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## Predisposition factors of career and technical education transfer students: A hermeneutic phenomenology study

Warren Glen Hioki  
*University of Nevada Las Vegas*

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PREDISPOSITION FACTORS OF CAREER AND TECHNICAL  
EDUCATION TRANSFER STUDENTS: A HERMENEUTIC  
PHENOMENOLOGY STUDY

by

Warren Glen Hioki

Bachelor of Science  
California Polytechnic State University  
1975

Master of Science  
San Jose State University  
1992

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the

**Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Educational Leadership  
Department of Higher Education Leadership  
College of Education**

**Graduate College  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
December 2009**

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## THE GRADUATE COLLEGE

We recommend that the dissertation prepared under our supervision by

**Warren Glen Hioki**

entitled

### **Predisposition Factors of Career and Technical Education Transfer Students: A Hermeneutic Phenomenology Study**

be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

#### **Doctor of Philosophy**

Educational Leadership

Mario Martinez, Committee Chair

Cecelia Maldonado, Committee Member

Robert Ackerman, Committee Member

LeAnn Putney, Graduate Faculty Representative

Ronald Smith, Ph. D., Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies  
and Dean of the Graduate College

**December 2009**

## ABSTRACT

### **Predisposition Factors of Career and Technical Education Transfer Students: A Hermeneutic Phenomenology Study**

by

Warren Glen Hioki

Dr. Mario Martinez, Examination Committee Chair  
Associate Professor of Education, Educational Leadership  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Various econometric, sociological, and combined research models (e.g., Hossler and Gallagher's preeminent Three-Phase Model on College Choice) provide help in understanding high school students in their decision-making stages and college experience. Many studies that utilize these models on college choice strongly substantiate and perpetuate the long-standing dichotomy between students who aspire to attend college in pursuit of upward mobility through the traditional baccalaureate pathway versus a community college Career and Technical Education (CTE) pathway. High school students' aspirations to attend a 4-year institution, and more recently, the community college, are a focal point.

A review of the literature as it pertains specifically to community college CTE transfer students and those factors influencing their decision to attend the senior institution remains sparse. In Nevada, it is non-existent. Therefore, this study will contribute to the literature by exploring the experiences of six Nevada CTE transfer students in those areas found to be the most influential towards their decision to continue

their education at the baccalaureate level. How do these CTE transfer students describe their career pathway experiences as they transition from high school to the community college and on to the senior institution, and what factors influence their decision to transfer to the senior institution?

A hermeneutic phenomenological method of inquiry was used for data collection and analysis resulting in findings that identified eight influencing factors of the Nevada CTE transfer student phenomenon: (1) Career Aspirations; (2) Teacher Influence; (3) Parental Influence; (4) SES Background; (5) Academic Achievement; (6) Self-Improvement; (7) 2+2 Career Pathways; and (8) College Location. These findings suggest that there are no significant gaps in predisposition factors on college choice between the six Nevada CTE transfer student respondents and their native 4-year counterpart. Nevada CTE transfer students are likely to be as successful as their counterparts in their junior and senior years, if not more so. Their prior academic accomplishments at the community college and high levels of motivation supports a prior study indicating that successfully transferring from the community college to the senior institution may have provided them with the foundation to persist at the baccalaureate level. Clearly, this has been the case with six Nevada CTE transfer student respondents. The results of this study can be used to inform administrators, academic counselors, secondary and postsecondary faculty, the Nevada Department of Education, and other stakeholders to better prepare CTE students who opt to pursue a career pathway starting from high school and continuing through the community college, then on to a four-year college or university.

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understanding and appreciation for the legal and ethical dimensions surrounding higher education, and a greater understanding of the role of college and university faculty.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background to the Study

Career and technical education (CTE), also known as vocational education, workforce development, or workforce preparation, has existed in various forms for centuries (Wonacott, 2003). As American community colleges emerged in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they began to blend vocational and collegiate education together, providing a bridge between secondary and postsecondary institutions. Their role in educating and training the workforce for vocational or occupational jobs directly related to CTE has increased dramatically since the 1970s, and many of these students have been transferring to the universities (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Laanan & Compton, 2006). Bragg (2001) and Lynch (2000) coined the term, “new vocationalism,” to describe the emerging forms of vocational education that “focus on curriculum alignment, articulation, and integration between CTE and academic education, postsecondary education, and family-wage sustaining careers” (Bragg, 2007, p. 4). According to Grubb (1996), mid-skilled workers with CTE training and education account for three-fourths all employees in the United States, and community colleges have been the major source of CTE programs. Thus, vocationalization of higher education has given students enormous power, and for the most part, their choices now drive what most colleges and universities offer (Grub & Lazerson, 2005).

The Nevada Department of Education reports there are 83 public high schools in Nevada, and 47,953 of the 92,364 public high school students are enrolled in CTE programs for the 2007-2008 fiscal year (State Profile, 2008). This represents approximately 52% of all Nevada high school students taking one or more CTE classes. Moreover, graduation rates for Nevada high school students completing CTE programs are nearly 10% higher than non-CTE students and their high school proficiency exam scores are higher and their dropout rate is significantly lower (NDE Fact Sheets, 2007). Many of these students continue their CTE curricular track into Nevada community colleges, and then transfer to one of its three senior institutions.

### Problem Statement

Numerous studies, both qualitative and quantitative, have been conducted towards establishing a theoretical framework on college choice. For example, various econometric and sociological models depicting factors that influence a student's decision to attend college can be found in the works of several researchers and social theorists (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Chapman, 1981; Lewis & Morrison, 1975). Teachers, academic counselors, peer groups, family members (especially parents), and other adults have been found to have the greatest influence (Prindiville, 1995; Monks, 1999; Walpole, 2003; Bers & Smith, 1987). Prindiville (1995) believes that most of the available literature on college choice focuses on high school students' aspirations to pursue baccalaureate programs, rather than the characteristics and motives of CTE students who attend community colleges or technical colleges.

Bateman and Spruill (1996) suggest that college choice models provide help in understanding and guiding students through their decision-making stages and college experience. They distinguish between three categories of college choice models: *econometric models*, *sociological models*, and *combined models*. The college choice model that was used for this study is based, in part, on the econometric and sociological framework established by Hossler and Gallagher (1987). Their model stands out as the preeminent model on the college choice process since 1987 (Gildersleeve, 2003). The Hossler and Gallagher model provides a simplified conceptual three-stage model on college choice: (1) predisposition, (2) search, and (3) choice. The *predisposition stage* is that stage of the college choice process when students decide whether they aspire to continue their formal education after high school; the *search stage* is the process of considering which types of postsecondary educational institutions to which they will apply; and the *choice stage* is the selection of an institution to attend.

Prindiville (1995) used Hossler and Gallagher's model to analyze a total of 25 variables with the intent to explore the differences found in personal, family background, and school variables among high school seniors electing two postsecondary options: a community college or two-year technical college CTE career pathway, or a four-year baccalaureate-granting college or university. Her methodology included the use of a discriminate function analysis, followed by descriptive cross-tabulations on student questionnaire and test data collected from the NELS: 88 Second Follow-Up (NCES, 1994). Among the 25 variables analyzed, Prindiville found the following five variables most likely to influence a CTE student's decision to go to college (in ranking order):



1. Students' career aspirations
2. School support (teachers and counselors)
3. Parental influence
4. Socioeconomic status (SES)
5. College admissions applications

In light of these models, many of which describe college choice as a developmental process (Chapman, 1981, 1984; Jackson, 1982; Litton, 1982; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987), a review of the literature as it pertains specifically to community college CTE transfer students and those factors influencing their decision to attend the senior institution, remains sparse. In Nevada, it is non-existent. Nevertheless, the combined studies germane to this research topic have provided a sound understanding of the phenomenon surrounding CTE students and the unique challenges they face. They have also served to identify and accentuate the dearth of and need for research on CTE students in facilitating their transition from the community college to the senior institution.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of Nevada CTE transfer students in those areas found to be the most influential towards their decision to continue their education at a higher level. This study will contribute to the literature by filling in the gap on those career and technical education (CTE) students who successfully advanced their career pathway beyond the community college and into a four-year

college or university. How do these CTE transfer students describe their career pathway experiences as they transition from high school to the community college and on to the senior institution? What factors influence their decision to transfer to the senior institution? Such research can be used to inform administrators, academic counselors, faculty, and other secondary and postsecondary personnel to better prepare CTE students who opt to pursue a career pathway starting from high school and continuing through the community college, then on to a four-year college or university.

### Overview of Methodology

In establishing a theoretical framework for characterizing transfer students, one should be mindful that qualitative and quantitative design approaches are both useful and legitimate in social research. “You will be a stronger researcher, however, to the extent you can use both approaches effectively” (Babbie, 2004, p. 27). A quantitative framework is best suited if the study is to identify factors that influence an outcome, that is, cause and effect, or to test a theory or explanation, according to Creswell (2003). Likewise, if a research’s study is exploratory, or the concept or phenomenon needs to be understood because little research has been conducted on the subject, then it merits a qualitative approach, according to Creswell. Thus attempting to answer a research question using a qualitative approach may offer richness and depth of exploration beyond what a quantitative methodology can provide.

Common strategies of inquiry used for qualitative research design include ethnography, grounded theory, case studies, narrative research, and phenomenology (Creswell, 2003). Due to the exploratory nature of this study, phenomenology, combined

with in-depth qualitative interviewing of respondents is used to explore the research questions. Phenomenology is the study of lived experiences and the ways we understand those experiences to develop a world view (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The advantage is that it permits an explicit “exploratory” focus drawing on the researcher’s personal experiences combined with those of the interviewees. More specifically, a *hermeneutic* phenomenological approach (which is more fully explained in Chapter 3) was selected on the basis of nearly 30 years of CTE professional and personal experience oriented towards an “abiding concern” and interest in interpreting the “lived experiences” of CTE students (van Manen, 1990, p. 31). Additionally, the researcher has served as a CTE advisor for the Nevada Department of Education’s (NDE) Office for CTE; Vice President of Information Technology (IT), Historian, and Board member for the Nevada Association for Career and Technical Education (NACTE); and Chair for NDE’s IT standards writing team is conducive to the interpretive techniques supporting a hermeneutic phenomenology method of inquiry.

### Research Questions

According to Creswell (2003), in a qualitative study, inquirers state research questions, not objectives or hypotheses. These research questions assume two forms: a broad centralized question followed by associated sub-questions that narrow the focus of the study. Combined, they present the overall intent of the study, how open or closed it will be, and provide a focus on data collection and analysis (Glesne, 1999). Careful attention should be given to ensure that the research questions are not leading, nor do they seek to predict or determine some causal relationship (Moustakas, 1994).

Martin Heidegger, regarded as a leading expert in hermeneutic phenomenology, discusses certain paths pertaining to the interview, “wood-paths, towards a clearing where something could be shown, revealed, or clarified in its essential nature” (van Manen, 1990, p. 29). van Manen, another noted phenomenologist, believes that the hermeneutic phenomenology interview serves the specific purpose of exploring and gathering experiential information that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon. “The interview process needs to be disciplined by the fundamental question that prompted the need for the interview in the first place... and that one needs to guard against the temptation to let method rule the question, rather than the research question determining what kind of method is most appropriate for its immanent direction” (van Manen, 1990, p. 66). Because Prindiville’s findings serve as a fundamental basis for disciplining, framing, and prompting the interview questions for this study, the following two broad centralized research questions and possible focused sub-questions have been crafted for this study:

Broad centralized questions:

1. *How do Career and Technical Education (CTE) transfer students describe their career pathway experiences as they transition from high school to the community college and on to senior institution (UNLV, UNR or NSC)?*
2. *What factors influence CTE transfer students the most in their decision to transfer from the community college to the senior institution?*

Examples of focused sub-questions include the following:

1. *How do CTE transfer students describe their academic aspirations to attend the senior institution?*
2. *Who, if anyone, has had the greatest impact on a CTE transfer student's decision to transfer to the senior institution?*
3. *How has socioeconomic background supported or hindered a CTE transfer student's decision to continue their education beyond the community college and on to the senior institution?*

These core questions also satisfy Moustakas' (1994) five "definite characteristics" of phenomenological research questions (p. 105), which will be presented in Chapter 3. Collectively, they represent his criteria for phenomenological studies: a topic of intense interest, one that has social meaning, excitement, curiosity, personal significance, and personal history that brings the core of the problem into focus. The four sub-questions above are based on Prindiville's (1995) study and those variables she found most likely to influence a CTE student's decision to go to college. Her four highest ranking variables (student career aspirations, school support, parental influence, and SES) are variables that fall into Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) *predisposition stage*: the earliest stage of the process when students decide whether to continue their education after high school, or in this study, from the community college to the senior institution.

## Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection and analysis for this study is aligned with a pilot study conducted at the 2008 Annual Nevada Association for Career and Technical Education (NACTE) Summer Conference in Lake Tahoe, CA. The pilot study focused on developing an experiential understanding of the research procedures involved in anticipation of this study. It went beyond data collection and analysis by including preliminary steps such as Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval; Nevada Department of Education approval; signed letters of informed consent from participants; completion of the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) certification exam; all part of the intended learning outcomes of the pilot study. Thank you acknowledgements were sent to all participants. Creswell's (2007, p. 60-62) detailed procedures for phenomenological data collection and analysis were followed. His procedures are based on the methodological approaches of noted phenomenologist like Husserl (Mohanty, 2008), Heidegger (1962), Moustakas (1994), Polkinghorne (1983), and van Manon (1990).

Data collection for the pilot study involved unstructured informal interviews in a face-to-face setting with four outstanding Nevada CTE students. All four of the students were 18 years and older, and all four students were Career and Technical Student Organization (CTSO) Nevada State officers. Two Future Farmers of America (FFA) CTSO officers were selected; one Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA) CTSO officer; and one Family Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) CTSO officer. Purposeful sampling was used in the selection of these participants because it was conducive to developing the best understanding of why successful CTE students persist into college, and to better understand the phenomenon to the extent that

others may learn. Similar procedures were used for this study at the transfer level and are detailed in Chapter 3.

Data analysis for both studies included the complementing use of qualitative methods oriented towards a vast personal and professional background, oriented towards an “abiding concern” and interest (van Manen, 1990) in interpreting the “lived experiences” of CTE students. This strongly supports Heidegger’s interpretive perspective and provides justification for a hermeneutic phenomenological method of inquiry.

Husserl’s (1970) concept of *phenomenological reduction* was also employed in the analysis of data. “We penetrate deeper into things and learn to see more profound ‘layers’ behind what we first thought to see” (p. 30.). Moustakas (1994) defines another dimension of phenomenological reduction called “horizontalization” (p. 95), in which he suggests that “horizons are unlimited, and can never be completely exhausted of our experience of things no matter how many times we reconsider them or view them.” To this end, content analysis, both manifest and latent, was used to initially provide a systematic focus on student transcripts. From these results, event maps were constructed, followed by an extensive domain analysis utilizing Spradley’s (1980) methodological approach. His approach includes a taxonomic and componential analysis of the data. Graphical illustrations, accompanied with detailed explanations of the outcomes, including a stacked Venn diagram to identify the phenomenon, were used to reinforce the analysis and understanding of the data.

## Validation of the Study

Though *validity* is considered one of the many strengths of qualitative research, it does not carry the same connotations as it does in quantitative research (Creswell, 2003). Marshall and Rossman (1999, p. 191) believe that all researchers must respond to the cannons of quality by being held accountable in meeting the traditional criteria in which the trustworthiness of one's project can be evaluated. Like many authors and researchers, they propose the four qualitative constructs suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985): *credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability*. In order to ensure the trustworthiness and integrity of this study, four traditional qualitative practices that align with Lincoln and Guba's four constructs were used. They included *triangulation, peer review, member checking, and thick descriptions*. Chapter 3 will expound upon their respective definitions and usage.

