefore, relying solely on the concept of family capital precludes the importance of families’ social ties as a means to accessing resources, knowledge, and opportunities which are not available within the family unit (Burt, 2005; Granovetter, 1973, 1983). For the families who participated in this study, a significant shortcoming of their family capital was the absence of weak ties as a connection to knowledge and opportunities which could have improved students’ likelihood of a college education (Burt, 2005; Granovetter, 1973, 1983).

This study, therefore, proposes that in order to assist Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin in realizing their aspirations, family capital should be acknowledged and viewed for the ways in which it influences students’ educational planning and decisions. In addition, Brazilian families should be assisted in expanding their social ties beyond their strong networks of family and friends as a means of
accessing educational resources and opportunities (Burt, 2005; Fukuyama, 2001; Granovetter, 1973, 1983). As this study was small in scope, this theory should be developed and supported through further research.

**Implications**

This study is novel in its scope because it explores a relatively unexamined population of students at a time in their lives that is foundational to their future educational and career development. As such, results of this study provide valuable insight into the perspectives and experiences of families who are Brazilian and of Brazilian origin concerning students’ educational aspirations and intended pathways. Implications derived from the conclusions of this study are outlined below, offering considerations and recommendations for educational practice, policy, and research.

**Educational Practice**

Contemplating the implications of this study’s conclusions for educational practice elicits two main areas to which educators could turn their attention in order to strengthen their work with students and families who are Brazilian or of Brazilian origin. They are (a) enhancing educational planning and career exploration during the middle school years and (b) fortifying family, school, and community partnerships.

**Enhancing educational planning and career exploration.** Findings from this study suggest the need for more attention at the middle school to postsecondary educational planning and career exploration. There were several programs and initiatives that addressed college preparation and career exploration at Clarkston. However, these programs had limited outreach to the student body at large. Results of this study, with
support from the literature, demonstrate the need for middle schools to re-examine their efforts concerning educational planning and career exploration.

The middle school years have been depicted as a period of rapid development for adolescents (Cushman & Rogers, 2008; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Wheelock & Dorman, 1988). During this time, it is “developmentally appropriate” for middle school students to be undecided about their future educational and employment pursuits (Akos et al., 2004, p. 54). However, in spite of the uncertainty that students may experience during this period, their decisions can have lasting effects on their future educational and career pathways (Akos et al., 2004; Arrington, 2000; Hill & Tyson, 2009). Therefore, providing students with opportunities to explore different careers promotes self-discovery and can lead to the maturation of students’ aspirations (Akos et al., 2004; Arrington, 2000).

There are a variety of ways that middle schools could encourage the further investigation of postsecondary and career options for adolescents. One possibility could be to embed career exploration into the curriculum. For example, students could be assigned to interview a college student or graduate about what higher education is like for their language arts class. They could then write a brief paper about their conversation and present what they learned to the class. Another idea would be to implement a separate career development program. Weekly classes could be held for all students consisting of discussions and activities that encourage exposure to various careers, preparation for postsecondary education, and the discovery of personal interests. Guest speakers could also be invited to the middle school to talk with students about jobs, higher education, and preparation for life after high school. Middle schools could also
organize a school-wide career fair. They could also take students on a visit to a local university campus. Parents could be invited to attend activities such as these with their children. Also, individual meetings with guidance staff and/or teachers could be held on a bi-yearly basis with all students and their parents. These meetings could be scheduled toward the beginning and end of each school year which would provide families with an opportunity to discuss students’ educational plans and questions pertaining to the current school year as well as those related to their transition to a new grade for the following school year. These types of meetings would also provide an avenue for families to ask questions concerning students’ more long-term goals. Additionally, schools could work with parents to help them understand which classes their children should take in middle school and high school in order to be prepared for college. Finally, mentoring programs, such as the one that was implemented at Clarkston, could facilitate ongoing educational planning with students and parents.

While there are certainly other ways that the career development of middle school students could be nurtured, these ideas can be used as a starting place for schools to discuss what they are doing to help students prepare for life after high school as well as where they could make improvements. The intent of these suggestions is not to imply that all middle schools are deficient in helping students plan for postsecondary education and explore different careers. However, the purpose is to raise schools’ awareness of the substantial effects that career development can have on the lives of young adolescents and to invite middle schools to assess their efforts in this regard.
**Fortifying family, school, and community partnerships.** Results from this research demonstrated that many students drew significant support from their families regarding their ambitions and decisions related to their schooling. As the role of families was critical to students’ educational development, families should not be removed from students’ education. Therefore, one of the implications of this study is the importance of developing positive partnerships among families, schools, and the community with a common goal to assist students throughout their educational journeys.

Research maintains that families and communities, which includes schools, affect one another. Therefore, as families are strengthened, communities are also reinforced and vice versa (Belcher et al., 2011; Cohen et al., 1996). Community efforts should seek to empower families, supporting them in their decisions and focusing on their strengths rather than accentuating their weaknesses (Belcher et al., 2011; Cohen et al., 1996). Ultimately, community-based policies and programs should be family-centered and promote values such as collaboration, empowerment, and self-sufficiency (Cohen et al., 1996).

In spite of the potential benefits available to families through partnerships with schools and community organizations, data from this study suggested that for most families, their involvement with these two entities was minimal, especially with the community. Cecília remarked that I was the first person from a school or community organization to have a conversation with her about the educational opportunities for her son and the limitations that he faced because of legal status. She emphasized how dialogues such as the one we had have the potential to help many parents who are
Another parent, Sergio, contended that the Brazilian community was not very involved in advocating for social issues which affected their lives. He stated

One of the reasons I’m participating in this interview with you is I think it’s a really good cause, a really noble cause. And we have a huge Brazilian community here in [the Northeast] in general. But they’re not very united. And if we, [the] Brazilian community, could get together and pool our resources and our voices, we could accomplish a lot more for our kids.

Findings from this study also suggested that there was limited discussion between the middle school and families about students’ long-term educational goals and needs.

There are multiple ways to fortify relationships among families, schools, and communities. One idea might be to hold regular meetings with students and parents to discuss their questions, concerns, and needs related to students’ schooling. Findings from this study suggested that the middle school was not necessarily aware of the circumstances confronting families and the forces affecting students’ educational decisions. Therefore, these gatherings could provide a forum for educators and community members to better understand the experiences and needs of Brazilian families and families of Brazilian origin. Likewise, families could increase their understanding of the purposes of school and community organizations. These sessions could also offer an instructional component for families, providing information related to topics such as high school requirements, college admission, and financial aid. Because many parents may work multiple jobs or long hours, the days and times of the meetings could vary to
accommodate for various schedules. In addition to regular meetings with families, a committee of parents who are Brazilian or of Brazilian origin could serve as liaisons for the Brazilian community. These parent representatives could meet regularly with educators and community members with the purpose of reaching out to other Brazilian families to increase their involvement and to share information (e.g., information about upcoming events and community resources). With each of these recommendations, the focus should be on creating a partnership among families, schools, and communities, realizing that each organization has strengths to offer (Cohen et al., 1996).