## Ethics

According to Marshall and Rossman (1999, p. 87), "It is not enough to state that trust in relationships are important." They suggest that researchers should develop a logical plan that respects the need for time to build trust and sensitivity in relationships beforehand. They assert this as one of many qualities of a good researcher. Additionally, the researcher must be sensitive to the ethical issues present when engaging in moral activity, particularly involving ethnographic fieldwork. What fallback procedure is in place if an interviewee does not feel comfortable with the procedures and how they are going? What is the nature of the interview in terms of privacy, anonymity and confidentiality, pseudonyms, informed consent letters, field research self-introductory



letters, follow-up thank you letters (reciprocity), and more? Each of these questions and implied suggestions has been incorporated into the ethical design of this study.

### Limitations of the Study

In general, qualitative studies are time consuming, particularly in the data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the study. Because of the hermeneutic (interpretive) phenomenological nature of this qualitative study, this could be a major disadvantage and shortcoming in virtually all aspects of the study. Factors such as establishing and maintaining a positive impression and rapport with respondents are vitally important. Observations skills, temperament, professionalism, mannerisms, sensitivity to gender, socioeconomic status, personality differences, lack of an abiding concern, and more, are all qualitative skills that require special consideration. Also, within the context of the researcher's role, there are a myriad of differences in knowledge claims and strategies of inquiry. Choices of methods for data collection and data analysis are anything but uniform (Creswell, 2003). Despite decades of qualitative studies, even among highly-regarded ethnographers, anthropologists, and psychologists, the question arises: Do quantitative rivals still believe there is no general agreement about the conduct of any type of qualitative inquiry? Nearly twenty years ago, Eisner and Peshkin (1990, p. 1) commented on behalf of many quantitative researchers: "to conduct experiments and surveys was to be scientific; to do otherwise –and otherwise covered considerable territory –was to be soft-, wrong-, or muddle-headed." Yet from their own perspective, such dissent among the opposing researchers "contributes to the intellectual vitality that a

growing form of research needs” (p. 365). Clearly, qualitative research has come a long way in the past twenty years.

Though the hermeneutic phenomenological method of inquiry used in this study has been well-documented and well-defined, philosophical differences remain in the strategic use of Edmund Husserl’s *epoche* and *transcendental phenomenology* versus Martin Heidegger’s *hermeneutic phenomenology*. This study leaned towards the use Heidegger’s hermeneutic approach to data collection and analysis, but used several of Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology concepts, including *epoche*, phenomenological reduction, and horizontalization. This will forever remain debatable.

An argument can be made over the respondent pool with regard to representation of CTE transfer students through the use of NACTE’s six clustered areas of CTE Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs): (1) Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA); (2) Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA); (3) Family Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA); (4) Future Farmers of America (FFA); (5) Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA); (6) and Skills USA. Selecting one student per career cluster may not adequately characterize the respective CTSO. Though this may be true to some extent, the intent is not to represent and/or characterize each organization as a whole, but rather to identify, interpret, and describe the CTE transfer student *phenomenon* by purposely sampling one student in each respective area. That is, to capture the “essence” of their “lived experience” in which they all share, including how they experience the phenomenon as a whole.

During the *peer review* or *peer debriefing* stage, as described in Chapter 3, the Dissertation Committee played the vital role of what Lincoln and Guba (1985) define as

the “devil’s advocate” in keeping the researcher honest in his or her methods, meanings, and interpretations. Questions were raised regarding methodological procedures, research questions, depth, and form. The Committee also provided detailed feedback recommendations, including the opportunity for catharsis, by sympathetically listening and genuinely understanding, the researcher’s viewpoints. Despite any possible limitations to the study, in the end, the Committee established that the given research questions were important, and that this study is not only is feasible, but will advance the existing literature on CTE transfer students.

#### Definition of Terms

Table 1-1 lists a definition of key terms that are central to this dissertation study.

Table 1-1 Definition of Key Terms.

Term	Definition
ACTE	Association for Career and Technical Education: Formerly the American Vocational Association (AVA), ACTE is the largest national education association dedicated to the advancement of education that prepares youth and adults for careers (ACTE, 2008).
Bracketing	Also known as <i>epoche</i> , bracketing is when researchers bracket out or suspend their own judgment as they interpret and describe the phenomenon under study.
Career pathway	A career pathway is a coherent, articulated sequence of rigorous academic and career/technical courses, commencing in the ninth-grade and leading to an associate degree, baccalaureate degree, or industry certification (Whitaker, 2008).
Componential analysis	A systematic search for the attributes or components of meaning associated with cultural categories. (Spradley, 1980).
Confirmability	A trustworthiness technique used in qualitative research that seeks to determine whether the results could be confirmed by others (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
Content analysis	The examination of artifacts of social communications, typically written documents, transcriptions of recoded communications. Or, any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying special characteristics of messages (Berg,

	2001).
Credibility	A trustworthiness technique used in qualitative research that seeks to determine the believability of an activity from the perspective of the participant/s (Lincoln & Guba et al., 1985).
CTE	Career and Technical Education: also known as vocational education, workforce development, or workforce preparation prepares both youth and adults for a wide range of careers. These careers may require varying levels of education, from high school and postsecondary certificates, to college degrees.
CTSO	Career and Technical Student Organization: are an integral part of all CTE programs. CTOSs develop citizenship, technical, leadership, and teamwork skills essential for students who are preparing for the workforce and further education (NACTE, 2008).
DECA	Formerly the Distributive Education Clubs of America, also known as Delta Epsilon Chi on the college level) is national association of marketing education students, provides teachers and members with educational and leadership development activities to merge with the education classroom instructional program (NACTE, 2008).
Dependability	A trustworthiness technique used in qualitative research that seeks to determine the trustworthiness of the research by emphasizing the need for the researcher to account for the ever-changing context within which research occurs (Trochim, 2008).
Domain analysis	An ethnographic analysis of cultural domains, which are categories of cultural meaning. They may include smaller categories (Spradley, 1980)
Epoche	Edmond Husserl, heralded as the “founder of modern phenomenology,” is credited with the concept of <i>epoche</i> (bracketing), whereby researchers bracket out or suspend their own judgment as they interpret and describe the phenomenon under study
Event mapping	In qualitative data analysis, event maps are used to illustrate the breakdown of transitional events into categories and subcategories, e.g., major events with corresponding detailed events within a major event respectively. Event mapping can also be considered a form of transcribing and representing the flow of conduct between and among members of a social group (Putney, 2008).
FCCLA	Family Community Career Leaders of America is a state and national CTOS whose members actively address societal concerns, including environment, nutrition, safety, and family literacy across the nation.
FFA	Future Farmers of America is a state and national CTOS that makes a positive difference in the lives of more than young people by developing their potential for premier leadership,

	personal growth, and career success in agriculture education.
Hermeneutic phenomenology	A qualitative method of inquiry that is taken to be interpretive, rather than purely descriptive as in transcendental phenomenology. This orientation is evident in the work of Martin Heidegger who argues that all description is already an interpretation (Creswell et al., 2007).
Hermeneutics	The study of interpretation theory, or written texts (Cresswell et al., 2007).
Horizontalization	A phenomenological data analysis procedure that involves highlighting significant words and statements, sentences, or quotes (from transcribed interviews or other data) that provide an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon. “It is a never-ending process, and though we may reach a stopping point and discontinue our perception of something, the possibility for discovery is unlimited.” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 95).
HOSA	Health Occupations Students of America is a national student organization endorsed by the U.S. Department of Education and the Health Science Technology Education Division of ACTE. HOSA's two-fold mission is to promote career opportunities in the health care industry and to enhance the delivery of quality health care to all people (NACTE, 2007).
Latent Content	In content analysis, latent content is a methodological coding technique used with manifest content. Latent content is extended to an interpretive reading of the symbolism underlying the physical data, whereas manifest content are those elements that are physically present and countable (Berg, 2001).
Manifest content	In content analysis, manifest content is a methodological coding technique used with latent content). Manifest content are those elements that are physically present and countable, whereas latent content is extended to an interpretive reading of the symbolism underlying the physical data (Berg, 2001)
Member checking	A qualitative technique involving the inclusion of participants in critiquing the researcher’s working drafts so that researchers’ recordings, interpretations, and findings accurately reflect the views of participants. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 314), member checking is, “the most critical technique for establishing credibility,” and hence it satisfies their construct for credibility.
NACTE	Nevada Association for Career and Technical Education strives to provide leadership in developing an educated, prepared, and competitive workforce (NACTE, 2009).
Peer review	Peer review, also known as <i>peer debriefing</i> , is a qualitative technique providing external validation of one’s study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) define the peer as one who serves the role of “devil’s advocate,” debriefing the researcher, and keeping him or

	her honest.
Phenomenology	A qualitative method of inquiry. Phenomenology is the study of lived experiences and the ways we understand those experiences to develop a world view (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).
Phenomenon	In phenomenology, the essence of the lived experience and its wholeness in meaning and appearance, shared among all individuals (Moustakas, 1994).
Pilot study	A preliminary study to determine the feasibility of a larger study. Pilot studies are generally performed on a small scale.
Skills USA	Formerly the Vocational Industrial Clubs of America (VICA), Skills USA is a national organization serving more than 240,000 high school students and professional members enrolled in training programs for technical, skilled and service occupations (NACTE, 2007).
Structural description	Moustakas (1994) and others define “structural descriptions” as describing how the respondent experienced the phenomenon and “textural descriptions” as describing what the respondent has experienced in terms of the phenomenon.
Swirl	A characteristic of community college students known to have patterns of swirling back and forth between the workforce and the two- and four-year institution (Laanan & Compton, 2006).
Taxonomic analysis	A systematic search for sets of categories organized on the basis of a single semantic relationship. It shows the relationship among all the included terms in a domain (Spradley, 1980).
Textural description	Moustakas (1994) and others define “textural descriptions” as describing what the respondent has experienced in terms of the phenomenon, and “structural descriptions” as how they experienced the phenomenon.
Tech-Prep	Tech Prep emanated out of the early 80s with the intent to provide emphasis on integrating practical hands-on CTE course work with academics that align with a planned career pathway from high school to community college or technical college, and more recently, to a baccalaureate degree. Tech Prep is provided with Perkins funding with the intent to link secondary to postsecondary career pathways or “programs of study,” as outlined in the most recent Perkins IV.
Telos	In phenomenology, <i>telos</i> , refers to “the essence.” (Moustakas, 1994).
Thick description	According to Denzin (1989, p. 83), “A thick description ... does more than record what a person is doing. It goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances. It presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another. Thick description evokes emotionality and self-feelings. It inserts history into experience. It establishes the significance of an experience, or the sequence of events, for the person or persons in question. In thick description, the voices, feelings,

	actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard.”
Transcendental phenomenology	A qualitative method of inquiry in which the researcher uses “bracketing” to bracket out one’s own experiences and collecting data from several persons who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).
Transferability	A trustworthiness technique used in qualitative research that seeks to determine the degree to which the results of one’s research can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings (Lincoln & Guba et al., 1985).
Transfer shock	A temporary decline in community college transfer students’ GPAs within their first few semesters at the four-year institution.
Triangulation	A qualitative method employing the practice of using multiple methods to establish the integrity and trustworthiness of one’s study. Triangulation addresses Lincoln and Guba’s credibility construct (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Introduction

This chapter presents a review of the literature as it pertains to Career and Technical Education (CTE) transfer students and the factors influencing their decision to continue their education at the senior institution. For purposes of informing the reader and illuminating the subject matter, a history of CTE, its organizational background, and CTE students will be given at the onset of this review. The body of this literature review will assimilate and synthesize the scholarly works germane to CTE (Calebrese, R., 2006). This includes differentiating general student populations with CTE student populations and the factors influencing their decision to continue their education from high school, directly to the university, or from high school to the community college and then to the university. Once this conceptual framework is established, a more focused theoretical framework will be presented on CTE students and their decision to attend college. Lastly, the methodological approaches used to critically analyze pertinent scholarship are presented, along with the identification of landmark studies, competing perspectives, and where further research is needed.

#### The History of Career and Technical Education

Career and technical education (CTE) also known as *vocational education*, *workforce development*, or *workforce preparation*, has existed in various forms for



centuries (Wonacott, 2003). An historical examination of American higher education will reveal that as far back as the Colonial Era and the founding of America's first institutions of higher education (Harvard, William and Mary, Yale, Princeton, etc.), there is evidence of continual efforts to teach beyond the classic seven liberal arts. The *trivium*, which included the teachings of grammar, rhetoric, and dialect; and the *quadrivium*, which included music, arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy (Perkin, 1997) were largely reconciled by curricula that were diversified and specialized with scientific, technical, and vocational utilitarian subject matter that assumed equal rank with the classic liberal arts (Gruber, 1997).

#### *The Yale Report of 1828*

If colleges and universities are to maintain responsiveness to their local and regional communities, particularly in light of 21<sup>st</sup> century technological changes, the question arises as to how students may be best prepared to meet the specialized demands of society at large. One thing for certain, is that our academic history and traditions of American higher education have mirrored the social, economic, political, and technological changes over time. Ironically, this is no different than nearly 200 years ago when the *Yale Report* was written. "We believe that changes may, from time to time be made with advantage, to meet the varying demands of the community, to accommodate the course of instruction to the rapid advance of the country, in population, refinement, and opulence" (Yale Report of 1828).

Opposition to the widely acclaimed Yale Report of 1828 provides testament to a growing trend towards using college for explicitly vocational purposes, which began in the early nineteenth century with the founding of West Point (1802), Rensselaer

Polytechnic (1824), and others (Grub & Lazerson, 2005). “In 1828, the faculty of Yale College prepared a report to justify the faculty’s rejection of an alumnus’ suggestion that Yale College add several ‘practical subjects’ to its curriculum.” (Church & Sedak, 1976). To address the practical demands for educating a developing nation, a skeletal frame for vocationalism was being laid long before the Yale Report.

### *Benjamin Franklin, an Influencing Factor*

Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790), America’s oldest founding father, combined his scientific accomplishments with his responsibilities of citizenship to influence higher education beyond the traditional classic studies favored by the period’s elite. What was revolutionary about Franklin is that he proposed training in the practical studies of English, modern languages, contemporary history and philosophy, and the “mechanic arts,” which included geography, medicine, law, natural history, measurement and surveying, and animal and plant husbandry. In 1749, Franklin’s *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania* suggested that Philadelphia needed an institution with a broader curriculum than that of the classical grammar school. He proposed a school where students would “learn those things that are likely to be most useful and most ornamental...might not a little gardening, planting, grafting, inoculation, etc. be taught and practiced” (Franklin, 1749). Franklin raised over 5,000 pounds of donor funds from the wealthiest inhabitants of Philadelphia, and in 1751 he founded the Academy of Philadelphia (McCormick, 2005), which we know of today as the University of Pennsylvania.

### *The Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862*

Franklin's proposal set the stage for Justin Morrill's *Land-Grant Act of 1862* and the legacy of our 105 land-grant colleges and universities to date. Often hailed as one of the most influencing pieces of legislation to formally recognize and contribute to the organization and practice of education beyond the liberal arts, the *Morrill Act of 1862* is also considered by many to be one of the most important pieces of legislation for vocational education and higher education ever passed by congress (Scott & Sarkees-Wircensk, 1996; Thelin, 2004; Grub & Lazerson, 2005). Signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln, this historic act, also known as the *Land-Grant College Act*, was named after Vermont congressman Justin Smith Morrill. Morrill was the principal author of this "path-breaking" legislation that signaled the entrance of the federal government into public policy dealing with the creation of land-grant colleges (Thelin, 2004). A total of 30,000 acres of federal land, commensurate with each congressional delegate for that state, was appropriated under the condition that the land, or proceeds for the sale of that land, were used to establish, maintain, and support at least one land-grant college. The leading objective of a land-grant college "shall be, without excluding other scientific and classical studies, and including military tactics, to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanical arts, in such a manner as the legislature of the States may respectively prescribe, in order to promote the liberal and practical educations of the industrialized classes in the several pursuits and professions in life..." (Morrill Act of 1862, Sec. 4, p. 504). Some state governments that dedicated the land sale proceeds to establishing collegiate programs in such "useful arts" as agriculture, mechanics, mining, and military instruction included "A&M" in their land-grant college names, e.g., Texas

A&M, Alabama A&M (Thelin, 2004). Grub & Lazerson (2005) state that the emphasis on classical studies and more utilitarian studies was important, for it suggested the traditional notions of higher education, such as intellectual, moral, and civic values should coexist with the added expectation that college and university curricula will include practical and vocational-oriented studies geared towards preparing people for vocations.

#### *The Smith-Hughes National Vocational Act of 1917*

The Morrill Act of 1862, and its successor, the *Morrill Act of 1890*, provided the impetus for publically supported universities in every state. At the turn of the century, universities began to pioneer their services to the broader community by offering, not only agriculture and teacher training, but an “ever-increasing” range of occupational subject matter (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). On January 20, 1914, President Woodrow Wilson appointed a commission to study national aid to vocational education, and on April 2, 1914, the Commission on National Aid to Vocational Education was organized with Senator Hoke Smith of Georgia as its chairman. The Commission used figures from the 1910 Census Report to stress the need for vocational education. The report indicates over 12,000,000 males and females in the United States engaged in agriculture, and over 14,000,000 engaged in manufacturing, mechanical pursuits, and allied industries (Smith, 1999). In 1917, President Wilson signed the *Smith-Hughes National Vocational Act*, which provided federal funding for agricultural education, trades and industry, and home economics (ACTE, 2008). In order to receive funding, states were required to establish a state vocational board of education. The demand for vocational training in agriculture, home economics, and the trades and industry continued to grow, and in 1926, the

*American Vocational Association* (AVA) was established (ACTE, 2008). The AVA, now known as the *Association for Career and Technical Education* (ACTE), remains committed to the advancement of education that prepares youth and adults for careers (ACTE, 2008).

#### *Continued Federal Legislation*

Congress continued to pass legislation and fund vocational education with millions of dollars throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The *George-Dean Act of 1936* authorized \$14 million per year towards agriculture, trades and industry, home economics, and distributive occupations such as marketing and business. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's signing of the *G.I. Bill of Rights* in 1944, and continued support by President Harry S Truman, provided further legislation for funding of vocational education, particularly for veterans. The large number of men serving in World War II provided a gap in industry that was rapidly filled by women, perhaps marking the onset of women being on equal footing with men. By December of 1941, the number of women trained for the war effort totaled 11,552, and by April 1943, 741,322 women were enrolled in training programs. "...and according to a study done by the U.S. Office of Education from July 1, 1942 to December 31, 1942, 81% of all employed women trained for war production work were working in war production industries" (Techniques, 2002, p. 29).

#### *Carl D. Perkins Legislation*

One of the most noted figures in vocational education is Carl D. Perkins (1912-1984). Perkins, representing the State of Kentucky, served in U.S. Congress for a total of 36 years and was the author of the *Vocational Act of 1963*, also referred to as the *Carl Perkins Act*. President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the bill into law and "it became the

most comprehensive vocational education measure that had ever become law in the history of our nation. It authorized a new permanent program of federal assistance for vocational education amounting to \$60 million for the fiscal year of 1964. After rising to \$177.5 million for fiscal 1966, funding would become \$225 million in subsequent years” (Techniques, 2002). Those subsequent years included President Ronald Reagan signing the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1984 into law; the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Act of 1990, signed into law by President George H. W. Bush, which provided \$1.6 billion per year for state and local appropriations until 1995; the congressional reauthorization of Perkins and signing of the *Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act of 1998* (Perkins III) by President Bill Clinton; and the most recent *Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006* (Perkins IV), signed by George W. Bush, providing \$1.2 billion per year of federal support for CTE programs in all 50 states. This latest reenactment of the Perkins IV funding demonstrates overwhelming bipartisan support to continue the country’s federal investments in CTE and strengthens the various components of the prior Perkins legislation (OVAE, 2008). The renaming of each act was intended to reflect CTE growth, policy, and the evolving strategies for improving students' academic knowledge and technical skill sets.

#### *Tech Prep and School-to-Work*

Other key legislative enactments supporting CTE include President Clinton’s endorsement of the *National School-to-Work Opportunities Act* (NSTWOA) of 1994 and the *Tech Prep Educational Act*, included in the amendments to the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Educational Act of 1984. According the U.S. Department of Education’s

Office for Vocational and Adult Education (2008), both these laws were intended “to improve the knowledge, skills, and employment preparation of American youths by stimulating state and local reform efforts” (Dept. of Ed., Tech Prep, 2008, p. 1). Though the two models are similar in emphasizing the integration of academics and vocational education through career path linkages between secondary and postsecondary, the NSTWOA differs in that it was designed to include a work-based learning component with employers. “Unlike School-to-Work, Tech-Prep was not designed to include a work-based learning component. Employers are intended to play a more significant role and be more active in school-to-work partnerships than was expected for Tech-Prep consortia” (Dept. of Ed., WBL, 2008, p. 4). Because so many Tech Prep consortia have provided workplace opportunities for Tech Prep students, the distinctions between the two initiatives have become blurred. In the year immediately following the passage of the NSTWOA of 1994, relatively few consortia were implementing workplace experiences as a Tech Prep component, mostly due to coordinating and difficulties in tracking the interaction between employers and Tech Prep and School-to-Work students (Dept. of Ed., WBL, 2008).

The NSTWOA was conceived as umbrella legislation designed to address the nation’s serious shortage of skilled workers through partnerships and employers. Best reform practices of Tech Prep career academies, youth apprenticeship programs, cooperative education, and other programs are encompassed by the NSTWOA (Brown, 2001). Funding for the initiative was provided by a combination of seed money from Perkins and the *Job Training Partnership Act* (JTPA) of 1983. President Bill Clinton endorsed the NSTWOA initiative in 1994. In the October 1991 issue of *Vocational Education Journal*, Clinton stated, “Today we are failing, miserably, our non-college-bound young people, because we don’t have a real school-to-work system in America.

We are laboring under the belief that our kids can get a high school education that is internationally competitive without working as hard as students in competitor nations.”

Tech Prep emanated out of the early 1980s with the intent to provide emphasis on integrating practical hands-on CTE course work with academics that align with a planned career pathway from high school to community college or technical college, and more recently, to a baccalaureate degree. Dale Parnell, long-time community college and vocational education advocate, former president of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), author of *The Neglected Majority*, and more, is credited with championing the inception of Tech Prep. Perkins II, III, and IV have provided Tech Prep funding intended to link secondary to postsecondary career pathways or “programs of study,” as outlined in the most recent Perkins IV legislation. These career pathways are expected to be aligned with respective Department of Education statewide CTE and academic skill standards. For example, the Nevada Department of Education has developed CTE skill standards that are cross-walked with its state standards for English, language arts, math, and science. Academic and technical competencies and performance indicators are outlined in the standards for assessment purposes (NVDOE, 2008).

Title III-E of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act of 1990 is cited as the *Tech Prep Education Act*. In order to be eligible for federal funding, Perkins law requires Tech Prep programs to have seven essential elements (OVAE, 2008):

1. Articulation agreements between secondary and postsecondary participants in Tech-Prep consortia, to establish a basic framework that links secondary and postsecondary courses.



2. A 2+2 or 4+2 design, which defines a common core of math, science, communications, and technology for participating students as a basis for more advanced and specialized courses during four- or six-year program sequences leading to at least an associate degree or two-year certificate.
3. A Tech-Prep curriculum appropriate to the needs of each secondary and postsecondary institution, so that the overall program design makes full use of each school's resources but also considers the needs of its student body.
4. Joint staff development for secondary and postsecondary instructors to promote cooperation and a common understanding of objectives, overcome turf jealousies, and maximize the "seamlessness" of the overall curriculum content in four- or six-year program sequences.
5. Secondary and postsecondary counselor training, to promote effective student recruitment, retention, and post-program employment placement.
6. Measures to ensure access for special populations, such as minorities and students at risk of dropping out of high school.
7. Preparatory services, such as recruiting, counseling, and assessment, to help students understand the Tech-Prep option, explore the educational and career options open to them through Tech-Prep, and make decisions on program and course selection and career direction.

"To date, roughly 47% of the nation's high schools (or 7,400 high schools) offer one or more Tech Prep programs. Nearly every community college and technical college in the nation participates in a Tech Prep consortium, as do many four-year colleges and

universities, private business, and employer and union organizers” (OVAE, 2008, p. 2). In Nevada, virtually all public high schools and four community colleges (College of Southern Nevada, Great Basin College, Truckee Meadows Community College and Western Nevada College) continue to receive Tech Prep funding through its Perkins IV allocation. All programs funded under Perkins, Tech Prep included, are administered by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Vocational and Adult Education. The Nevada Department of Education’s Office of Vocational and Adult Education oversees Nevada’s allotment of Perkins funding for CTE.

#### The Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE)

In the late 1990s, members of the American Vocational Association (AVA), after nearly 75 years, voted to change their name to the *Association for Career and Technical Education* (ACTE). Several reasons justified the name change. Foremost was the stigma associated with “vocational education,” one that suffered from a ubiquitous image of programs associated primarily with academically disadvantaged students, undesirable career tracks, only suited towards students with no intention of going to colleges, dumbed-down curriculum, students from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds, and an elitist view from dissenters who continue the notion that education beyond rigorous academic course work preparing youth for a four-year college or university is not appropriate (Grubb & Lazerson, Lynch, Dare, ACTE).

New descriptors for vocational education were used by legislators, states, and localities. They included Applied Studies, Technical Education, Applied Science, Applied Technology Education, Career and Professional Education, among others, with

the AVA's final decision to change its name to *Career and Technical Education* (Lynch, 2000). "They chose this new moniker as the one to best describe their work and profession and to identify their association, and then encourage other organizations and government agencies to remove 'vocational education' from titles, policy documents, and legislation and replace it with *Career and Technical Education* (CTE)" (Lynch, 2000, p. 3). Thus the immense changes in vocational education aimed at integrating more rigorous academics with the replacement of low-skill, low-wage job training to 21<sup>st</sup> century high-tech, high-skill sets further warranted the name change to CTE. Lynch also states that economists are widely pointing out that it is no longer a post-agricultural or post-industrial world. Instead, it is a new world of fast communications and information, rapid decision-making, and intelligent social skills that are needed to deal with the economic, social or political system (Nijhof, 1998). Today, CTE is inextricably intertwined with focused postsecondary curriculum alignment, articulation, and academic education (Bragg, 2001).

ACTE is now the largest national education association dedicated to the advancement of education that prepares youth and adults for careers (ACTE, 2008). The organization prides itself in its diverse membership, which is comprised of more than 28,000 career and technical educators, administrators, researchers, guidance counselors and others involved in planning and conducting career and technical education programs at the secondary, post-secondary, and adult levels. ACTE is committed to enhancing the job performance and satisfaction of its members; to increasing public awareness and appreciation for CTE programs; and to assuring growth in local, state and federal funding

for these programs by communicating and working with legislators and government leaders (ACTE, 2008).

### CTE Organizational Background

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as community colleges began to emerge, they took on the role of educating and training the workforce for vocational or occupational jobs directly related to CTE (Laanan & Compton, 2006). According to Grubb (1996), mid-skilled workers with CTE training and education account for seventy-five percent of all employees in the United States, and community colleges have been the major source of CTE programs. Originally conceived as an essential component of terminal study, or education for students with no immediate intent to further their studies beyond learning a trade or occupational skill, CTE now plays a dominant role in higher education, and community colleges have taken on that role (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Through School-to-Work and Tech Prep initiatives, community colleges and high schools throughout the United States promote CTE career pathways linking secondary and postsecondary educational institutions, state and federal agencies, community-based organizations, local business and industry, parents, and students (DOE, 1994).

In the United States, 47% of high school students take at least one CTE course, and approximately one quarter of all high school students are *CTE concentrators*: A secondary student who has earned three or more credits (high school classes) in a single CTE program area (e.g., health care, IT, or business services), or two credits in a single CTE program area, but only in those program areas where 2 credit sequences at the secondary level are recognized by the State and/or its local eligible recipients (OVAE,

2008). For participants in a CTE program at the postsecondary sub-baccalaureate level, which is predominately the community college, approximately one third of all students are enrolled in CTE programs (NWLC, 2007). The Nevada Department of Education (NDE) reports there are 83 public high schools in Nevada; 47,953 of the 92,364 public high school students were enrolled in CTE programs for the 2007-2008 fiscal year (State Profile, 2008). This represents approximately 52% of all Nevada high school students taking one or more CTE classes. According to NDE, the percentage of CTE students, relative to the total number of high school students, is growing. Graduation rates for Nevada high school students completing CTE programs are nearly 10% higher than non-CTE students, their high school proficiency exam scores are higher, and their dropout rate is significantly lower (NDE Fact Sheets, 2007).

NACTE CTE programs fall under the following seven categories:

1. Agriculture (agricultural science, horticulture, food science)
2. Business (accounting, finance, entrepreneurship)
3. Family and Consumer Sciences (child development, culinary arts, interior design)
4. Health Sciences (nursing, dental hygiene, pharmaceutical, physical therapy)
5. Information Technology (hardware, software, telecommunications, networks, web design)
6. Marketing (management, retail, sales, entrepreneurship)
7. Trade and Industrial (automotive, construction, Computer-Aided Design)

These seven CTE programs are commonly-offered programs in secondary and postsecondary institutions throughout the United States. They are represented on a national level by the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE). Founded in 1926, ACTE is the largest national education association dedicated to the advancement of education that prepares youth and adults for careers (ACTE, 2007). Federal and state governments have long recognized the success of ACTE school-to-work programs that support secondary and postsecondary CTE students. For example, the *Carl D. Perkins CTE Improvement Act of 2006*, which passed almost unanimously (399-1 House and unanimous consent by Senate) by Congress in late July of 2006 (ACTE, 2008) is a prime example of federal recognition. President George W. Bush signed the Perkins Act into law. Over \$1.6-Billion per year will solely fund nationwide CTE programs over the next 12 years.

### Career and Technical Student Organizations

Millions of CTE students across the United State participate in Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs). These organizations have been around for the last 50 to 80 years. Many of us have either heard of them or participated in these organizations, particularly in high school. Their respective acronyms have become icons in American education. Consider the FFA (Future Farmers of America), DECA (formerly Distributive Education Clubs of America, and more recently known as Delta Epsilon Chi), FBLA (Future Business Leaders of America), Family Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA), Skills USA (formerly VICA), and HOSA (Health Occupations Students of America). Each of these CTE organizations is governed

by its statewide Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE), which is funded through association membership dues. Common among all CTSOs are their goals to develop citizenship, technical, teamwork, and leadership skills, which are essential for students who are preparing for the workforce or furthering their education. Whether CTE students participate in CTSOs or not, more and more of them are looking for upward mobility through two- and four-year applied science programs. The challenging issues they face in preparedness and access and how it influences their decision to attend college warrants further investigation.

### College Choice

According to Monks (1997), over the past decade researchers have begun to address the full breadth of college experiences, including the exploration of heterogeneity in the returns to higher education. Perna (2003) suggests that, “econometric approaches to college enrollment assume that the decision to enroll is based on a comparison between the present value of perceived lifetime benefits and the present value of perceived lifetime costs” (p. 451). In either case, today’s high school students understand the importance of going to college.