A final consideration is the professional development needed for educators and community organizations to be able to provide effective and competent support for families who are Brazilian and of Brazilian origin. As evidenced by this study, assistance from educators at the middle school was limited in certain areas of students’ lives that were applicable to their intended educational pathways (e.g., counseling immigrant students about postsecondary educational options). Therefore, educators and community members could acquire a better understanding of the Brazilian population through workshops that provide instruction about the Brazilian culture, students’ aspirations, impediments to educational access, and educational and financial possibilities for immigrant students. Also, schools and community organizations could hire individuals who understand the Brazilian culture and speak Portuguese. Results from this study also showed that the middle school viewed Brazilian students and students of Brazilian primarily for their language needs. While ELL students need assistance with English, content knowledge should not be sacrificed at the expense of developing students’
language skills. Therefore, schools should simultaneously teach language and content to Brazilian students. For example, students with limited English language skills could be given opportunities to take advanced mathematics courses with the assistance of a tutor.

Forging strong and trusting connections among families, schools, and communities may take time, especially since families who are Brazilian and of Brazilian origin may be used to relying mainly on their stronger ties of family members and close friends (Fukuyama, 2001). Cecília, a mother who took part in this study, thought that I would have a difficult time getting enough parents to participate, especially because of many families’ undocumented legal status and an associated fear of participating. Therefore, with this in mind, educators and community members should give heed to the possible hesitancies of families who are Brazilian or of Brazilian origin to more actively participate in schools, without blaming them or concluding that they do not want to be involved. While uncertainty in partnering with school and community organizations may be associated with undocumented legal status, busy work schedules, or unfamiliarity with school and community environments, showing care and persistence can encourage participation. It is likely that families who have been minimally involved will see the benefits of school and community partnerships as they are offered continual support, no matter their circumstances or initial lack of participation.

**Educational Policy**

One of the main findings of this study was the impact that students’ legal status had on their intended educational pathways and decisions. Overall, students who had legal status within the United States were more optimistic about their future educational
and career possibilities than were those students who were undocumented. Several parents expressed hope that policy changes in the future would reflect greater equality for their children. Results from this study suggest a significant need to evaluate the short- and long-term implications of current educational and immigration policies within the United States on the lives and futures of immigrant children and youth.

The access to higher education for undocumented youth is a problem that extends beyond simply the students in this study. The College Board (2012) reported the following statistic about undocumented students in the United States:

There are an estimated 65,000 undocumented students — children born abroad who are not U.S. citizens or legal residents — who graduate from U.S. high schools each year. These children are guaranteed an education in U.S. public schools through grade 12, but may face legal and financial barriers to higher education. (para. 1)

They further indicated that, “There are three main areas on the path to higher education where undocumented students may have special concerns or face obstacles: admission, tuition and financial aid” (College Board, 2012, para. 2). Therefore, the challenges associated with undocumented legal status as described by families in this study have relevance to other students throughout the United States as well.

There have been some efforts to address obstacles faced by undocumented immigrant children and youth within the country through policy measures. For example, some states have provided in-state resident tuition for undocumented students at public institutions of higher education. These actions have led to increased college enrollment
rates for undocumented immigrants (Flores, 2010). Another policy that was implemented to assist undocumented immigrant youth was the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. This initiative was announced by President Barack Obama in June 2012. Through this program, undocumented youth who came to the United States before they were 16 years old and who are not older than age 30, among other criteria, can be granted permission to remain in the United States for increments of 2-year periods (Napolitano, 2012). They can also receive authorization to work (Napolitano, 2012). In the memorandum outlining the basic provisions of DACA, Napolitano (2012) concluded, “This memorandum confers no substantive right, immigration status, or pathway to citizenship” (p. 3). Offering critique on DACA, Arellano (2012) pointed out that recipients receive no “permanent or substantive benefit under the program” (p. 1147). Arellano also claimed that DACA will have “little lasting effect in the absence of further legislative action” (p. 1140).

At the time of data collection for this study, three of the nine states in the Northeast had some type of policy offering in-state tuition to undocumented immigrant students if certain conditions were met. However, in-state tuition for undocumented students was not available in the state where this study took place at the time of the interviews with families. Also at the time of data collection with students and parents, DACA had not yet been announced. Therefore, it is unclear from data in this study about how policies such as DACA and in-state resident tuition might affect the aspirations and intended educational pathways for Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin.
In terms of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, included in the United States Department of Education’s (2010) goals were provisions that all students would be “college- and career-ready” (p. 3) and that there would be “equity and opportunity for all students” (p. 5). The reauthorization further stated, “Every student should graduate from high school ready for college and a career, regardless of their income, race, ethnic or language background, or disability status” (p. 3). While these are worthy goals, questions arise about what happens to “college- and career-ready [undocumented] students” (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p. 3) when they leave the doors of high school and face the real world confronted by limitations of their legal status. Students in this scenario may have been assured that they would be prepared with the skills and knowledge that they need to be “college- and career-ready” (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p. 3) throughout their primary and secondary school years. However, many of them may find their pot of gold at the end of their K-12 rainbow of opportunity filled with shattered dreams for further education and dimmed hopes for higher status employment.

Currently, students residing within the United States have the right to a public K-12 education. However, there is a discrepancy between this right and the reality that strikes undocumented students when they graduate from high school. Sergio, a father who participated in this study, explained that he wants people in the United States to see Brazilians for their potential to contribute to society. He stated

I do believe that Brazilians have a lot to contribute to the American society....not only in workforce, but, you know, most Brazilian kids are really smart
kids….And if they could get a college education in the states, it would be a huge resource for the country….So unfortunately, nowadays…there’s a huge anti-immigrant sentiment in the states….And people don’t get informed about who the Brazilians are. For them, it’s just another group of immigrants who are here as freelancers and freeloaders and stuff. They don’t see the potential of the kids who are growing up here, kids who only know this place as their country.

Findings from this study highlight the need for further political intervention that establishes a positive foundation for longer-term achievement and the wellbeing of students who have undocumented legal status. While some states grant in-state college tuition to undocumented immigrant youth, students who take advantage of this may be unable to work after graduation because of their undocumented legal status (Frum, 2007; Gonzales, 2011). Also, policies such as DACA do not provide permanent residence to immigrants, thus leaving them vulnerable after the period of protection expires. Thus, a question that arises is for what purpose are we raising students to be “college- and career-ready” (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p. 3)? Does providing in-state tuition for undocumented students encourage them to take advantage of the higher education system in the United States and then take their talent elsewhere?

Possible policy considerations might be to reduce tuition prices for all undocumented students and to make educational funding more available. Also, the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM Act) or other policies that open up possibilities for permanent residency should be examined. Many undocumented students face the situations they do because of decisions of other people,
especially their parents, to immigrate to the United States. As a result, the success of their futures should not hinge upon other people’s choices, especially with many of them coming to the country at a young age where they had little, if any, input regarding the matter.

**Future Research**

This study was exploratory in nature because of its attention to an under-researched population during a significant developmental period in their lives. As there is little information available about the Brazilian population of students and their educational experiences during the middle school years, the focus of this study was narrowed to students at one school. Restricting the sample size as well as utilizing a qualitative methodological approach facilitated a more in-depth examination of the research questions guiding this study. While this study yields fruitful results that shed light on the educational experiences of Brazilian middle school students and students of Brazilian origin, its findings should not be exaggerated nor generalized to the Brazilian population at large. As with any qualitative study, the purpose is not to generalize results, but to try to offer a more detailed and thorough explanation of the research topic at hand (Merriam, 2009). Furthermore, this study does not claim to provide all of the answers regarding the forces that influence the educational aspirations of Brazilian middle school students and students of Brazilian origin. Rather, it opens the door for future research in this area. Because of the exploratory nature of this research and being that there are few, if any, studies of its kind, there is significant potential for future
inquiry in this area. While not an exhaustive list, some of the areas of potential examination are outlined below.

Since this study only included Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin from one middle school, and because there is a dearth of research on this population and time period in these students’ lives, future investigations could expand the number of middle schools and student participants. In addition, areas from which future samples of middle school students are drawn could be extended to other locations where there are high concentrations of Brazilians. Broadening the representation of students, schools, and geographical locations from which samples are taken would provide a more thorough understanding of the experiences and forces that affect the educational aspirations of students who are Brazilian and of Brazilian origin. It could also render further knowledge about possible similarities and differences between students who are Brazilian and of Brazilian origin throughout the United States.

Another possibility for further exploration would be to conduct a longitudinal study that follows Brazilian middle school students and students of Brazilian origin through high school and beyond. A study of this nature would offer insight into whether and how students’ intended educational pathways shift during their middle school and high school years and how guidance during their K-12 schooling shapes their postsecondary pursuits. For example, as students become more informed about different postsecondary educational and career possibilities, or as they further confront the reality of their legal status, consideration could be given to whether and how their educational
plans change. Also of interest could be whether and how the forces that influence middle school students’ educational vary during their high school years.

An additional consideration for future research could be the influence of changing political contexts and current immigration laws on the educational decisions and opportunities of Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin. At the time of data collection with students and parents, DACA had not yet been implemented. Since data collection with families took place prior to this policy change, it is unclear whether these adjustments in protocol would have altered students’ and parents’ perspectives, especially concerning the impact of their legal status on educational opportunities. For example, this policy change elicits the question of whether families who had undocumented legal status would have been more optimistic about higher education. Therefore, another area of potential research would be to investigate the effects of policy changes on the educational aspirations and opportunities of Brazilian middle school students and whether, and how, this affects students’ intended plans.

Finally of note is the possibility of further researching the family unit and the role that family members have on students’ educational endeavors. Because this study found that families have an important function in students’ schooling, examining the family unit in more depth could provide additional insight about how family structure and family life shapes students’ decisions. Some studies suggest that siblings can influence students’ education (e.g., Gofen, 2009; Swartz, 2008). For example, Swartz (2008) maintained that investments in a family’s capital may not be evenly dispersed among family members, particularly when resources may be limited. Therefore, the educational experiences of
siblings may vary to some extent (Swartz, 2008). Gofen (2009) indicated that siblings, such as an oldest child, can also encourage educational attainment for younger children in the family. Both Swartz (2008) and Gofen (2009) contended that research on families generally focuses on the relationships between parents and children. However, they argued that family research should extend to other members of the family such as siblings. Increasing the focus of this research to the entire family unit could offer valuable insight on the ways that family structure and dynamics shape the educational aspirations of Brazilian students and students of Brazilian origin.

Because this study addresses an under-researched area, there is considerable room to build upon these findings and conclusions. Starting points for further research might include expanding the number of participants and locations from which data is collected, conducting a longitudinal study that follows students through high school graduation and beyond, evaluating the impact of policy on students’ educational options, and doing a more thorough analysis of the family unit. However, no matter the beginning point for further inquiry, it is certain that research on the Brazilian population of students and students of Brazilian origin is an area needing attention.

Concluding Remarks

This dissertation is about the educational aspirations of Brazilian middle school students and students of Brazilian origin. The development of students’ ambitions can be likened to building a fire. The process takes time and requires the correct materials and conditions.
When making a fire, the following three types of material are needed: tinder, kindling, and fuel (Haslett & Smith, 2009; Holtzman, 2013). Each of these components serves a distinct purpose in helping to create a fire that can burn on its own (Haslett & Smith, 2009; Holtzman, 2013). Tinder is fine, dry material, such as straw, grass, and leaves, that is easily ignited (Haslett & Smith, 2009; Holtzman, 2013). Next is kindling, or “the first real fuel to burn,” which consists of material that is somewhat larger than the tinder (e.g., twigs, wood splinters; Haslett & Smith, 2009, p. 64). Finally, fuel, or the primary source of heat, includes such things as logs and large branches (Haslett & Smith, 2009; Holtzman, 2013). The order in which these three types of material are ignited is important. Tinder should be lit first, which in turn provides heat for the kindling to burn, followed by the fuel (Haslett & Smith, 2009; Holtzman, 2013). The initial stages of building a self-sustaining fire require the flames to be fed often (Haslett & Smith, 2009). However, once the fire is burning brightly, it needs less attention and can be maintained by the occasional addition of fuel (Haslett & Smith, 2009; Holtzman, 2013).

In addition to the “fuel to burn,” Haslett and Smith (2009) suggested that fires need “heat to ignite it” and “oxygen to breathe” (p. 63). A balance of these three elements is needed to create a strong fire (Holtzman, 2013). Haslett and Smith (2009) explained that after igniting the tinder, “Fire needs oxygen, and the best way to convert a tiny flame into a large one is to give it some air” (p. 66).

The process of fire making has relevant lessons for the development of students’ ambitions. First, children and young adolescents often dream about what they will do when they grow up. For example, they may desire to be a famous basketball player just
like the person they saw on television, or they may want to be a doctor following in the footsteps of their father. These initial dreams and sparks of interest can be likened to the tinder which is ignited to eventually create a stronger burning fire. While tinder alone will not lead to a sustainable fire, children’s dreams are foundational to their self-discovery and the further development of their interests. As children mature into young adolescents, kindling is added to the delicate flames of their developing ambitions, allowing them to discover their possibilities and interests. Therefore, kindling represents the period of exploration and discovery for students that further ignites their internal drive for achieving their goals and developing their dreams. For example, this may be accomplished as students find interests in certain school subjects or hobbies. Eventually, students’ goals become more solidified, and the flames of their ambition become large enough to add fuel to their fire. Fuel, or students’ actual steps and concrete plans toward realizing their goals, might reflect their application to college or a technical training program leading to a professional or technical career.

Once a fire is ignited, oxygen is also needed for the fire to continue to grow (Haslett & Smith, 2009; Holtzman, 2013). Oxygen could represent the guidance and support offered by families that nurtures students’ aspirations, the positive mentorship of students’ teachers, opportunities provided to students for career exploration, and the assistance of school staff in helping students prepare for college process. Oxygen may also include policies that encourage educational achievement for immigrant students or society’s connections with families which provide access to knowledge and resources.
Just as the order is important in which the materials are added when building a fire, so it is with students’ developing interests. One cannot expect to light a log and get a blazing fire before first attending to the tinder and kindling of students’ dreams. Likewise, without proper amounts of oxygen, the fire of students’ dreams can become smoldering ashes. With proper attention and care, what begins as a flicker of interest in a child’s life can, in time, turn into a brilliant fire of ambition in young adulthood, thus leading to a lifetime of satisfaction and accomplishment.