Throughout one’s formal education, parents, teachers, peers, counselors, administrators, even researchers continually suggest that choosing education beyond high school will lead to higher earnings. The U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2008) reports that for each year between 1980 and 2005, earnings for young adults increased when education level increased. “This pattern generally held for male, female, White, Black, Hispanic, and Asian subgroups. Moreover,

for the entire population, and generally for each subgroup, the difference between the earnings of those with at least a bachelor's degree and those with less education grew during this period. And in 2005, the average earnings for those with bachelor's degrees were 68% higher than those with a high school diploma" (NCES, 2008). In the same year, the U.S. Census Bureau reinforced the value of a college education with their headline press release: "College Degree Nearly Doubles Annual Earnings." Workers 18 years and over with a high school diploma earn an average of \$27,915, while those with a bachelor's degree earn an average of \$51,206 a year. Workers with an advanced degree earn an average of \$74,602, and those without a high school diploma average \$18,734 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005).

Earnings benefits resulting from higher education are widely accepted. However, research continues to suggest there are also short-term and long-term benefits beyond higher earnings. They include higher socioeconomic status, a more fulfilling work environment, lower probability of unemployment, enjoyment of the learning experience, better health and longer health, and more (Monks et al., 1997). From an institutional perspective, it is widely accepted that, embedded in the core curriculum of virtually all of higher education course work is the implication that there are public and private social, economic, political, and cultural benefits that serve as intended goals and outcomes. Albeit the transformational changes in academe over time have influenced these goals and outcomes, they have been considered since the time of Plato by philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, literary figures, social critics, and educators (Bowen, 1977). The public and private benefits of higher education continue to persist over time. That is, desirable and undesirable behavioral patterns are influenced to the extent that students



attain some degree of edification in intellect, morale, practical and social skills, intellectual integrity and tolerance, and hopefully, a sense of civic responsibility for the betterment of society.

### *General Student Populations*

Years of kindergarten through 12 grade (K-12) reform initiatives have ultimately increased enrollments in degree-granting postsecondary institutions (Valenza, 2005). According to the U.S. Department of Education, 87% of adults with ages ranging from 25 to 29 years received a high school diploma or equivalent certificate and 30% of adults in the same age range attained a bachelor's degree or higher (NCES, 2008). Though the percentage of high school graduates has remained relatively constant over the past 30 years (85-88%), those attaining a bachelor's degree or higher continue to rise; the same is true for those seeking associate's degrees, certificates, or some college education beyond high school (NCES, 2008). Still, researchers continue to seek evidence of the factors influencing the decision to go to college, the choice of college majors, and choice of careers.

### *Frameworks*

Numerous studies, both qualitative and quantitative, provide evidence for establishing a theoretical framework on career decision-making or students' choice of college (Prindiville, 1995). For example, various econometric and sociological models on college describe college choice as a development process that includes decision-making in unique stages. They can be found in the works of several researchers and social theorists (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Eggleston & Laanan, 2001; Townsend, 2003). Peers, family members (especially mothers and

fathers), teachers, academic counselors, and other adults have been found to have the greatest influence (Bers & Smith, 1987; Monks, J., 1999; Walpole, M., 2003; Prindiville, 1995). Prindiville believes that most of the available literature focuses on high school students' aspirations to pursue baccalaureate programs, rather than an extensive analysis of the characteristics and motives of CTE students who attend community or technical colleges.

Bateman and Spruill (1996) suggest that college choice models provide help in understanding and guiding students through their decision-making stages and college experience. They distinguish between three categories of college choice models: *econometric models*, in which geographic, economic, and academic factors based on family background, social context, and academic experiences influence college choice; *sociological models*, in which status attainment in individual positions or occupations of prestige influence college choice; and *combined models*, which “draw from both sociological and econometric models by extricating and combining the most powerful indicators in the decision-making process of each (Hossler et al., 1989), providing guidance to institutional decision makers” (Bateman & Spruill, 1996, p. 4).

Many educational scholars have relied on Hossler and Gallagher's three-phase model on college choice. Table 2-1 depicts their model. Since the introduction of their model on college choice, Gildersleeve (2003) believes educational scholars have widely accepted the Hossler and Gallagher model as a psychological, individual level framework for understanding the complex process that determines postsecondary educational and/or career plans. Their model has stood out as the preeminent model on the college choice process since 1987 (Gildersleeve, 2003). Hossler and Gallagher built their model based

upon prior studies that examined how student background characteristics, aspirations, and achievements interact with student expectations of college. They include the works of Chapman (1981, 1984), Jackson (1982), Lewis & Morrison (1975), Litten, (1982), and Litten, Sullivan & Brodigan (1983). Combined, their research attempts to explain how these factors interact to influence students' attitudes towards attending college, why they select a specific institution, and the implications for policymakers (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

Table 2-1 Hossler and Gallagher's Three-Phase Model on College Choice (Hossler and Gallagher, 1987, p. 208).

Mode 1 Dimensions	Influential Factors		Student Outcomes
	Individual Factors Factors	Organizational	
Predisposition (Phase 1)	Student characteristics Significant others Educational activities	School characteristics	Search for: a. College options b. Other options
Search (Phase 2)	Student preliminary college values	College and University search activities (Search for students)	a. Choice set b. Other c. options
Choice (Phase 3)	Choice set	College and University courtship activities	Choice

The three phases of Hossler and Gallagher's Three-Phase Model on College Choice are: (1) predisposition, (2) search, and (3) choice. The *predisposition stage* is that stage of the college choice process when students decide whether they aspire to continue their formal education after high school. The *search stage* is the process of considering which types of postsecondary educational institutions to apply. The *choice stage* is the selection of an institution to attend (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

Prindiville (1995) used Hossler and Gallagher's model to analyze a total of 25 variables with the intent to explore the differences found in personal, family background, and school variables among high school seniors electing two postsecondary options: a community college or two-year technical college CTE career pathway, or a four-year baccalaureate-granting college or university. Her methodology included the use of a discriminate function analysis, followed by descriptive cross-tabulations in which she was able to develop a profile of the two student cohorts. Surveys and tests of students, and surveys of parents, school administrators, and teachers were collected from the *NELS:88 Second Follow-Up*. Only the student questionnaire and test data were used in her study. Table 2-2 depicts Prindiville's expansion of Hossler and Gallagher's model.

The advantage of using the Hossler and Gallagher model was that it allowed variables to be analyzed that may influence the aspirations of students (Prindiville, 1995). Prindiville found that, among the 25 variables analyzed, five of the most distinguishing variables likely to influence their decision to attend college, in ranking order, are as follows:

1. Students' Academic Aspirations (desire to attend college)
2. School Support (teachers and counselors)
3. Parental Influence
4. Socioeconomic Status (SES)
5. College Admissions Applications

Table 2-2 Prindiville's Expansion of Hossler and Gallagher's Three-Phase Model on College Choice (Prindiville, 1995, p. 28).

Stage	Description	Variables
Predisposition	Earliest Stage of the process when students decide to continue their formal education after high school	Personal Characteristics 1. Gender 2. Ethnicity 3. Academic (ability) Performance 4. Students' career aspirations Family Characteristics 5. SES 6. Parental Educational levels 7. Parental career aspirations for their students School Characteristics 8. School support 9. Peer influence 10. School climate 11. High school curriculum program
Search	The process of considering which types of postsecondary educational institutions to apply	Personal Characteristics 1. Taking the PSAT exam 2. Number of schools to which student has applied 3. Financial aid applications Family Characteristics 4. SES 5. Parents' educational background 6. College costs School Characteristics 7. Peer influence 8. Location of the school
Choice	The selection of an institution to attend	Personal Characteristics 1. Academic (ability) Performance 2. Ethnicity 3. College costs 4. Financial aid Family Characteristics 5. SES 6. Parental educational levels 7. Parental encouragement School Characteristics 8. Peer influence

Of the five variables, Prindiville found the four top variables strongly aligned within Hossler and Gallagher's *predisposition phase*. More specifically, this phase is considered a "developmental phase" in which students decide whether or not they will continue their formal education after high school (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). The fifth variable, *College Admissions Applications*, was found in Hossler and Gallagher's *search phase*, which indicated to Prindiville that the student was serious about searching for a postsecondary institution to attend. She recommends further research be conducted on these and other variables related to the college choice process.

#### *Choice and Transfer Research on CTE Students*

The Hossler and Gallagher conceptual model on college choice considers what predisposes students to attend college after high school, but does not address community college transfer students and the factors leading to their decision to attend the senior institution. Currently, community colleges in the United States are now attracting the majority of first-year higher education students, and most of them initially plan on continuing their education at a 4-year college or university (Rhine, Milligan, & Nelson, 2000). This raises an overarching question similar to what Prindiville has raised. That is, what factors, in general, influence first-year students' decision to attend a community college, versus a 4-year college or university? A review of the literature reveals a multitude of reasons not limited to CTE students alone.

#### *Community College Choice*

Community colleges offer an attractive alternative to four-year colleges and universities. In addition to cost savings through lower tuition and fees, community colleges permit students to remain close to home, thereby reducing the cost of living

expenses and permitting close proximity to family and friends as support systems (Montondon & Eikner, 1997). Montondon and Eikner also cite, “although many students who attend community colleges do so for economic reasons, some students attend community colleges because they have no other choice. Their high school grades or college admittance test scores (SAT, ACT) are too low to gain admittance to the university of their choice” (p. 21).

Dare (2003) examines a number of research studies (Bragg & Kim, 2006; DeLuca, Plank, & Estacion, 2006; Bottoms & Anthony, 2005) focusing on “boundary-spanning” CTE initiatives intended to facilitate students’ K-12 transitions into postsecondary institutions. She cites four best-practice programs researchers have studied in recent years. They include: *High Schools that Work* (HSTW); *Tech Prep*; *College and Careers Transition Initiative* (CCTI); and *Project Lead the Way* (PLTW). All four programs attempt to infuse rigorous academics high school course work with CTE disciplines, and all four programs have shown positive results in successfully facilitating student transitions to postsecondary education. However, Dare recommends these four initiatives “serve as wake-up calls for community colleges,” as opposed to 4-year colleges. “Although high school CTE programs vary, community colleges must provide the key leadership throughout students’ transition” (Dare, 2003, p. 78).

Cohen and Brawer (2003) cite several reasons for choosing to attend the community college, and those reasons are not limited to CTE students. Beyond general growth in population, they include part-time attendance, reclassification of institutions targeting older students, redefinition of students and courses, and high attendance by low-ability women and minority students. Piland (1995) suggests that community colleges

foster an atmosphere more conducive to students in general, such as relatively small class sizes, excellent instruction, and personal attention. This may also “help students acquire the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to be successful at the senior institution” (Piland, 1995, p. 4). According to Townsend (2004), community colleges have a long-standing mission of providing a “second chance” to students with poor academic records, or students with lower abilities, as measured by standardized high school tests and grade point average (GPA). However, her research focuses on the technical community college as a “first choice” institution for post-baccalaureate work because it “offered a second chance for career advancement or a career change” (Townsend, 2004, p. 273).

#### *Community College Transfer Students*

At its very foundation, the community college continues to play a major role in the transfer function. Glass and Harrington (2003) state that “the transfer function was, and still is, one of the most important functions of the community college” (p. 416). Their study was prompted by the differing viewpoints regarding the quality of transfer students. Dougherty (1998), a prominent scholar among community college researchers, believes the community college serves as the main portal entry to higher education. He argues that, not only should it enlarge its role as a main portal, but community colleges should safeguard its “open-access and comprehensive character, making sure that it remains particularly open to working class and minority students ... and its transfer function must be protected, in part, by encouraging transfer on the part of occupational education students” (Dougherty, 1997, p. 1 ). Yet critics of the community college transfer function continue to scrutinize its transfer role, even proclaiming that entering a community college decreases the likelihood that a student will complete a bachelor’s



degree (Brint & Karabel, 1989), hence the need for continued research on transfer students' performance, adjustment processes, and other empirical challenges they face (Deegan & Tillery, 1988; Pincus & Archer, 1989; Dougherty, 1998). Regardless, from their beginnings to the 1940s when they were known mostly as junior colleges providing collegiate-grade lower-division university course work, through their expanding role as a community college in the 60s and 70s, the transfer role has remained intact (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

While community colleges continue to serve a diverse group of students with diverse sets of needs, their success is often measured by their ability to facilitate baccalaureate pathways to four-year institutions (Long & Kurleander, 2008). All too often the debates over the growing number of community college baccalaureate aspirants are plagued with “data of poor quality; anecdotes and surveys drawn from a small unrepresentative sample of colleges” (Dougherty, 1997, p. 189). Though these debates are important, Dougherty notes that defenders of the community colleges would argue that the critics are comparing apples and oranges. Furthermore, the bulk of prior research highlighting the reduced likelihood of baccalaureate attainment for community college transfer students focuses on students who graduated fifteen to twenty-five years ago (Long & Kurleander, 2008). In their more recent study, Long and Kurleander's findings suggest a “community college penalty” for starting at the two-year institution, as opposed to those that start at a four-year institution. “Our conservative estimates suggest that these students are 14.5 percent less likely to complete a baccalaureate degree within nine years” (Long & Kurleander, 2008). Like most comparative studies between community college transfer students and native four-year students, they recommend the two types of

institutions focus more on policies and initiatives that facilitate retention and transitional support services that aid transfer students in reaching their intended goal of obtaining a baccalaureate degree.

Since the 1970s, high proportions of CTE students graduating from community college CTE two-year programs have been transferring to the university, thus causing the lines between CTE and traditional collegial liberal arts education to become blurred (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Cohen and Brawer suggest that “an argument can be made that all contemporary education is vocational, since it is designed for people who will one day work” (p. 248). Because of the difficulties in predicting what the future holds in terms of available jobs, they suggest the challenge be remedied in two ways. First, by ensuring our educational system remain open enough for students to return for retraining, that is, “life-long learning.” And secondly, they suggest training should be broad enough in scope so that it is applicable to a multitude of occupations. They stress that occupational skills alone are not sufficient and that CTE education will fail without the integration of traditional academic rigor necessary for attaining functional literacy and interpersonal skills.

#### Methodological Approaches Used to Study Transfer Students

An analysis of existing methodological approaches used to study transfer students show that they are, by and large, quantitative studies. This is not to say these studies are lacking richness, nor to negate these studies because they are quantitative in nature, but to consider alternative techniques in eliciting data to gain an understanding of the phenomenon in question. Qualitative researchers depend on a variety of methods for

collecting data. According to Glense (1999), rather than relying on a single technique, the use of multiple methods contributes to the trustworthiness of the data. Cresswell (2003) believes that choosing between a quantitative approach, qualitative, or mixed design approach is a matter of priority. “A priority for one type of study or the other depends on the interests of the researcher, the audience for the study (e.g., faculty committee, professional association), and what the investigator seeks to emphasize in the study” (Cresswell, 2003, p. 212).

A review of these quantitative studies reveals that data collection draws upon local, state, and national survey data; institutional research databases; and administered surveys and questionnaires, many involving content analysis of large samples ( $n > 30$ ) of high school, community college, and university students. Various combinations of descriptive and inferential statistics are used by researchers to characterize the student population they are sampling. For example, Fredrickson (1998) used a two-sample t-test and Tukey honestly significant difference (HSD) test to study over 5,000 transfer students to the University of North Carolina. She found that 70% of the students came from college transfer programs and 30% from technical programs. Her results were contrary to Cohen and Brawer (1989), who suggested that up to one half of community college transfer students come from occupational programs. She also found that 67% to 83% of the transfer students waited at least one year before transferring to the four-year institution, a characteristic of community college students known as *swirl*: patterns of swirling back and forth between the workforce and the two- and four-year institution.

Ceja, Kaylor, and Rewey (1998) studied over 300 community college transfer students and used a 2X4 mixed model analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Tukey HSD.

Their findings support previous studies on *transfer shock*: a temporary decline in community college transfer students' GPAs within their first few semesters at the four-year institution. Laanan (1996), another prominent scholar among community college researchers, studied nearly 800 California community college students who transferred to the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA). He used descriptive statistics and t-tests to determine if UCLA's Transfer Alliance Program (TAP), an honors program articulated with California community colleges, enhanced the academic performance of transfer students and aided the students in their adjustment process. The differences in academic performance between TAP and non-TAP students in terms of GPA were not statistically significant. Piland (1995) conducted a study of community college transfer students who earned their bachelor's degree from San Diego State University (SDSU), the largest among the California State University campuses. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze student characteristics and graduation rates. Content analysis of university transcripts and microfiche copies of community college students' records over a six-year period (1987-1992) permitted Piland to identify multiple populations, the largest being 5,532 bachelor's degree recipients of the 15,085 total number of community college transfer students who enrolled at SDSU over the six year period. Of the 5,532 transfer students who attained their bachelor's degree, 1,796 were transfer students. This equates to approximately one third of graduating students.

Piland's study aligns with the U.S. Department of Education's 2008 NCES study on 2004 high school graduating students who immediately enrolled in postsecondary institutions the following fall semester. One third of the 63% of high school graduates who immediately enrolled in college chose the community college and two-thirds of the

63% of students chose a 4-year institution. In 1992, the same percentage of high school graduates (1/3) chose the community college immediately after graduation, versus a 4-year institution (2/3). Though this data pertains to high school students, and not transfer students, it serves as a fundamental benchmark for comparison.

### Methodological Approaches Used to Study CTE Students

As stated earlier, Prindiville (1995) used Hossler and Gallagher's model to analyze a total of 25 variables with the intent to explore the differences found in personal, family background, and school variables among high school seniors electing two postsecondary options: a community college or two-year technical college CTE career pathway, or a four-year baccalaureate-granting college or university. In her quantitative study, she included the use of a discriminate function analysis, followed by descriptive cross-tabulations in which she was able to develop a profile of the two student cohorts. Surveys and tests of students, and surveys of parents, school administrators, and teachers were collected from the *NELS:88 Second Follow-Up*. Only the student questionnaire and tests data were used in her study.

In more recent years, Laanan (2006), conducted a quantitative study on *The Role of Career and Technical Education in Iowa Community Colleges*, and used descriptive statistics in conjunction with Iowa institutional data and Iowa Department of Education data. Dare (2006) conducted a study entitled *The Role of Career and Technical Education in Facilitating Student Transitions to Postsecondary Education*, and used evolutionary CTE studies. Grubb and Lazerson (2005) used this same approach in their essay entitled *Vocationalism in Higher Education: The Triumph of the Educational*

*Gospel*, and Rhine, Milligan, and Nelson (2000), in their study entitled *Alleviating Transfer Shock: Creating An Environment for More Successful Transfer Students*. In a study entitled *Improving Access to the Baccalaureate*, Zinser (2006) used both quantitative and qualitative data drawn from a Web-based survey conducted among principal investigators (PIs), or designees, of National Science Foundation (NSF) Advanced Technology Education (ATE)-funded projects. His study on two-year CTE degrees and how they articulate to baccalaureate degrees was intended to help explain how well NSF's ATE projects improve CTE students' access to the university.

One qualitative study worthy of noting because of its methodological approach and similarity to this study, but at the high school level, is that of Gentry, Hu, and Peters (2008). Their study, entitled *Talented Students in an Exemplary Career and Technical Education School*, was prompted, in part, by the fact that little information has been written about gifted and talented secondary CTE students in CTE settings. Their purpose was to investigate, through the use of qualitative tools, the perceptions and experiences of gifted and talented CTE students in a CTE center whereby students met each day for a half day (Gentry, Hu, and Peters, 2008). Although their study pertains to CTE high school students, the researchers' theoretical, empirical, and methodological approach is closely aligned to the problem and purpose statement of the current study.

Gentry, Hu, and Peters' (2008) used grounded theory as their method of inquiry. Data collection included participant observations, semi-structured interviews, and document review. The corresponding data were categorized using open coding, followed by the formation of axial codes (typically used with grounded theory) to describe various student phenomena. Four themes emerged from their study: (1) individualization, (2)

student-centered meaningful choices, (3) instructors as developers of talent, and (4) participation in Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs). According to Gentry, Hu, and Peters, these four themes parallel suggested practices in gifted education. Their research addresses the U.S. Department of Education's definition of *gifted* and *talented*, and indicates that not all students with gifts or talents have skills aligned in the traditional academic areas. Gentry, Hu, and Peters, like other researchers studying CTE students, recommend additional research to be conducted on talented CTE students. They also recommend "more research is needed concerning the efficacy of this method" (p. 196).

### Qualitative Rationale

It is unlikely Gentry, Hu, and Peters arbitrarily chose a qualitative approach to their study on CTE students. Over the past ten years, qualitative research has become increasingly more accepted as a legitimate mode of inquiry in the social behavioral and health sciences (Creswell, 2007). Marshall and Rossman (1999) reflect upon the unique characteristics of qualitative research, such as taking place in a natural world; using multiple methods that are interactive and humanistic; is emergent, rather than tightly prefigured; and is fundamentally interpretive. From a researcher's perspective, he or she views social phenomenon holistically, systematically reflects on who he or she is in the inquiry, is sensitive to one's own personal biography and how it shapes the study, and uses complex reasoning that is multifaceted and iterative (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

With the vast array of books and reference articles on qualitative research, and the various approaches of inquiry, researchers are often at a loss in understanding what

approaches to use and how to make an informed choice of an option for research (Creswell, 2007). Additionally, the various qualitative research “camps” led by staunch research methodologists and philosophical advocates often overlap, even contradict each other, causing even more difficulty in making an informed choice as to which approach is best suited for one’s study. For example, major sociological and anthropological theoretical perspectives include *Functionalism*, *Conflict Theory*, *Critical Theory*, *Ethnoscience*, *Exchange Theory*, *Psychodynamic Theory*, and *Behaviorism*. According to LeCompte & Preissle (1993), the vast number of these theoretical perspectives is interrelated sets of assumptions, concepts, and propositions that constitute a view of the world. “Frequently, however, they are little more than conceptual frameworks or typologies” (p. 126). Complicating matters further, particularly for graduate researchers, there are *philosophical assumptions*, *research paradigms*, and *interpretive frameworks* that need consideration in qualitative research design.

Creswell (2007) suggests that “good research requires making these philosophical assumptions, paradigms, and frameworks explicit in the writing of a study, and at a minimum, to be aware that they influence the conduct of inquiry” (p. 15). Given these suggestions, the stance taken for the philosophical assumption of this study on CTE transfer students is *ontological* in nature. (It is based on Creswell’s ontological assumptions, which are adapted from Lincoln and Guba (1988)). The ontological question raised is: “What is the nature of reality?” The ontological characteristic is, “reality is subjective, and multiple, as seen by participants in the study.” The ontological implications for practice are, “researchers use quotes and themes in words of participants



and provides evidence of different perspectives” (Creswell, 2007, p. 17). The ontological assumption best informs the conduct and writing of this study.

*Paradigms or world views* are “a basic set of beliefs that guide action” (Guba, 1990, p. 17). Creswell (2003) focuses on four paradigms or world views: (1) postpositivism, (2) social constructivism, (3) advocacy/participatory, and (4) pragmatism. This study used the world view of *social constructivism*, which is common phenomenology and grounded inquiries. As for the *interpretive framework*, this study, like all qualitative studies, took into account the pervasive lenses or perspectives in understanding the “differences in gender, race, religion, class, sexuality, and geography, or some intersection of these differences” (Creswell, 2007, p. 24). Some of these theoretical perspectives include *post modern perspectives, feminists theories, critical theory* and *critical race theory, queer theory, and disability theories*.

### Conclusion of the Literature Review

This chapter presented a review of the literature on *career and technical education* (CTE) students and the major contributions of significant works as they pertain to college choice. An historic perspective on CTE was given at the onset to establish an apparent connection between what is known versus the areas of inquiry that necessitate further study. Clearly, there is an abundance of literature on studies pertaining to community colleges’ long-standing mission in providing its transfer function. Even more is available on accommodating high school graduates with lower academic records than their university counterparts, minority students, students from low SES backgrounds, continuing education and adult students, students seeking skills or certificates with no

intent to attain a degree, articulation and retention challenges, and a multitude of other issues surrounding America's community colleges.

Billions of dollars from federal funding through a long history of Carl D. Perkins legislation, School-to-Work and Tech Prep initiatives, as well as the National Science Foundation's Advanced Technology Education grants, have aided CTE reform efforts aimed at providing defined career pathways for CTE students, yet the literature review continues to indicate these efforts remain seriously under-researched (Castellano, Stringfield, & Stone (2003); Dare (2006); Zinzer 2006); Brown (2001); et al.). Flaga (2006) contends the bulk of the literature on transfer students deals with "transfer shock," the temporary dip in GPA as transfer students adjust to the new four-year college or university environment. Beyond studies conducted by government agencies, including the Department of Education's Office for Vocational and Adult Education, research specifically on CTE transfer students and the factors influencing their decision to attend the senior institution remains sparse. In Nevada, it is non-existent. Nevertheless, the combined studies germane to this research topic have provided a sound understanding of the phenomenon surrounding CTE students and the unique challenges they face. They have also served to identify and accentuate the dearth of research on CTE students in facilitating their transition to postsecondary education.

The two studies credited with establishing relevance and having direct implications to the problem statement, research questions, and theoretical framework for this study include Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) Three-Phase Model on College Choice and the seminal work of Prinitive (1995). Hossler and Gallagher's conceptual model on college choice considers the central characteristics that predispose students to attend

college after high school, but does not address those of the community college transfer student, specifically CTE students and their decision to move on to the senior institution. Prindiville used Hossler and Gallagher's model as a framework towards exploring the differences found in personal, family background, and a multitude of other school variables among high school students choosing a CTE pathway to the community college, or a baccalaureate program in a four-year college or university. The current study springboards off of their combined exemplary research and the relevance they have provided towards addressing the problem statement and research questions posed in this study.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

This chapter highlights the methodological approach to data collection and analysis of Nevada Career and Technical Education (CTE) transfer students. An overview of the method of inquiry and how the phenomenological research questions are formulated is established at the onset. Qualitative research design processes generally begin with several philosophical assumptions which include the researcher's personal worldviews, paradigms, and belief systems in to the study. On this basis, it is necessary to expound upon these assumptions so it is clear that the research design is based on an approach that best suits the research problem (Creswell, 2007). "Good research requires making these assumptions, paradigms, and frameworks explicit in the writing of a study...and the qualitative researcher chooses a stance on each of these assumptions, and the choice has practical implications for designing and conducting research" (p. 15). Therefore, the explicit stance taken on philosophical assumptions, paradigms, and interpretive frameworks that inform the conduct and writing of this study are presented, along with the methods used to address validation and trustworthiness.

#### Overview of Methods

This study uses a hermeneutic phenomenology framework as a method of inquiry to explore the predisposition factors that influence Nevada career and technical education

(CTE) transfer students to continue their education at the senior institution. A *hermeneutic* approach (which is more fully explained throughout this chapter) was selected on the basis of nearly 30 years of CTE professional and personal experience oriented towards an “abiding concern” and interest in interpreting the “lived experiences” of CTE students (van Manen, 1990, p. 31). Additionally, the researcher’s service as a Board member for the Nevada Association for Career and Technical Education and Chair for the Nevada Department of Education’s secondary and postsecondary information technology (IT) standards writing team is conducive to the interpretive techniques supporting a hermeneutic phenomenology method of inquiry.

In his discussion on hermeneutic phenomenology, Denzin (1989) states that all researchers must express their prior interpretations or experiences of the phenomenon being investigated, otherwise any subsequent interpretations by others may be clouded or misunderstood. Whereas some qualitative researchers, trained in a particular methodological discipline, are adamant over disciplinary tools, jargon, and other territorial identifiers, many remain open to the array of techniques used to understand naturally-occurring phenomena in the social world. For example, Van Maanen (1983) believes that qualitative methods have no precise meaning in any of the social sciences. “It is at best an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning...of naturally occurring phenomenon in the social world” (p. 9). He also believes that qualitative methods do not prohibit the use of scientific empiricism because qualitative researchers “tend to regard social phenomena as more particular and ambiguous than replicable and clearly defined.”

Hammersly and Atkinson (1995) believe that most researchers write for other scholars, as opposed to outside audiences. They draw upon prior research and develop ideas that make sense within the conceptual language of a given discipline. However, “an over-concern for scholarly framework and concepts would distort and obscure the nuances of everyday life; but to simply present members’ categories exclusively in their terms would produce texts devoid of relevance and interest to scholarly audiences” (Hammersly & Atkins, 1995, p. 169). Green, Camilli, & Elmore (2006) indicate that *The American Educational Research Association’s* journals are abound with reports on case studies, inquiry that incorporates ethnographic procedures, hermeneutic analyses, thick descriptions, and narrative accounts of multiple methods serving to complement each other across the disciplines. "Today, it is virtually impossible for any one approach to be used to address the complex issues being explored through research in education. Further, no longer is it a question of alternative research traditions (the concern of Jaegar in 1988 and 1997) but of which approaches are appropriate to the questions under study and which can be productively combined within a program of research" (Green, Camilli, & Elmore, 2006, p.xvi).

Given these perspectives, the overall form, focus, and emphasis of this study demonstrate the intuitive use of those qualitative methods deemed necessary in yielding the most meaningful and optimized results. In doing so, the long and distinguished history of social science practices, including those who are among the pioneers, has been duly noted.

## Formulating the Phenomenological Research Questions

In characterizing the pursuit of human science research reduced to its hermeneutic phenomenological methodical structure, van Manen (1990, p. 30) draws the researcher's attention to six structural dynamics that necessitate consideration: (1) A phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world; (2) investigating experience as we live it, rather than as we conceptualize it; (3) reflecting on essential themes which characterize the phenomenon; (4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing; (5) maintaining a strong pedagogical relationship to the phenomenon; and (6) balancing research context by considering parts and the whole. Bearing in mind these structural dynamics while establishing research questions and conducting an investigation is vitally important in phenomenological research. Further preparedness was attained by formulating research questions with the intent to satisfy some distinct characteristics. These six "methodological themes," as van Manen suggests, are intended to enable researchers to "invent" new procedural methods and techniques for hermeneutic phenomenology research, provided they are appropriate.

He (van Manen, 1990) also suggests that the hermeneutic phenomenology interview serves the specific purpose of exploring and gathering experiential information that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon. "The interview process needs to be disciplined by the fundamental question that prompted the need for the interview in the first place... and that one needs to guard against the temptation to let method rule the question, rather than the research question determining what kind of method is most appropriate for its immanent direction" (van Manen, 1990, p. 66). In this regard, Prindiville's study and her findings

serve as a fundamental basis for disciplining, framing, and prompting the interview questions for this study.

In preparing to conduct a phenomenological investigation, Moustakas (1994, p. 104) stresses the importance of establishing a topic of intense interest, one that has social meaning, excitement, curiosity, personal significance, and personal history that bring the core of the problem into focus. This is the basis in which research questions evolve and remain meaningful and alive throughout one's investigation. They parallel the methodological themes suggested by van Manen and outlined above. The same is true with his characterization of research questions. He provides five "definite characteristics" of research questions which the study also takes into account (p. 105): (1) They seek to reveal more fully the essence and meaning of human experience; (2) they seek to uncover the qualitative rather than the quantitative factors in behavior and experience; (3) they engage the total self of the research participant, and sustain personal and passionate involvement; (4) they do not seek to predict or to determine causal relationships; and (5) they are illuminated through careful, comprehensive descriptions, and vivid and accurate renderings of the experience, rather than measurements, ratings, or scores. These methodological themes from van Manen, coupled with Moustakas' characterization of research questions, have provided the appropriate criteria for developing the research questions that have been framed by Prindiville's study. These criteria served to guide the interview process and methodological approach to data collection and analysis for this study.