It is hoped that this dissertation has awakened a sense of urgency in educators, policymakers, and researchers to help ignite the flame of educational aspirations for students who are Brazilian and of Brazilian origin. Returning to the analogy of fire building, Haslett and Smith (2009) counseled

You don’t just start a fire – you build one! With that in mind, remember that most people have trouble getting their fires started in the wilderness because they hurry the building process and use a haphazard selection of starter materials. So try to think of your fire as being like a well-designed structure – if you build it right, you’ll be rewarded. (p. 63)

Feeding the fire too quickly, using the wrong materials, or providing insufficient amounts of oxygen can cause students’ flames of ambition to dwindle until they become embers of a once imagined dream. For example, nurturing students’ ambitions cannot be accomplished through a one-shot attempt at career exploration or a single presentation on college readiness. Likewise, students cannot be expected to develop postsecondary educational and career plans on the doorstep of high school graduation.
The process of educational and career development for students requires time and appropriate care. If students’ sparks of ambition are properly nourished, this can create a self-sustaining fire that provides light and warmth throughout their lives. Therefore, this dissertation concludes with an invitation to all. Let us reach out to the youth around us and breathe life into the flames of their dreams.
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APPENDIX A

Individual Interview Protocol: Students

Background Information

1. Ice breaking question.
2. How long have you lived in the United States? Why did your family move to the United States? Does your family plan to stay in the United States? Do you want to stay here after you graduate from high school?
3. How has it been transitioning from Brazil to the United States? What has been easy? Hard?
4. Where did you go to school before you came to this school? (Probe: Was the school public or private? How many hours per day did you stay at school? What kinds of specials [e.g., music, gym, art] did you have?)
5. What are similarities and differences between the schools in Brazil and the schools in the United States? (Probe: amount of homework, how teachers grade students, discipline, how teachers relate to students, safety, technology in instruction.)

Educational Preparation and Support

6. What is your favorite part of school? Least favorite?
7. Do people have certain expectations of you in school? What are their expectations? (Probe: teachers, parents, older siblings, cousins, aunts/uncles, grandparents, friends, others.) What expectations do you have for yourself?
8. Who influences you the most with the decisions you need to make about school? Why do they have the greatest influence?
9. Do you have support from others with your school work? When you need help in school, who helps you? What are some examples of how they support you? When you have questions, who do you ask for help? Why do you turn to these people?
   a. When do you do your homework? Who helps you with it? Do your parents speak English? Do they help you with your homework?
10. Tell me about someone you know in this school who you think is successful. What do you think they have to support them? Do you get this same kind of support?
11. Do your parents know your teachers? Do your parents ever visit the school?
12. What do your teachers understand about you as a Brazilian student? What do you wish they understood about you that they don’t?
Educational Aspirations

13. Do you want to go to Breyborn High School, Saddle Hill Technical School, or another school? Why do you want to go to this school? Do you feel that your decision of what school to attend will impact your future opportunities? (Probe: chance to go to college, future job.)

14. Does anyone talk to you about high school? (Probe: teachers, guidance, parents.) Is anyone doing anything to help you prepare for high school? (Probe: teachers, guidance, parents.) To prepare for college?

15. What do you dream about doing one day when you finish school? Have you thought about different jobs you might want to do someday? What have you thought of?
   a. If the student has ideas about future plans:
      i. Who do you think can help you figure out goals for the future? Why do you think this person can help you? How do you think they can help you?
      ii. When did you first have this idea(s)? How did you come up with this idea(s)? What do you think you need to do to make this happen?
      iii. Have you told other people about your idea(s)? (Probe: parents, friends, teachers.) What did they think of this idea(s)? Do they think you can do it?
      iv. What do you need to do to reach these goals?
   b. If the student does not have ideas about future plans:
      i. When do you think it will be important for you to start planning for what you will do after high school?
      ii. Does this worry you that you don’t have any plans now? Do you care?
      iii. When it comes to the time when you start making plans, who will you talk to? Who do you think can help you figure out goals for the future? Why do you think this person can help you? How do you think they can help you?

16. Are there people who talk to you about your future? (Probe: teachers, family, peers, others.) What do they say?

College and Career Planning

17. Tell me the first names of at least three adults you know and think are successful. What does each of them do for their jobs?

18. What skills do you think you need to get a job after high school?
   a. Do the types of skills people need vary depending upon the job? Where and how do you develop these skills?
b. Who helps you know what you need to do to prepare for a job? Who helps you know what you need to do to prepare for college?
c. Do your parents know what you need to do to graduate from high school? Do they know what people need to do to go to college?

19. Have you ever thought about going to college? (If yes) Why do you want to go to college?
   a. Has anyone in your family gone to college? Do you know anyone else who has gone to college?
   b. Does anyone tell you that they want you to go to college? What are their reasons? (Probe: family, teachers, peers, others.)
   c. Is there anyone that has told you that you shouldn’t go to college? What are their reasons for saying you shouldn’t go?
   d. What do you see as the pros for going to college? What about the cons?

20. Do all students have the same opportunities in this school? Do you have the same opportunities as other students in this school?

21. Do other people’s views and experiences about education influence what you think you can do? (Probe: parents, teachers, friends.)

22. Do you talk about what you will do one day with your friends? What do you tell them you want to do? What do they want to do?

23. Does anyone talk to you about what you will do after high school? If so, who? What do they say?

24. Does the school or your teachers provide opportunities for students to explore different jobs or learn about college? What do they do?

25. Would you like to know more about different professions? Where would you go to get more information? (Probe: Internet, peers, older friends/relatives, television.)

**Conclusion**

26. Is there anyone who works at the school or in the community who has helped you make decisions about your education that you would recommend I talk to?

27. Is there anything else you would like to add that we have not discussed?
APPENDIX B

Individual Interview Protocol: Parents/Guardians

Background Information

1. Where are you from (country and city)? How long have you lived in the United States?
2. Why did your family move to the United States? Do you plan to stay in the United States? If they plan to stay: Do you plan to stay for the same reasons as those that brought you here?

Educational and Work History

3. What is your educational level?
4. Where did you attend school?
5. What was your occupation before moving to the United States? How long did you have this occupation? What do you currently do for work? How long have you had this job?

Roles and Responsibilities

6. What do you see as your role in working with your child’s school and his/her teachers? Role of teachers and the school? Role of your child?
7. What was challenging for you when you first enrolled your child and he/she started going to school in the United States? What did you do to make sure your child was able to adjust to the school here?
8. Are there supports you and your family have received as immigrants to the United States? How have these been supports?
   a. Are there challenges you and your family have faced as immigrants in the United States? Why are they challenges? (Probe: relatives, church, non-profits, boss.)

Educational Aspirations of Student

9. What does your son/daughter want to do when he/she finishes high school? What does he/she want to do for a job?
   a. Do you think this is possible?
   b. Do you agree with his/her plans?
   c. Does this require a college degree?
10. What do you want your child to do after high school? Why? Does your child know this? What have you told him/her? What do you think he/she should do for a job?
11. What do your son’s/daughter’s teachers think he/she should do after high school? For a job?
12. Do your son’s/daughter’s friends influence his/her aspirations?

Educational Preparation and Support

13. Do you think that what your son/daughter does in middle school will affect his/her future and goals?
14. What kind of support does your son/daughter receive to work toward his/her goals? What are specific examples?
   a. Who provides this support? What kind of support do they provide?
   b. Are there things you feel you or your child need more support with? Do you perceive any barriers? What are they, and why are they barriers?
15. When you have questions about your child’s education and future, who do you ask for help? Where do you go for help?
16. Please describe your relationship with the school and your child’s teachers.
   a. What kind of support does the school offer to help you and your child make decisions about your child’s education and future?
   b. Are there challenges you face in working with the school? If so, what are they? Why are they challenges?
   c. Parents who do not speak English: What kinds of support are offered to you being a Portuguese-speaker?
      i. Are there things you feel you need to help understand your child’s education better? What are they? Why do you feel this would be helpful?
17. What are the skills your child needs to be successful in school now? How does your child learn the skills he/she needs to be successful in school? Do you help him/her? Are there other people that help him/her? Are there people that help you with this process?
   a. Are these skills the same ones needed to be successful in a job someday?
18. Does your child have the same opportunity as other students to be successful in school?
   a. Are there things you wish you had help with that you currently don’t? Why and how would this be helpful?
19. Do teachers understand your child’s culture and experiences in Brazil? Is this important? Why or why not?
Future Plans

20. Tell me about your family background.
21. Does your family have plans to return to Brazil in the near future? Do you have friends or family members who have already returned to Brazil?
22. Is your family actively setting aside resources to build a financial future in Brazil?

College and Career Planning

23. Has your son/daughter begun planning for what he/she will do after high school? What has he/she done? If not, when should he/she begin planning? What should this entail?
24. Who do you think can help you and your son/daughter plan his/her goals for the future? Why do you think this person(s) can help you? How do you think they can help you?
25. Have any of your family members gone to college? If so, who?
26. What do people in Brazil think about higher education? What do you think about higher education?
27. Do you want your son/daughter to go to college? Does your son/daughter want to go to college? Are there other people who want your son/daughter to go to college? If so, who are they? Why do they want your son/daughter to go to college?
28. What do you see as the pros of your son/daughter going to college? What about the cons?
29. If you had a choice, where would you prefer that your son/daughter went to college? Why?
30. How important are economic matters to college attendance for your son/daughter? Will this impact your child’s decisions about what to do after high school?
31. How important are issues related to immigrant status in your son’s/daughter’s decision to attend college?

Conclusion

32. Is there anyone who works at the school or in the community who has helped your child make decisions about his/her education that you would recommend I talk to?
33. Is there anything else you would like to add that we have not discussed?
APPENDIX C

Individual Interview Protocol: Educators

Roles and Responsibilities

1. What is your role within the school/district? What is your role in working with immigrant students and their families?
2. How many Brazilian students do you have in your classes?
3. How are Brazilians identified and categorized within the school/district on demographic and enrollment information? (Probe: Latino, Latin American, Hispanic, White, Black.)
4. What is your understanding of the Brazilian culture and education in Brazil?
5. Are there specific things you think schools need to do or be aware of in working with immigrant students and their families? What are some specific things you have done?
   a. Is it important to honor or draw out the culture of immigrant students? If so, why? If not, why not?
6. What specific training have you received to work with immigrant students?
7. Are there challenges faced by students and their families when they come to the United States? (Probe: in school.) Why are these challenges?
8. In your view, how has the distribution of immigrant students throughout the schools in the district impacted their educational opportunities? What is the impact on the work of teachers, specialists, and administrators?
   a. Are there challenges faced by schools, teachers, and the district in working with immigrant students and their families? How has the school/district addressed these challenges? Can you give any examples?

Educational Preparation and Support

9. What is the role of the school/district in working with immigrant students and parents? How does the school/district reach out to these individuals?
   a. Communicating with parents who are English language learners (ELL) may be challenging. Can you tell me some strategies used in your school/district to make this communication easier (e.g., translators at conferences, translated bulletins, staff makes phone calls for teachers who do not speak Portuguese, etc.)?
10. How does the school/district approach parents who are hard to reach (e.g., working multiple jobs)? (Probe: What is the role of the school/district? Role of parents/students?)
11. Are there issues or challenges that arise in the transition of students from middle school to high school? From high school to college? How are these addressed?
Educational Aspirations

12. What educational aspirations are expressed by Brazilian students? What do you think their parents want them to do following high school? Who shapes their aspirations?
13. Do you think the school/district should have a role in influencing their aspirations? Are there specific examples of things the school/district has done to influence students’ educational aspirations? (Probe: goals of the school/district for immigrant students.)

College and Career Planning

14. Should all students be encouraged to prepare for college? Who should prepare for college?
15. When does the school/district begin preparing students for postsecondary education and a career? (Probe: Should this planning begin in middle school? Are students developmentally ready in middle school for this?) What are specific things the school/district does to prepare immigrant students?
16. Are there aspects of the curriculum and curricular planning in the middle school that reflect college awareness and preparation? Can you give some examples?
17. What are the main barriers or challenges associated with attending college faced by Brazilian students in this school/district?
18. What skills does this school/district feel immigrant students need to develop in middle school to be ready for high school? What skills do they need to be college ready?
   a. Do immigrant students have these necessary skills?
   b. What is the school/district doing to help students develop these skills?
19. Why do some students in this school/district consider pursuing college and others do not? Are there groups of students who are more likely to attend college over others? Less likely? What does the school/district do to address any differences?
20. Some students have parents with limited educational backgrounds. What is the approach of the school/district in working with these students and families?
   a. Will this impact these students’ career paths?
   b. What should be the goals for students whose parents did not attend college? What is the role of the school/district in working with these families? What is the role of the student and families?
   c. When students and families lack information about careers and higher education, who has the responsibility for seeking such information? For providing it? For helping families and students develop this knowledge? (Probe: role of school/district, student, families/parents; specific examples.)
Resources and Capital

21. How important are economic matters to college attendance for students in this school/district? Does school funding and resources impact student outcomes? Does a family’s socioeconomic status influence their opportunities?

22. Does immigrant status affect college preparation and postsecondary choices for students in this school/district?

23. What social networks do Brazilian immigrant families have within this community? Are there benefits to these networks? Are there drawbacks to these networks?

24. What resources do immigrant families have in this community? Are there resources that these families need but don’t have? Why don’t they have them? Is there a way for them to get these needed resources? Where do Brazilian immigrant families get information? Where should they get it?

25. What specific things does the school/district do to solicit parent and student feedback? What type of feedback is sought?

Conclusion

26. What do you think about the future of Brazilian students in general? What happens to them? Do you know of any initiative to track the postgraduate experiences of immigrant students? (Probe: Do they track if students (a) graduate from the traditional high school or the technical high school, (b) begin some sort of postsecondary education, (c) acquire some professional skill?)

27. Is there anyone you would recommend that I talk with who has been influential in working with Brazilian students and families related to issues of educational planning and postsecondary pursuits?

28. Is there anything else you would like to add that we have not discussed?
APPENDIX D

Demographic Data: Students

Name: ________________________________

*Please complete the following demographic information to the best of your knowledge. All information will be kept confidential.*

1. What is your gender?
   - Male
   - Female

2. What is your date of birth? Please include the month, day, and year.

3. Where were you born? Please include the country and city?

4. When did you first come to the United States? Please include the month and year.

5. What is your native language?
   - Portuguese
   - Spanish
   - English
   - Other (please indicate)
APPENDIX E
Demographic Data: Parents/Guardians

Name: ______________________________________

*Please complete the following demographic information to the best of your knowledge. All information will be kept confidential.*

1. What is your gender?
   Male
   Female

2. What is your age?
   24 years old or under
   25-34 years old
   35-44 years old
   45-54 years old
   55-64 years old
   65 years and over

3. What is your relation to the student in this study?

4. Where were you born? Please include the country and city?

5. When did you first come to the United States? Please include the month and year.

6. What is your native language?
   Portuguese
   Spanish
   English
   Other (please indicate)
7. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   Less than a high school diploma
   High school graduate
   Some university
   Professional school / technical school
   Higher education (completed university)
   Specialized training (following university)
   Master’s degree
   Doctoral degree
   Post-doctoral degree (MD, JD, etc.)
   Other (please indicate)