## Research Questions

The following research questions assume two forms: broad centralized questions followed by associated sub-questions that narrow the focus of the study (Creswell, 2007). Combined, they represent the overall intent of the study, how open or closed it will be, and how it provides a focus on data collection and analysis (Glesne, 1999). Two centralized research questions have been formulated for this study. Both questions appropriately align with van Manen's hermeneutic structural dynamics and Moustakas' characterization of the phenomenological research questions as described above.

Broad centralized questions:

1. *How do Career and Technical Education (CTE) transfer students describe their career pathway experiences as they transition from high school to the community college and on to senior institution (UNLV, UNR or NSC)?*
2. *What factors influence CTE transfer students the most in their decision to transfer from the community college to the senior institution?*

A myriad of focused sub-questions were used to engage the respondent into telling their story, revealing essential themes, and capturing the essence of their lived experience as CTE transfer students. The interviews were continued until the topic was deemed exhausted and no new perspectives of the phenomenon evolved. Examples of focused sub-questions include the following:

1. *How do CTE transfer students describe their academic aspirations to attend the senior institution?*

2. *Who, if anyone, has had the greatest impact on a CTE transfer student's decision to transfer to the senior institution?*
3. *How has socioeconomic background supported or hindered a CTE transfer student's decision to continue their education beyond the community college and on to the senior institution?*

These overarching centralized research questions and focused sub-questions satisfy Moustakas' five "definite characteristics." Collectively, they represent a topic of intense interest, one that has social meaning, excitement, curiosity, personal significance, and personal history that bring the core of the problem into focus (Moustakas, 1994).

#### Methodology and Approach to Data Collection and Analysis

Phenomenology, as a method of inquiry for qualitative research, can be broadly defined as the study of a group of individuals' "lived experiences," with an interpretive description of what these individuals have in common as they experience the phenomenon. Two philosophical perspectives providing guidance to this method of inquiry stem from the historical works of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). Husserl, heralded as the "founder of modern phenomenology," is credited with the concept of *epoche* (bracketing), whereby researchers bracket out or suspend their own judgment as they interpret and describe the phenomenon under study. Moustakas (1994) refers to this as "transcendental phenomenology." Transcendental meaning, "everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time" (p. 34). Heidegger, an assistant to Husserl in 1916 (Smith, 2008), unfurled Husserl's rendition of

phenomenology with his own philosophical perspective. In his classic book, *Being and Time*, published in 1927, Heidegger disputes the concept of epoche or bracketing and discusses *hermeneutic phenomenology*, a methodological perspective that is interpretive, rather than descriptive (transcendental). The argument he poses is that any description is already an interpretation.

As stated earlier, this study uses a hermeneutic phenomenology framework as a method of inquiry to explore those predisposition factors that influence Nevada CTE transfer students to continue their education at the senior institution. A vast personal and professional background, oriented towards an “abiding concern” and interest (van Manen, 1990) in interpreting the “lived experiences” of CTE students, strongly supports Heidegger’s interpretive perspective and provides justification for this hermeneutic phenomenology method of inquiry. Given the extensive CTE background and abiding concern stated earlier, caution was given to potentially hazardous tendencies of bias and objectivity resulting from what researchers refer to as “over-identification,” “over-rapport,” and “going native” (Glesne, 1999, p. 102). “The qualitative researcher’s challenge is to demonstrate that his personal interest will not bias the study” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 28). Therefore, an awareness of the methodological distinctions between hermeneutic phenomenology and transcendental phenomenology was kept in mind throughout the data collection and data analysis process.

#### Philosophical Assumptions, Paradigms, and Interpretive Frameworks

Qualitative research originates when a researcher figuratively encompasses a temporal and spatial domain of the social world and define the territory about which

descriptions are fashioned (Van Maanen, 1983). “These descriptions are essentially idiographic maps of the territory, which must then be read and interpreted by the investigator if any nomothetic statements are to result from a given study” (p. 9). Data collection and analysis for this study encompassed the temporal and spatial domain surrounding the predisposition factors of successful career and technical education (CTE) transfer students. Capturing the *telos* (essence) of their experience and incorporating it into suggestive nomothetic statements is the fundamental act of data collection and analysis in qualitative studies, according to Van Maanen. In doing so, the researcher will be mindful that, “good research requires making *philosophical assumptions, paradigms, and interpretive frameworks* explicit in the writing of a study, and at a minimum, to be aware that they influence the conduct of inquiry” (Creswell, 2007, p. 15A). The researcher was also mindful of the “blurring of genres,” paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences that Lincoln and Guba (2005) address. For example, they state that “inquiry methodology can no longer be treated as a set of universally applicable rules or abstractions” (Lincoln & Guba, 2005, p. 191); all the more reason for one to take a stance in bearing down on what practitioners have already established.

The stance taken for the philosophical assumption of this study on CTE transfer students was *ontological* in nature. It was based on Creswell’s ontological assumptions, which are adapted from Lincoln and Guba (1988). The ontological view embraces the nature of reality, taking into account the multiple subjective realities of the participants. In identifying the predisposition factors of those CTE transfer student participants, the researcher was mindful that the nature of the students’ reality is subjective, and is

evidence as seen from their own perspective or world view, and certainly weighing in the epistemological forces of the researcher's own account. Therefore, the ontological assumption best informs the conduct and writing for this study.

*Paradigms or world views* are “a basic set of beliefs that guide action” (Guba, 1990, p. 17). Mills, Bonner, and Francis (2006) believe that our world view and the meaning of truth and reality are influenced by our personal history and cultural background. To ensure a strong research design, they suggest researchers choose a paradigm that is congruent with their personal beliefs of truth and reality. Because *social constructivism* manifests itself in phenomenological and grounded theory perspectives, the social constructivist (also referred to as *interpretivist*) paradigm was used for this study. Social constructivism relies on the participant's view of their experiences, which are formed by interacting with others through historical and cultural norms surrounding the individual's life, hence social constructivism (Creswell, 2007). In interpreting and describing the phenomenon or lived experiences of CTE transfer students, this study abides by Creswell's (2007) suggestion that the research questions are “broad and general so that the participants can construct the meaning of a situation, a meaning typically forged in discussion or interactions with other persons. The more open-ended the questioning, the better, as the researcher listens carefully to what people say or do in their life setting” (p. 21).

Creswell also suggests that researchers be mindful of how their work is being presented (e.g., journals, dissertations, a call for action and transformation, etc.), and the distinct bodies of literature on the various interpretive communities and respective interpretive frameworks. Participants in these various communities seek to discover and

collaboratively create knowledge that may benefit underrepresented populations or marginalized groups (Marshall and Rossman, 1999). Their differences “take the form of gender, race, religion, class, sexuality, and geography, or some intersection of these differences” (Creswell, 2007, p. 24). Some of these interpretive communities include *postmodern perspectives*, *feminists theories*, *critical theory* and *critical race theory*, *queer theory*, and *disability theories*. This study was mindful of their respective lenses, their call for action and relevant change, and the potential influencing powers researchers have with their studies’ recommendations.

### Data Collection

According to Putney (2002), there are essentially three types of interviews: the highly structured formal interview, the semi-structured interview, and the unstructured informal interview. A highly structured interview is one in which the wording of questions and the order in which they are asked is predetermined. It is an oral form of a survey. The semi-structured interview is one in which there is a mix of structured questions and open-ended questions with observations included. The unstructured informal interview is entirely open-ended questions that allows for flexibility and exploration. It is essentially a conversation.

This study used an unstructured informal interview in a face-to-face mode with six CTE students who successfully transferred to one of Nevada’s three, 4-year public institutions. They included the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR), and Nevada State College (NSC). Student participants were all transfer students from one of Nevada’s four community colleges, which include the

College of Southern Nevada (CSN), Truckee Meadows Community College (TMCC), Great Basin College (GBC), and Western Nevada College (WNC).

In order to best characterize these transfer students, purposeful sampling was used to select the six students whose baccalaureate majors represent each of Nevada's six Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs). The six CTSOs, common among all 50 states, include Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA), Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA), Family Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA), Future Farmers of America (FFA), Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA), and Skills USA. Students were selected based on discussions and recommendations from Nevada CTE secondary and postsecondary faculty, the Nevada Association of Career and Technical Education (NACTE) current and past Board members, and the Nevada Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education. Examples of corresponding baccalaureate majors include the following:

1. DECA: Marketing, Management, Finance, Hospitality
2. FBLA: Business, Business Administration, Project Management, Human Resource Management
3. FCCLA: Family and Consumer Sciences, Teacher Education, Nutritional Science, Home Economics
4. FFA: Agriculture, Agriculture Education, Horticulture, Plant/Soil Science
5. HOSA: Nursing, Health Science, Nutritional Science, Dental Hygiene

6. Skills USA: Graphic Design, Culinary Arts, Electrical Engineering,  
Construction Management, Mechanical Engineering, Computer Engineering,  
Criminal Justice

This type of purposeful sampling heeds the advice of Moustakas (1994) and Marshall and Rossman (1999), who suggest that researchers remain flexible in their sampling strategy, including the selection of location, setting, and nature of the participant. They believe the theoretical framework (in this case, phenomenology) should guide the selection of respondents and be built into the qualitative design. Both, Creswell (2007) and Marshall and Rossman (1999), emphasize the use of Miles and Huberman's (1994) approach to purposeful sampling. In his table of *Typology of Sampling Strategies for Qualitative Inquiry*, Creswell (2007) suggests the use of "Criterion Sampling" for phenomenological studies. "Criterion Sampling works well when all individuals studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon" (p. 128). Because of their experience, they are also likely to understand the nature of the research problem and willingly grant the researcher a recorded interview knowing their supporting data may be published in a dissertation or other publications (Moustakas, 1994).

#### *The Interview*

According to Moustakas (1994), in a phenomenological interview, the researcher is responsible for making the participant feel comfortable enough to respond in a genuinely honest and comprehensive fashion. The interview often begins with a relaxed conversation, or a "brief meditative activity aimed at creating a relaxed and trusting



atmosphere” (p. 114). To this notion, casual conversation took place prior to the onset of voice recordings. Upon establishing a perceived relaxed and trusting atmosphere, two digital recorders were turned on, one as a backup redundancy measure. Research questions, both the central and sub-questions, were used to establish a general direction of the conversation with each respondent. When new questions or themes (patterns, categories, perspectives, issues, etc.) emerged during the course of the interview, they were added or used to replace prior anticipated questions. Therefore, the interview remained flexible, iterative, and continuous, rather than prepared in advance and set in stone (Glesne, 1999; Babbie, 2004). Ideally, the respondent does most of the talking. According to Babbie, if the researcher talks more than 5% of the time, that’s probably too much.

An appropriate *Interview Questions and Protocol Sheet* (Appendix) was used to for ease of reference to pertinent research questions necessary to explore the participants’ experiences as CTE transfer students. It was also used to record detailed handwritten field notes. Lincoln and Guba (1985) do not recommend tape recordings except for unusual reasons. They believe the recorder is intrusive, and one runs the possibility of technical failure. Conversely, other prominent researchers believe the tape/digital recorder is indispensable. “Recordings have the advantage of capturing data more faithfully than hurriedly written notes, and can make it easier for the researcher to focus on the interview...” (Hoepfl, 1999). Considering the respondents in this study were all young, amiable, technology-savvy adult students, 18 years and older, it was anticipated beforehand that an audio recorder would pose no problem. Nevertheless, respondents were asked if they were comfortable with the audio recorder, and were reminded that

UNLV's Institutional Review Board (IRB) *Letter of Informed Consent* (Appendix) provided an option for note-taking as the primary mode of immediate data collection. The audio recorder posed no problem for the respondents.

### Data Analysis

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), the analysis of data by qualitative researchers can be identified using three major approaches: (1) interpretive approaches; (2) social anthropological approaches; and (3) collaborative social research approaches. This study assumed an interpretive approach (the constructivist paradigm) to data analysis, combining both *manifest* and *latent* content analysis, as recommended by Berg (2001). "Manifest content is comparable to the surface structure present in the message, and latent content is the *deep structural* meaning conveyed by the message" (Berg, 2001, p. 242). Combining the two strategies is best suited because it attempts to uncover or capture the *telos* (essence) of an account. In this case, the account was the interview transcriptions of CTE transfer student participants.

It is the description of these transcriptions that is hermeneutical. In his famous book, *Being and Time*, Heidegger (1962) states that, "The meaning of phenomenological description as a method lies in interpretation...hermeneutic in the primordial signification of this word, where it designates the business of interpreting" (p. 37). Additionally, van Manen (1990) believes there is a difference between understanding a phenomenological research project intellectually and understanding it "from the inside." Thus the interpretation (hermeneutics) of student transcripts was aided by the researcher's own understanding of the phenomenon, again, being mindful of Husserl's transcendental

methodology and *epoche* (bracketing), which argues that phenomenological research is purely descriptive.

In addition to manifest and latent content analysis, Creswell's (2007) procedures for phenomenological data analysis were used in conjunction with Berg's recommendations. Creswell's procedure for data analysis builds upon the methodological approaches of Berg and other noted phenomenologist like Husserl, Heidegger, Moustakas, Polkinghorne, and van Manen. He recommends highlighting significant words and statements, sentences, or quotes that provide an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) calls this *horizontalization*: a dimension of Husserl's (1970) *phenomenological reduction*. "It is a never-ending process, and though we may reach a stopping point and discontinue our perception of something, the possibility for discovery is unlimited" (p. 95 ).

This study employed horizontalization to develop "layers of meaning," penetrating deeper with each layer and discovering clusters and themes (domains) that further detail and accentuate the phenomenon. "From the structural and textural descriptions, the researcher then writes a composite description that presents the 'essence' of the phenomenon, called the *essential, invariant structure*, or essence" (Creswell, 2007, p. 62). *Event mapping*, coupled with Spradley's (1980) detailed methodology on *domain analysis*, was used as an added dimension of phenomenological reduction and horizontalization. This ultimately provided further definition and organization of the structural and textural descriptions of CTE transfer students' lived experiences.

## *Content Analysis*

“Analysis of any kind involves a way of thinking. It refers to the systematic examination of something to determine its parts, the relationship among parts, and their relationship to the whole” (Spradley, 1980, p. 85). Berg’s (2001) methodological coding technique of blending *manifest* and *latent* content analysis is systematic and makes intuitive sense, given a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. Therefore, interview transcriptions of all CTE transfer students were not limited to one content analysis strategy alone. Instead, both manifest and latent content analysis were used to assess the transcriptions, with the latter representing an interpretive reading of the symbolism underlying the physical data. What specifically is manifest and latent content analysis? Manifest content are those elements that are physically present and countable, whereas latent content is extended to an interpretive reading of the symbolism underlying the physical data (Berg, 2001). Both were used to analyze the data in an equally weighted manner.

On the basis of reporting the frequency with which a given concept appears in the text, researchers suggest the magnitude of the observation be a descriptive statistical consideration. However, in doing so, one should be mindful that frequency distributions, magnitudes, or proportions do not necessarily reflect the nature of the data or variables (Berg, 2001). The units of analysis, which are the major elements recommended by Berg, were identified by sampling each student’s total words, significant words, semantics, characters, paragraphs, and concepts. They were uniquely coded in accordance with the following definitions (Berg, 2001):

*Total Respondent words* (Manifest Content): Total number of words in Student transcription. This does not include the interviewer's words.