8. What is the highest level of education your mother completed?
   Less than a high school diploma
   High school graduate
   Some university
   Professional school / technical school
   Higher education (completed university)
   Specialized training (following university)
   Master’s degree
   Doctoral degree
   Post-doctoral degree (MD, JD, etc.)
   Other (please indicate)

9. What is the highest level of education your father completed?
   Less than a high school diploma
   High school graduate
   Some university
   Professional school / technical school
   Higher education (completed university)
   Specialized training (following university)
   Master’s degree
   Doctoral degree
   Post-doctoral degree (MD, JD, etc.)
   Other (please indicate)
10. What is your current marital status?
   Single
   Married
   Divorced
   Separated
   Living with another person
   Widowed
   Other

11. What is your current household income in U.S. dollars per year?
   Under $10,000
   $10,000 - $19,999
   $20,000 - $29,999
   $30,000 - $39,999
   $40,000 - $49,999
   $50,000 - $74,999
   $75,000 - $99,999
   $100,000 - $150,000
   Over $150,000

12. How often do you work?
   71 hours or more per week
   61-70 hours per week
   51-60 hours per week
   41-50 hours per week
   35-40 hours per week
   25-34 hours per week
   10-24 hours per week
   9 hours or fewer per week
   Not currently working

13. What do you do for your job(s)? Do you work for someone else, or are you self-employed?

14. What did you do for employment prior to coming to the United States?
APPENDIX F

Recruitment Letter

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Michelle de la Rosa. I am currently doing research for my dissertation which tries to understand the educational experiences and goals of eighth grade students who are Brazilian or of Brazilian origin.

I lived in Brazil and speak Portuguese. I love Brazil and its people. I want people who are Brazilian or of Brazilian origin to have many opportunities for good jobs and a good education. I believe that schools need to understand students’ and families’ experiences so they can provide a good education for students who are Brazilian or of Brazilian origin.

I would like to invite you and your son/daughter to be in this study. Yours and your child’s participation will help schools and teachers provide better opportunities for students who are Brazilian or of Brazilian origin. Your son/daughter was identified by staff at Clarkston Middle School as a possible participant because he/she is in the eighth grade and is Brazilian or of Brazilian origin. You and your son/daughter can choose whether to participate or not. It does not cost anything to participate. Each student and parent who participates in the study will receive one free movie ticket as a gift of appreciation.

If you decide to participate in this study, a 1-hour interview will be held at a time and place that is convenient for you. For students, a 1-hour interview as well as a 1-hour discussion with other eighth grade students will be held at Clarkston Middle School. Your identity as well as your son’s/daughter’s identity will be kept private.

If you are interested in participating or have any questions, please let me know by using any of the following ways:

1. Call me at 339-707-0518. (I speak Portuguese.)
2. E-mail me at reichmi@bc.edu. (E-mails can be in Portuguese or English.)
3. Mail the enclosed form to me using the stamped envelope provided.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Michelle de la Rosa
Please complete this form and mail it to Michelle de la Rosa in the stamped envelope provided.

Check here if you are interested in being in this study or learning more about it. 

Please contact me using the following information:

Parent/Guardian Name: ________________________________
Student Name: ________________________________
Phone Number(s): ________________________________
Best time and day to call: ________________________________
E-mail: ____________________ @ ________________________________

Check here if you are not interested in this study and do not want to be contacted about it again. 

Parent/Guardian Name: ________________________________
Student Name: ________________________________
APPENDIX G

Phone Script

My name is Michelle de la Rosa. For my dissertation research, I am trying to understand the educational experiences and goals of eighth grade students who are Brazilian or of Brazilian origin. I want people who are Brazilian or of Brazilian origin to have many opportunities for good jobs and a good education. I believe that schools need to understand students’ and families’ experiences so they can provide a good education for students who are Brazilian or of Brazilian origin.

I recently met with your son/daughter about a research study I am doing for my dissertation. Did he/she show you the letter about this research?

I would like to invite you and your son/daughter to be in this study. Yours and your child’s participation will help schools and teachers provide better opportunities for students who are Brazilian or of Brazilian origin. Your son/daughter was identified by staff at Clarkston Middle School as a possible participant because he/she is in the eighth grade and is Brazilian or of Brazilian origin. You and your son/daughter can choose whether to participate or not. It does not cost anything to participate. Each student and parent who participates in the study will receive one free movie ticket as a gift of appreciation.

If you decide to participate in this study, a 1-hour interview will be held at a time and place that is convenient for you. For students, a 1-hour interview as well as a 1-hour discussion with other eighth grade students will be held at Clarkston Middle School. Your identity as well as your son’s/daughter’s identity will be kept private.

Do you think you might be interested in participating in this study?

(If No): Thank you very much for your time.

(If Yes): Thank you for your consideration of being in this study. Please remember that you can choose whether to participate or not. If you or your son/daughter chooses not to participate or to stop being in the study at any time, it will not influence any current or future relationships with his/her teachers or anyone else at Clarkston Middle School or Heaton Public Schools.

Do you have any questions regarding participation?

Do you know if your son/daughter also wants to participate?
(If the parent/guardian and son/daughter want to participate): Before being in this study, both you and your son/daughter needs to sign consent forms saying that you are volunteering to be in this study.

Thank you very much for your time and willingness to participate in this study. What day and time work best for you to meet for the interview? What is a location that is convenient for you to meet? Do you have any questions?
APPENDIX H

Informed Consent Form: Child Assent Ages 12-17

BOSTON COLLEGE
Lynch School of Education

Research Study: Kindling Ambition: An Examination of Individual, Familial, and Educational Forces on Brazilian Middle School Students’ Aspirations
Investigator: Michelle de la Rosa, M.Ed.
Date Created: February 20, 2012

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM: Student Participation in an Individual Interview
Child Assent Ages 12-17

Introduction:

• You are being asked to be in a research study that tries to understand the educational experiences and goals of eighth grade students who are Brazilian or of Brazilian origin.
• You were selected as a possible participant because you are in eighth grade and are Brazilian or of Brazilian origin. Your thoughts and experiences about your education and goals for the future are important.
• Please read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Purpose of Study:

• The purpose of this study is to better understand yours and other students’ experiences in school and your goals following high school.
• Other people being asked to participate in the study are other eighth grade students from your school who are Brazilian or of Brazilian origin, their parents and/or guardians, and teachers and leaders from your school and the community.

Description of Study Procedures:

• If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:
  • Answer questions individually for about 45-60 minutes.
• Answer questions in a group with other students in the study for about 45-60 minutes.
• Fill out a paper with some questions with basic information about yourself.
• If you agree, allow me to record the interviews.
• If you do not wish to answer a question, you can choose to do so.
• If you agree, allow me to obtain a copy of your grades at school and the record of how often you miss school.

Risks to Being in Study:
• It is possible that during our discussion, I may ask questions that you do not want to answer. You do not need to answer any questions that you do not feel like answering.

Benefits of Being in Study:
• There are no expected benefits of you being in this study. However, I do hope that your participation will help teachers, leaders, and other people provide better educational opportunities for students who are Brazilian or of Brazilian origin in middle school, high school, and college.

Payments:
• You will not receive any money for your participation in this study. However, you will receive one free movie ticket for participating as a gift of appreciation.

Costs:
• You will not need to pay anything to be in this study.

Confidentiality:
• The records of this study will be kept private. I will not let anyone else see personal information about you. In any sort of report I may publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you or anyone else. The record of your grades at school, the record of how often you miss school, and other information I collect will be kept in a locked file.
• All electronic information, including the interviews that are recorded, will not include your name and will be kept private by a password on the computer. Only I and the person who helps record the words that were said during the interviews will be able to listen to the interviews. The recorded interviews will be destroyed after the interviews have been studied.
• I will be the only person who will see information collected during this study – but you should know that people at the Institutional Review Board at Boston College and my faculty advisor may also see this information.
Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal:
- You can choose whether to participate or not. If you choose not to participate, it will not influence your current or future relationships with your teachers or anyone else at Clarkston Middle School or Heaton Public Schools.
- You are free to stop being in the study at any time for any reason.
- There will not be any consequences if you do not participate nor if you decide not to continue being in the study. If you decide to quit being in the study before it is finished, this will not influence your grades nor impact your relationships with your teachers or anyone at the school or in the district.

Dismissal from Study:
- The investigator may ask you to leave the study at any time for the following reasons: (1) quitting the study is a good thing for you (e.g., being in the study has been difficult for you), or (2) you do not follow the instructions you are given.

Contacts and Questions:
- The person doing this study is Michelle de la Rosa. For questions or more information about this research, you may contact her at 339-707-0518 or reichmi@bc.edu.
- If you believe you may have been hurt by being in this study, contact Michelle de la Rosa at 339-707-1518 who will let you know what to do.
- If you have any questions about your rights while being in this study, you may contact: Director, Office for Research Protections, Boston College at 617-552-4778 or irb@bc.edu.

Copy of Consent Form:
- You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records and future reference.

Statement of Consent:
- I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form and have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received answers to my questions. I give my consent to participate in this study. I have received (or will receive) a copy of this form.

Signatures/Dates:

Study Participant (Print Name): ____________________________

Study Participant (Signature): ____________________________ Date: __________

Witness/Auditor (Signature): ____________________________ Date: __________
______ Check here if you will allow me to tape record your interview.

______ Check here if you do not want to have your interview tape recorded.

______ Check here if you will allow me to obtain a copy of your grades at school and the record of how often you miss school.

______ Check here if you do not want me to obtain a copy of your grades at school and the record of how often you miss school.
APPENDIX I

Informed Consent Form: Parental Permission for a Child to Participate

BOSTON COLLEGE
Lynch School of Education

Research Study: Kindling Ambition: An Examination of Individual, Familial, and Educational Forces on Brazilian Middle School Students’ Aspirations
Investigator: Michelle de la Rosa, M.Ed.
Date Created: February 20, 2012

PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM: Parental Permission for a Child to Participate in an Individual Interview

Introduction:
- Your child is being asked to be in a research study that tries to understand the educational experiences and goals of eighth grade students who are Brazilian or of Brazilian origin.
- Your child was selected as a possible participant because he/she is in the eighth grade and is Brazilian or of Brazilian origin. His/her thoughts and experiences about his/her education and goals for the future are important.
- We ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before giving permission for your child to be in the study.

Purpose of Study:
- The purpose of this study is to better understand the school experiences of students who are Brazilian or of Brazilian origin as well as their goals following high school.
- Other people being asked to participate in this study are other eighth grade students from the school who are Brazilian or of Brazilian origin, their parents and/or guardians, and teachers and leaders from the school and the community.

Description of Study Procedures:
- If you give permission for your child to be in this study, your child will do the following things:
  - Answer questions individually for about 45-60 minutes.
• Answer questions in a group with other students in the study for about 45-60 minutes.
• Fill out a paper with some questions with basic information about himself/herself.
• If your child and you agree, allow me to record the interviews.
• If he/she does not wish to answer a question, he/she can choose to do so.
• If your child and you agree, allow me to obtain a copy of your child’s grades at school and the record of how often he/she misses school.

Risks to Being in Study:
• It is possible that during our discussion, I may ask questions that your child does not want to answer. Your child does not need to answer any questions that he/she does not feel like answering.

Benefits of Being in Study:
• There are no expected benefits of your child being in this study. However, I do hope that your child’s participation will help teachers, leaders, and other people provide better educational opportunities for students who are Brazilian or of Brazilian origin in middle school, high school, and college.

Payments:
• Your child will not receive any money for participation in this research study. However, your child will receive one free movie ticket for participating as a gift of appreciation.

Costs:
• Your child will not need to pay anything to be in this study.

Confidentiality:
• The records of this study will be kept private. I will not let anyone else see personal information about your child. In any sort of report I may publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify your child or anyone else. The record of your child’s grades at school, the record of how often he/she misses school, and other information I collect will be kept in a locked file.
• All electronic information, including the interviews that are recorded, will not include your child’s name and will be kept private by a password on the computer. Only I and the person who helps record the words that were said during the interviews will be able to listen to the interviews. The recorded interviews will be destroyed after the interviews have been studied.
• I will be the only person who will see information collected during this study – but you should know that people at the Institutional Review Board at Boston College and my faculty advisor may also see this information.
Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal:
- You and your child can choose whether he/she participates or not. If you choose not to give permission for your child to participate, it will not influence your child’s current or future relationships with your child’s teachers or anyone else at Clarkston Middle School or Heaton Public Schools.
- Your child is free to stop being in the study at any time for any reason.
- There will not be any consequences if your child does not participate nor if he/she decides not to continue being in the study. If he/she decides to quit being in the study before it is finished, this will not influence his/her grades nor impact his/her relationships with his/her teachers or anyone at the school or in the district.
- During the research process, you will be notified of any new information from the research that may make you decide that you want your child to stop being in the study.

Dismissal from Study:
- The investigator may ask your child to leave the study at any time for the following reasons: (1) quitting the study is a good thing for your child (e.g., being in the study has been difficult for your child), or (2) your child does not follow the instructions he/she is given.

Contacts and Questions:
- The person doing this study is Michelle de la Rosa. For questions or more information about this research, you may contact her at 339-707-0518 or reichmi@bc.edu.
- If you believe that your child may have been hurt by being in this study, contact Michelle de la Rosa at 339-707-1518 who will let you know what to do.
- If you have any questions about your child’s rights while he/she is in this study, you may contact: Director, Office for Research Protections, Boston College at 617-552-4778 or irb@bc.edu.

Copy of Consent Form:
- You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records and future reference.

Statement of Consent:
- I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form and have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received answers to my questions. I give my consent for my child to participate in this study. I have received (or will receive) a copy of this form.
Signatures/Dates:

Name of Child (Print Name): _______________________

Parent/Guardian (Print Name): _______________________

Parent/Guardian (Signature): _______________________ Date: ______

_______ Check here if you will allow me to tape record your child’s interview.

_______ Check here if you do not want to have your child’s interview tape recorded.

_______ Check here if you will allow me to obtain a copy of your child’s grades at school and the record of how often he/she misses school.