*Significant words* (Latent Content): Those words that are deemed relevant in capturing the *telos* (essence) of the student's transcription.

*Semantics* (Latent Content): Categories of the significant words due to their impact on the overall sentiment of the interview.

*Characters* (Latent Content): Significant people referenced in during the interview, e.g., parents, advisors, peers, teachers, etc.

*Total Paragraphs* (Manifest Content): Total number of paragraphs or responses by the CTE transfer student.

*Concepts* (Latent Content): SES, Career Pathways, and Scholastic Achievements: Clusters of words that form a conceptual idea. Socio-economic status (SES), career pathways, and scholastic achievements of the student have been identified.

Berg also outlines the definitions of three classes and/or categories used in standard content analysis. They include *common classes*, *special classes*, and *theoretical classes*. He defines common classes as those that are used to distinguish between and among persons, things, and events, e.g., age, gender, mother, father, teacher, cafeteria, student union, and so on. Special classes are used by members of certain areas or communities to distinguish between things, persons, and events within their own area or community. They can include jargon, such as *CTE* (Career and Technical Education), *ag* or *aggie* (agriculture or agriculture major), *CTSO* (Career and Technical Student Organization), *FFA* (Future Farmers of America), *NACTE* (Nevada Association for Career and Technical Education –pronounced nack-tee), and so forth. Theoretical classes

are those that emerge as a result of analyzing the data (Berg, 2001). In most content analyses, these theoretical classes provide overarching patterns that occur throughout the analysis. They can be likened to *semantics*, as defined earlier, or *domains* and *subdomains* in the domain analysis below. From these definitions, one sees the manifest and latent content of the transcribed data emerge from the puzzle.

This process can be broadly defined as *open coding*. Babbie (2004) defines open coding as, “The initial classification and labeling of concepts in qualitative data analysis. In open coding, the codes are suggested by the researchers’ examination and questioning of the data” (p. 377). Whether it is identifying classes and categories, or exhausting the extraction of those units of analysis listed above, the intent is ultimately to interpret and describe the essence of CTE transfer students’ experience as they transitioned to the senior institution. Thus content analysis, as described above, served as an initial layer towards penetrating into deeper layers of meaning (horizontalization).

Polkinghorne (1983, p. 210) maps out a similar methodology based on Amedeo Giorgi’s “empirical phenomenological analysis.” Giorgi, an experimental psychologist, is credited with discovering continental phenomenological philosophy. His empirical phenomenological analysis, as outlined by Polkinghorne, moves systematically from general descriptions of phenomenological structure that permits a sense of the whole, to more detailed structure that ultimately captures the essence with respect to the phenomenon. The researcher then “synthesizes and integrates the insights achieved into a consistent description of the structure of the phenomenon” (Polkinghorne, 1983, p. 211). Giorgi’s empirical phenomenological analysis, coupled with Moustakas’ horizontalization, further supports this study’s methodology on data analysis. Event

mapping and domain analysis has provided the detailed structure, capturing the essence of the CTE transfer students' lived experiences.

### *Event Mapping*

The interpretation of data often involves the mental process of identifying patterns, themes, differences, and the like, thereby permitting one to generate categories that aid in making sense of the data. It has become readily apparent that both quantitative and qualitative data analysts spend significant amounts of time committing their thoughts to the analysis of data. And they commonly resort to graphical means in order reinforce their understanding. In qualitative data analysis, *concept mapping* is often used as a method to model relationships among concepts within a given domain or theme. Some researchers find it is useful to put all their major concepts on a single sheet of paper, while others spread their thoughts across multiple sheets of paper, blackboards, magnetic boards, computer pages, or other media (Babbie, 2004).

Another qualitative data analysis method used in providing explicit visualization of relationships among concepts is through the use of *event maps*. Event maps differ from concept maps in that they are used specifically to illustrate the breakdown of “transitional events” into categories and subcategories, e.g., major events with corresponding detailed events within a major event, respectively. This is in contrast to mapping out “concepts,” as is the case with concept mapping. “Event mapping represents the flow of conduct of an individual member and/or the coordinated activity of multiple actors within a group across time. Event mapping can also be considered a form of transcribing and representing the flow of conduct between and among members of a social group” (Putney, 2008). In either case, as stated earlier, it involves the analysis of

data, a systematic examination of something to determine its parts, the relationship among parts, and their relationship to the whole (Spradley, 1980).

### *Construction of Event Map*

An event map was constructed for each CTE transfer student. Each was based on manifest and latent content analysis of their respective transcription. Though event maps, as stated earlier, are typically used to illustrate the breakdown of transitional events into categories and subcategories (or major events with corresponding detailed events within a major event) as a function of time, this study extended its use by including the flow of *transitional experiences* as a function of time and corresponding *transitional emotions*. This supports Van Maanen's (1983) notion that qualitative research originates when a researcher figuratively encompasses a temporal and spatial domain of the social world and defines the territory about which descriptions are fashioned. Each student's event map depicts a contiguous flow or sequencing of activities and experiences as they transitioned from high school to the community college and on to UNLV, UNR, or NSC. Their corresponding transitional emotions are also illustrated in the event map. In contrast to more traditional event maps, the students' transitional experiences and corresponding emotions may be regarded as *categories* and *subcategories*, or *Level I* and *Level II events* and *sub-events*, respectively (Putney, 2008).

Manifest content embedded in the students' transitional experiences and corresponding transitional emotions were derived from data expressed by words physically present and countable in their transcripts. They are graphically illustrated in the event maps to ultimately portray the student's experience as each transitioned to the senior institution. Any tacit signs of emotions (e.g. pride, excitement, self-worth)



apparent among students were combined with the latent content of the analysis because they are also considered an interpretive reading of the underlying phenomenon of the lived experience expressed without words. In other words, they are grounded in personal experiences as well as the given process of constructing the event map.

#### *Domain Analysis, Taxonomic Analysis, and Componential Analysis*

Spradley (1980) believes that, “in order to discover the cultural patterns of any social situation, you must undertake an intensive analysis of your data *before* proceeding further” (p. 85). He refers to this process as *domain analysis* and identifies steps on how to conduct a domain analysis on ethnographic data so one can understand the nature of cultural domains. His method of conducting a domain analysis is an invaluable analytical tool used by social scientists to identify *cultural patterns, patterns of behavior, categories of meaning, themes, attributes*, and other centralized ideas or concepts. In this study, patterns, categories, themes and attributes (terms often used synonymously) have been identified using Spradley’s domain analysis. They represent the “lived experiences” of CTE transfer students, some of which they share among each other –the phenomenon. Capturing the essence of what they experienced and how they experience it is essentially what the phenomenologist does (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenologists focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon (Cresswell, 2007). Thus the phenomena, and any characteristic differences among transfer students, are likened to Spradley’s domains and subdomains respectively.

In this study, domain analysis was based on Spradley’s systematic method of identifying semantic relationships within a given domain. Prior results of content analysis and event mapping have been integrated into the analysis. The domain is career

and technical education (CTE) and the phenomenological lived experiences expressed by the CTE transfer students. Three forms Spradley's semantic relationships were used. They were established in the pilot study discussed below: (1) Rationale, X is a reason for doing Y; (2) Cause and Effect, X is a result of Y; and (3) Attribution, X is an attribution of Y (Spradley, 1980, p. 93). Combined, they identify and graphically depict the individual phenomenon (domain), or the essence of what each CTE transfer student experienced. Identifying these three relationships among students also permitted a focused search and discovery effort towards categorizing patterns that have corresponding semantic meaning, including smaller categories that Spradley refers to as "sub-domains," which include even more detailed meaning, both tacit and explicit (Spradley, 1980, p. 130).

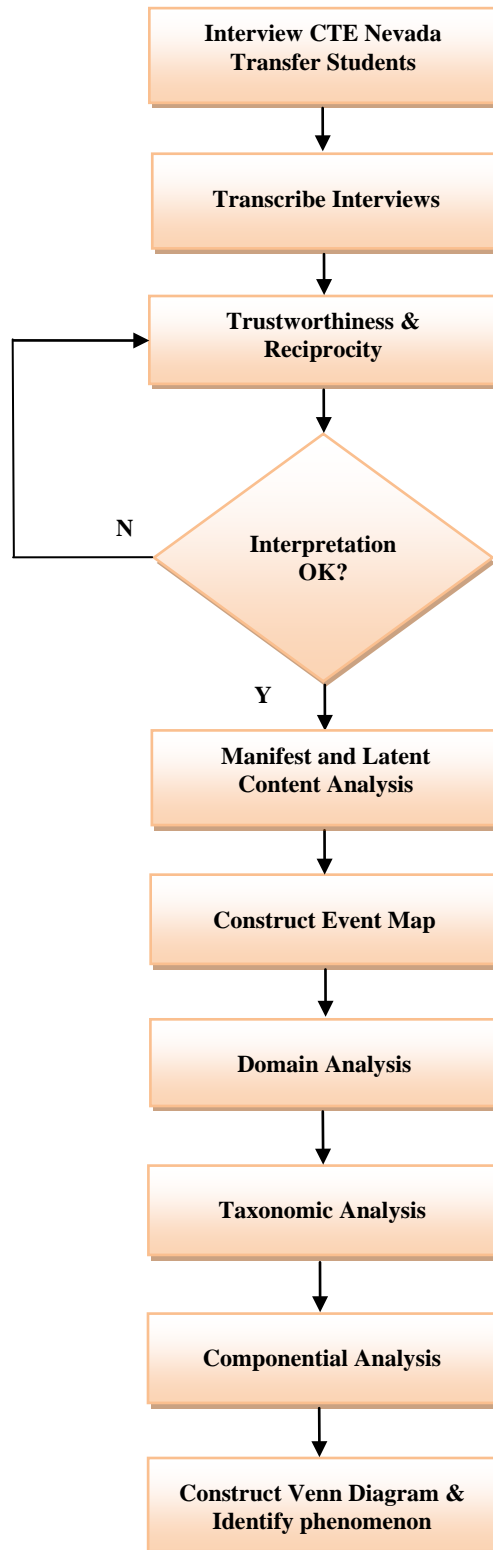
A *taxonomic analysis* provided further depth of the domain analysis by showing more of the relationships among the elements within the domain, namely descriptive, focused, and selective observations, as defined by Spradley. At this point in the research methodology, Spradley contends "there is a tendency to feel overwhelmed with the details." (1980, p. 130). However, the taxonomic analysis is necessary to provide an opportunity to organize descriptive, focused, and selective observations among the six CTE participants so that contrasts could be made with a *componential analysis* of CTE transfer students.

A componential analysis is considered Spradley's last step in conducting a domain analysis. It is "the systematic search for attributes (components of meaning) associated with cultural categories" (Spradley, 1980, p. 131). This study organized the dimensions of contrast among CTE transfer students in a manner that graphically depicts

their differences. As recommended in the pilot study discussed below, componential analysis tables and a “stacked Venn diagram” were used to graphically illustrate the componential analysis results and identify the phenomenon. Figure 3-1 depicts the entire methodological procedure for data collection and analysis.

### Validation of the Study

Comparing and contrasting validation methods used in qualitative research is a laborious process, but a necessity in responding to the canons of quality and integrity regarding one’s study. For purposes of a dissertation study, it is believed that the researcher should establish a sound rationale for selecting a validation perspective and strategy that ensures the overall trustworthiness of the study. It is immediately apparent that validation of qualitative research lends itself to a myriad of constructs, driven by tradition, philosophical perspectives, and change. Because human behavior and associated scholarship are developed by people across time and space, the constructs upon which these endeavors rest also change (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). “Just as people tinker with building better mouse traps, so do they tinker with their abstract concepts and theories” (p. 322). For example, the pilot study discussed below rest upon the laurels of Wolcott (1994), who suggests that “validation neither guides nor informs” his work. He does not dismiss validation, but rather places it in a broader perspective. Furthermore, he ultimately tries to understand, rather than convince, and he voices the view that validation in qualitative research distracts from his work of understanding what is really going on (Creswell, 2007). In contrast, this dissertation study warrants further investigation into qualitative validation methods, particularly those that are deemed



## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Two broad overarching questions:

1. How do CTE transfer students describe their career pathway experiences as they transitioned from high school to the community college and on to the senior institution?
2. What factors influence CTE students the most in their decision to transfer to the senior institution?

Examples of focused sub-questions include:

1. How do CTE transfer students describe their academic aspirations to attend the senior institution?
2. Who, if anyone, has had the greatest impact on a CTE transfer student's decision to transfer to the senior institution?
3. How has socioeconomic background supported or hindered a CTE transfer student's decision to continue their education beyond the community college and on to the senior institution?

Figure 3-1. Flow diagram illustrating complementing methodological procedure for data collection and analysis.

traditional, if not widely accepted. This permitted a sound rationale to be established for selecting a perspective and strategy that ensured a greater degree of confidence in the overall integrity and trustworthiness of the study.

Marshall and Rossman (1999, p. 191) believe that all researchers must respond to the canons of quality by being held accountable in meeting the traditional criteria in which the trustworthiness of one's project can be evaluated. Like many authors and researchers, they propose the four qualitative constructs suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985): *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability*, and *confirmability*. "First, how credible are the particulars of the findings? Second, how transferable and applicable are these findings to another setting or group of people? Third, how can we be reasonably sure that the findings would be replicated if the study were conducted with the same participants in the same context? And fourth, how can we be sure that the findings reflect the participants and the inquiry itself rather than a fabrication from the researcher's biases or prejudices?" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 192). These constructs, albeit similar to the labels and perspectives of quantitative research (*internal validity*, *external validity*, *reliability*, and *objectivity* respectively), were translated into the traditional qualitative practices and used to ensure the trustworthiness of this study. Those traditional practices included *triangulation*, *peer review*, *member checking*, and *thick descriptions*. Table 3-1 was constructed and used as a reference tool and contrasting guide between qualitative and quantitative terminology.

### *Triangulation*

Broadly stated, the practice of using multiple methods to establish the integrity and trustworthiness of one's study is commonly referred to as *triangulation* (Denzin,

1989; Glesne, 1999; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2002). As shown in Table 3-1, Triangulation addresses Lincoln and Guba's Credibility

Table 3-1 Techniques for Operationalizing Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research. (Adapted from Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Putney, 2008; Key 1997.)

Criterion	Quantitative Design	Qualitative Design	Qualitative Technique
Truth Value	Internal Validity	Credibility	Member Checking; Peer Review; Triangulation; Prolonged Engagement; Persistent Observations; Reflexivity; Interview Technique; Negative Case Analysis; Establishing Authority of Researcher; Structural Coherence; Referential Adequacy
Applicability	External Validity	Transferability	Thick Description; Nominated Sample; Time Sample
Consistency	Reliability	Dependability	Peer Review; Triangulation; Inquiry Audit
Neutrality	Objectivity	Confirmability	Triangulation; Reflexivity; Raw Data; Data Reduction and Analysis Products; Summaries; Data Reconstruction and Synthesis Products; Process Notes; Instrument Development Notes; Confirmability Audit

and Confirmability (column 3) constructs. In this study, triangulation was accomplished by horizontalization and blending not only manifest and latent content of student data, but through the evaluation of student data using the distinctive methods of event mapping and domain analysis. The prior works of Hossler and Gallagher, 1987; Prinidiville, 1995; Laanan, 1998, 2001, 2004, 2006; and Cohen and Brawer, 2003 have provide triangulation

sources for hermeneutic guidance in the data collection and analysis process.

Triangulation also assisted in this study by further ensuring any potential hermeneutic biases that may have occurred as a result of the researcher being the only observer of the phenomenon under investigation (LeComte & Preissle, 1993).