_______ Check here if you do not want me to obtain a copy of your child’s grades at school and the record of how often he/she misses school.
APPENDIX J

Informed Consent Form: Adult (Parents/Guardians)

BOSTON COLLEGE
Lynch School of Education

Research Study: Kindling Ambition: An Examination of Individual, Familial, and Educational Forces on Brazilian Middle School Students’ Aspirations
Investigator: Michelle de la Rosa, M. Ed.
Date Created: February 20, 2012

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM: Adult (Parent/Guardian)
Participation in an Individual Interview

Introduction:
• You are being asked to be in a research study that tries to understand the educational experiences and goals of eighth grade students who are Brazilian or of Brazilian origin.
• You were selected as a possible participant because you are the parent/guardian of an eighth grade student who is Brazilian or of Brazilian origin. Your thoughts about your child’s experiences in school and goals for the future are important.
• Please read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Purpose of Study:
• The purpose of this study is to better understand the school experiences of students who are Brazilian or of Brazilian origin as well as their goals following high school.
• Other people being asked to participate in this study are eighth grade students from the school who are Brazilian or of Brazilian origin, other parents and/or guardians, and teachers and leaders from the school and community.

Description of Study Procedures:
• If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:
  • Answer questions individually for about 45-60 minutes.
  • Fill out a paper with some questions with basic information about yourself and your family.
• If you agree, allow me to record the interview.
• If you do not wish to answer a question, you can choose to do so.

Risks to Being in Study:
• It is possible that during the discussion, I may ask questions that you do not want to answer. You do not need to answer any questions that you do not feel like answering.

Benefits of Being in Study:
• There are no expected benefits of you being in this study. However, I do hope that your participation will help teachers, leaders, and other people provide better educational opportunities for students who are Brazilian or of Brazilian origin in middle school, high school, and college.

Payments:
• You will not receive any money for your participation in this research study. However, you will receive one free movie ticket for participating as compensation for your time.

Costs:
• You will not need to pay anything to be in this study.

Confidentiality:
• The records of this study will be kept private. I will not let anyone else see personal information about you. In any sort of report I may publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you or anyone else. The information I collect will be kept in a locked file.
• All electronic information, including the interviews that are recorded, will not include your name and will be kept private by a password on the computer. Only I and the person who helps record the words that were said during the interviews will be able to listen to the interviews. The recorded interviews will be destroyed after the interviews have been studied.
• I will be the only person who will see information collected during this study – but you should know that people at the Institutional Review Board at Boston College and my faculty advisor may also see this information.

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal:
• You can choose whether to participate or not. If you choose not to participate, it will not influence your current or future relationships with teachers or anyone else at Clarkston Middle School or Heaton Public Schools.
• You are free to stop being in the study at any time for any reason.
• There will not be any consequences if you do not participate nor if you decide not to continue being in the study. If you decide to quit being in the study before it is
finished, this will not influence your child’s grades nor impact your relationships with teachers and or anyone else at your child’s school or in the district.

- During the research process, you will be notified of any new information from the research that may make you decide that you want to stop being in the study.

**Dismissal from Study:**
- The investigator may ask you to leave the study at any time for the following reasons: (1) quitting the study is a good thing for you (e.g., being in the study has been difficult for you), or (2) you do not follow the instructions you are given.

**Contacts and Questions:**
- The person doing this study is Michelle de la Rosa. For questions or more information about this research, you may contact her at 339-707-0518 or reichmi@bc.edu.
- If you believe you may have been hurt by being in this study, contact Michelle de la Rosa at 339-707-1518 who will let you know what to do.
- If you have any questions about your rights while being in this study, you may contact: Director, Office for Research Protections, Boston College at 617-552-4778 or irb@bc.edu.

**Copy of Consent Form:**
- You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records and future reference.

**Statement of Consent:**
- I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form and have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received answers to my questions. I give my consent to participate in this study. I have received (or will receive) a copy of this form.

**Signatures/Dates:**

Study Participant (Print Name): ____________________________

Participant or Legal Representative (Signature): _____________ Date: ________

_______ Check here if you will allow me to tape record your interview.

_______ Check here if you do not want to have your interview tape recorded.
APPENDIX K

Informed Consent Form: Adult (Educators)

BOSTON COLLEGE
Lynch School of Education

Research Study: Kindling Ambition: An Examination of Individual, Familial, and Educational Forces on Brazilian Middle School Students’ Aspirations
Investigator: Michelle de la Rosa, M.Ed.
Date Created: February 20, 2012

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM: Adult (Teachers/Educators/Community Members) Participation in an Individual Interview

Introduction:
• You are being asked to be in a research study that tries to understand the educational experiences and goals of eighth grade students who are Brazilian or of Brazilian origin.
• You were selected as a possible participant because you are a teacher, educator, or community member who works with students and/or their families who are Brazilian or of Brazilian origin. You have an important and valuable perspective about students’ educational experiences and goals for the future.
• Please read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Purpose of Study:
• The purpose of this study is to better understand the school experiences of students who are Brazilian or of Brazilian origin as well as their goals following high school.
• People being asked to participate in this study are eighth grade students who are Brazilian or of Brazilian origin, their parents and/or guardians, and adults from the school and community.

Description of Study Procedures:
• If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:
  • Answer questions individually for about 45-60 minutes.
  • If you agree, allow me to audiotape the interview.
  • If you do not wish to answer a question, you can choose to do so.
Risks to Being in Study:
- The study has the following risk. During our discussion, I may raise questions that you consider sensitive. As already noted, if you do not want to answer a specific question, you need not do so.

Benefits of Being in Study:
- There are no expected benefits of you being in this study. However, I do hope that your participation will help teachers, administrators, and policymakers provide better educational opportunities for students who are Brazilian or of Brazilian origin in middle school, high school, and college.

Payments:
- You will receive no payment for your participation in this research study. However, you will receive one free movie ticket for participating as compensation for your time.

Costs:
- There is no cost to you to participate in this research study.

Confidentiality:
- The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I may publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you or anyone else. Research records will be kept in a locked file. Access to the records will be limited to the researcher; however, please note that sponsors, funding agencies, regulatory agencies, the Institutional Review Board, and my faculty advisor may review yours and other participants’ responses and the research records.
- All electronic information, including the audiotapes, will be coded and secured using a password protected file. Only the researcher and person transcribing the interviews will have access to the audiotapes. Audiotapes will be destroyed after the interviews have been studied.

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal:
- Your participation is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, it will not affect your current or future relations with anyone at Clarkston Middle School or Heaton Public Schools.
- You are free to stop being in the study at any time for any reason.
- There is no penalty if you do not take part or if you decide not to continue being in the study.
- During the research process, you will be notified of any new findings from the research that may make you decide that you want to stop being in the study.
Dismissal from Study:
- The investigator may dismiss you from the study at any time for the following reasons: (1) withdrawal is in your best interest (e.g., side effects or distress have resulted), or (2) you do not follow the instructions you are given.

Contacts and Questions:
- The researcher conducting this study is Michelle de la Rosa. For questions or more information concerning this research, you may contact her at 339-707-0518 or reichmi@bc.edu.
- If you believe you may have suffered a research related injury, contact Michelle de la Rosa at 339-707-1518 who will give you further instructions.
- If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact: Director, Office for Research Protections, Boston College at 617-552-4778 or irb@bc.edu.

Copy of Consent Form:
- You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records and future reference.

Statement of Consent:
- I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form and have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received answers to my questions. I give my consent to participate in this study. I have received (or will receive) a copy of this form.

Signatures/Dates:

Study Participant (Print Name): ____________________________

Participant or Legal Representative (Signature): _______________ Date: ______

_______ Check here if you will allow me to tape record your interview.

_______ Check here if you do not want to have your interview tape recorded.