### *Peer Review*

*Peer review*, also known as *peer debriefing*, provides for dependability of one's study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) define a peer as one who serves the role of "devil's advocate," debriefing the researcher, and keeping him or her honest. Creswell (2007) states that the devil's advocate, or peer, is "an individual who keeps the researcher honest; asks hard questions about methods, meanings, and interpretations; and provides the researcher with the opportunity for catharsis by sympathetically listening to the researcher's feelings" (p. 208). Peer review satisfies Lincoln and Guba's credibility and dependability constructs. This strategy was incorporated into the study via a multitude of several reliable sources of guidance.

During the dissertation proposal defense for this study, committee members, all seasoned in the art of research, played the devil's advocate role. Methods for data collection and analysis were reviewed and validated, as was the case with trustworthiness, reliability, bias and error, and any other concerns related to the integrity and soundness of this study. Feedback was given as part of the peer review or debriefing process. As expected, this was a two-way process whereby corrective action was immediately taken throughout the process of this study. Other sources of guidance were provided by Nevada Department of Education consultants and administrators from Carson City, Nevada; CTE university and community college professors; NACTE CTSO

coordinators; secondary and postsecondary CTE students; and results from the pilot study.

### *Member Checking*

*Member checking* involves the inclusion of participants in critiquing the researcher's working drafts. This may include the participants' respective transcriptions and interpretations, analytical thoughts, and conclusions (Glesne, 1999). Do the researchers' recordings, interpretations, and findings accurately reflect the views of participants? (Creswell et al., 2007). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), member checking is, "the most critical technique for establishing credibility," and hence it satisfies their construct for credibility (p. 314).

During the course of interviews, CTE participants were informed of an opportunity to review their transcriptions and interpretations of their transcriptions. Where necessary, adjustments were made accordingly. This is simply appropriate etiquette. It falls under the protocol guidelines for *reciprocity*, which researchers should exercise at all times. Glazer (1982) maintains that reciprocity is "the exchange of favors and commitments, the building of a sense of mutual identification and feeling of community" (p. 50). Glesne (1999) believes that, "the interview process particularly provides an occasion for reciprocity. By listening to participants carefully and seriously, you give them a sense of importance and specialness" (p. 127). Thus member checking also provided an opportunity for reciprocity, expression of gratitude, and further validation of the study.



### *Thick Description*

According to Ponterotto (2006), the definition of *thick description*, despite its frequent use in qualitative research, is often confusing to researchers at all levels. Ponterotto traces its origin back to North American anthropologist Clifford Geertz's and his book entitled, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973). He notes that Geertz's adaptation of thick description was expanded upon by the noted qualitative researcher, Norman K. Denzin. Both, Geertz and Denzin are heavily cited among qualitative researchers. "In fact, the *Subject Index* of virtually every major textbook on qualitative methods published during the last three decades includes one or more entries under either thick description" (Ponterotto, 2006, p. 538). Denzin's definition of thick description was used as an additional validation strategy for this study. Ponterotto (p. 540) cites Denzin's definition as follows:

*"A thick description ... does more than record what a person is doing. It goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances. It presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another. Thick description evokes emotionality and self-feelings. It inserts history into experience. It establishes the significance of an experience, or the sequence of events, for the person or persons in question. In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard"* (Denzin, 1989, p. 83).

Thick descriptions, as defined by Denzin, are inherently built in to the rhetorical structure of phenomenology. "A thick description creates verisimilitude; that is, truth-like statements that produce for readers the feeling that they have experienced, or could

experience, the events being described” (Denzin, 1989, p. 83-84). Therefore, thick descriptions, as defined by Denzin, of each student’s lived experience as they transition from high school to the community college and on to UNLV, UNR, or NSC are embedded in their respective “stories” in Chapter 4. In other words, the process of capturing and describing the essence of the CTE transfer student phenomenon through the complementing methods used in this study ultimately attempts to provide a thick description of each student’s lived experience by providing detail, context, emotion, sequential history of events, and webs of social relationships among the CTE transfer students such that the reader feels experienced. Berg (2001) considers this “an interpretive reading of the symbolism underlying the physical data” (p. 242). Lastly, thick descriptions addresses Lincoln and Guba’s transferability construct because, with such detailed description, it enables other researchers to transfer information to other settings, provided they may be shared (Creswell, 2007).

### Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted in the summer of 2008 that focused on developing an experiential understanding of the research procedures involved in conducting a qualitative study on outstanding Nevada Career and Technical Education (CTE) students. The study was conducted at the 2008 Nevada Association of Career and Technical Education (NACTE) Summer Conference in Lake Tahoe, California. Although pilot studies are an option for refinement of a design or approach, researchers are not inclined to utilize this approach, perhaps due to time constraints or money (Kezar, 2000). Approval was granted to conduct the pilot study as a summer independent study class

(EDH 791). The study went beyond data collection and analysis by including preliminary steps such as Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval of pilot study; Nevada Department of Education approval; informed consent from participants; completion of the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) certification exam. All part of the intended learning outcomes geared towards understanding phenomenology research. Thank you acknowledgements were sent to all participants.

According to Glesne (1999), researchers enter a pilot study with a different frame of mind from the one they have when going into the real study. The idea is not to get data per se, but to learn about the research process, interview questions, observation techniques, and yourself. The intent was to prepare oneself for the challenge that was yet to come: the dissertation. Hermeneutic phenomenology, the same method of inquiry as this dissertation study, was used to explore the lived experiences of outstanding Nevada CTE high school seniors and/or recent graduates who were specifically Career and Technical Student Officers (CTSOs) attending the annual 2008 NACTE Summer Conference. As an overarching question, how did they describe their transition into college or recent plans to attend college? The central phenomenon investigated was framed within the context of this dissertation study, which in contrast, focuses on transfer students and their decision to continue their education at a higher level.

#### *Methodology of the Pilot Study*

The same methodological approach to data collection and analysis for the pilot study was incorporated in this dissertation. In brief, data collection involved unstructured informal interviews in a face-to-face mode with four outstanding CTE students. All four of the students were 18 years and older, and all four students were Career and Technical

Student Organization (CTSO) Nevada State officers. Two Future Farmers of America (FFA) CTSO officers were selected; one Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA) CTSO officer; and one Family Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) CTSO officer. Purposeful sampling was used in the selection of these participants because it was conducive to developing the best understanding of why successful CTE students persist into college, and to better understand the phenomenon to the extent that others may learn. Another reason for purposeful sampling was to avoid the added complexity of interviewing minors, i.e., students under the age of 18 would require full IRB approval.

Data analysis included a combination of qualitative methodological approaches, all intended to satisfy Husserl's (1970) concept of *phenomenological reduction*. As stated earlier, "we penetrate deeper into things and learn to see more profound 'layers' behind what we first thought to see" (p. 30). Moustakas (1994) defines another dimension of phenomenological reduction called "horizontalization" (p. 95), in which he suggests that "horizons are unlimited and can never be completely exhausted of our experience of things no matter how many times we reconsider them or view them." To this notion, content analysis, both manifest and latent, was used to initially provide a systematic focus on student transcripts. Similar to this dissertation study, event maps were constructed, followed by an extensive domain analysis utilizing Spradley's (1980) methodological approach. Taxonomic and componential analysis of the data were also conducted in the pilot study. Graphic illustrations, accompanied with detailed explanations of the outcomes, were included in the pilot study.

### *Findings and Conclusion of the Pilot Study*

Reflecting back on the pertinent interview questions and responses from all participants, coupled with the researcher's own personal experiences with the phenomenon under study, has resulted in identifying three meaningful themes: *parental influence*, *teacher influence*, and *SES background*. Prindiville's study, based on the Hossler and Gallagher three-stage model on college choice, resulted in a profile that highlighted five of the most influencing factors on a CTE students' decision to attend college. The five interview questions used in the pilot study were intended to investigate if there were a similar phenomenon with Nevada CTE students. Three of the five factors (or variables) were strongly supported, whereas the *college admission process* and *student career aspirations* were not strongly supported. It should be noted that counselors played little or no role as an influencing factor. There are lessons to be learned in this regard as well: that documented studies of the like can be used to inform parents, administrators, academic counselors, faculty, and other secondary and postsecondary personnel to better prepare CTE students who opt to pursue a career pathway, starting in high school and continuing through the community college, then on to a four-year college or university.

There was immediate concern regarding the pilot study's methodological approach and the various options for conducting qualitative research, including method of inquiry, data collection, and data analysis. Seeking out the meaningful essence of several individuals' shared experiences as CTE students who move on to the senior institution warranted a phenomenological method of inquiry, be it high school students, or the more

persistent CTE transfer students. What was neither readily warranted nor apparent until actually performing the research was the analysis of the final data.

Extrapolating the essence of two CTE FFA students' lived experiences through the pilot study's systematic procedure in the same manner as described for the dissertation study can be regarded as one of many qualitative approaches to validation. Without launching into procedural justification, validity, credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability, and the countless other terms used by qualitative researchers, the pilot study, as stated earlier, rested upon the laurels of Wolcott (1994), who suggests that validation neither guides nor informs his work. He does not dismiss validation, but rather places it in a broader perspective, and ultimately tries to understand, rather than convince. He voices the view that validation in qualitative research distracts from his work of understanding what is really going on (Creswell, 2007). On this basis alone, there is convincing reason to believe that the process of identifying manifest and latent content through content analysis and working laterally with event mapping and domain analysis with the inclusion of taxonomic and componential analysis enhances the qualitative analysis and interpretation of data. Whether this is coincidental or by virtue of combined and complementing methodologies was a question worthy of posing at the onset of the study, yet justifiable from the context of research tools given in higher education leadership. With little doubt, it worked!

Event mapping proved useful in forcing one to interact with the data by identifying transitional changes, be it a function of time, thought process, distance, or other variables. From an engineering perspective, this tool appeared analogous to a flow chart for computer programmers, a schematic diagram for electrical engineers, or a

topology map for network designers. Common amongst each of these professional diagrams are the commitment to thought process in the analysis of data through the use of graphical means as an added tool in reinforcing the interpretation of data. The event mapping procedure also coincides with many of the principals of Gregory Bateson, a noted British anthropologist, social scientist, and linguist. Bateson worked by systematically connecting patterns and relationships abductively and linking ideas within a confluence of different circles in order to discover the logical extension of related constructs (Singer, 1995). He believed that all mental processes involve locating differences and creating categories in order to make sense of information. This is indicative of the methodological approach presented in the pilot study.

Whereas content analysis provided a mechanism to extricate concrete physical data, i.e., that which was actually seen, counted, and interpreted, event mapping and domain analysis ultimately provided the graphical evidence depicting the *telos* and phenomenological experience of the two FFA student respondents –a useful set of tools that were applied towards identifying the phenomenon of CTE transfer students who were ultimately studied in this dissertation. The domain analysis was especially applicable towards identifying domains and subdomains, or what Spradley refers to as “categories of meaning.” It was demonstrated that these domains and subdomains can be further broken down into sets of categories organized on the basis of semantic relationships, that is, a taxonomic analysis of the data. Taxonomic analysis drew upon the results of content analysis, event mapping, and domain analysis. When coupled with componential analysis, even more focus on units of meaning were attained. Identification of what students have in common (or not in common) as they experience the

phenomenon (parental influence, teacher influence, and SES background) were contrasted, side-by-side, with their differences readily revealed. It was determined that a paradigm worksheet might be considered for the dissertation and used to compare and contrast student attributes associated with a domain or sub-domain. This could also be helpful in constructing the componential analysis table. Each CTE students' interview data can be charted across the worksheet, thus permitting common sets of experiences among CTE students to be even more readily apparent. A Venn diagram accompanying the table or paradigm worksheet would also be useful for the dissertation.

#### *Methodological Shortcomings of the Pilot Study*

Interview data derived from the four participants was meaningfully rich, yet limited in scope. This became immediately apparent during the course of the interviews. The exploratory and open-ended nature of the face-to-face interview permitted flexibility and the opportunity for new themes to surface, but resulted in tendencies to recall the other participants and see if they share the same experiences and beliefs. Because the interview questions frame the research and provide boundaries in breadth and depth, more careful attention should be given to research questions. In this case, they were seemingly broad, almost to the extent that each of the five questions necessitates being overarching with its own sets of focused sub-questions. This would, however, conflict with the nature in phenomenological inquiry.

The interview guidelines stated in the pilot study cannot be overemphasized (trust, rapport, setting, ethics, etc.). Establishing trust and rapport, as anticipated, was not a factor due to the venue and the respondent's knowledge beforehand of the interviewer's position as a NACTE Board member, conference participant, doctoral student, and



colleague of their direct CTSO advisors. However, the settings in which each of the interviews were conducted changed due to scheduled events that were changing on the fly. Two of the four interviews were conducted in adjacent conference ballrooms, approximately 20,000 square feet in area. Though empty, the adjacent rooms were occupied by CTSO student officers and advisors who were conducting meetings. In the spirit of friendship, togetherness, happiness, and participation in what they were doing, noise was overwhelming, and at times interfered with the recordings. As a result, careful planning and attention to the interview environment was given for the dissertation.

One of the four respondents had a speech impediment, which caused difficulties in interpreting her responses. They were short, terse, and repeated. This anomalous case, special as it may be, was lacking in data, relative to the other three respondents. One should be mindful of the huge variance in personalities, particularly communication skills, as it behooves the interviewer to heavily rely on one's ability to quickly develop rapport and trust. This student was shy and introverted, definitely expressing FCCLA organizational friendships and her mom as the most influencing factors in her decision to continue her education beyond high school.

Fortunately, the dissertation involved community college CTE transfer students to UNLV, UNR, or NSC. Not only did this provide stronger evidence as to why CTE students persist into the senior institution, but it eliminated the complexity of informed consent for minors under the age of 18 years. Such was the case with most of the students. Parent or guardian consent is required by IRB, in addition to full Board approval. The pilot study would not have been possible in the given time frame had it not been for the quick turnaround time by the Nevada Department of Education's

administrative help towards indentifying seniors or recent CTE high school graduates still involved as CTSO officers. It was originally assumed that the student attendees at the NACTE Conference were solely seniors when, in fact, most were juniors working their way up the CTSO officer ranks like their predecessors. As it turns out, interviewing six respondents, one from each CTSO organization, would have been beyond the scope of this project. Nevertheless, focusing on two of the four respondents' data provided meaningful insight into the overall process.

The researcher intends to share the pilot study results with NACTE colleagues, including those individuals the study is intended to inform: teachers, counselors, administrators, parents, and peers. (Perhaps it was not expressed with enough emphasis here, that the study revealed just how tremendous of an impact we have as teachers, counselors, administrators, and parents on influencing the educational career pathways for students.) If the phenomenon is to represent those shared experiences of the four CTE students who were interviewed, without a doubt, each and every one of them would attest to the importance of informing all stakeholders of those influencing factors on their decision to go to college.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS-A: A HERMENEUTIC ASSESSMENT OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SIX NEVADA CTE TRANSFER STUDENTS

#### Introduction

The following two chapters will present the results of this study. Whereas many dissertation studies abide by the traditional guidelines of presenting their results in Chapter 4, this study will separate the interpretation (hermeneutics) of the lived experiences of six Nevada Career and Technical Education (CTE) transfer students in Chapter 4 from the data analysis of these students, both individually and collectively, in Chapter 5. Clarity is added by separating narratives of each student's lived experience from an inductive data analysis of their respective stories. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.202) refer to this process as "making sense" of the field data. It should be noted that the following stories are the end result of data analysis presented in Chapter 5.

#### Chapter Organization

Three sections are included in this chapter. The first section summarizes the data collection methodology so that it serves as a reminder to the reader what this study is attempting to gain, and the method of inquiry used to establish a connection with the lived experience of six Nevada CTE transfer students. The second section is the major section of this chapter. It addresses how each of the six Nevada CTE transfer students responded to the two overarching research questions and corresponding (possible)

focused sub-questions presented in Chapter 3. They are listed below for reference purposes. In essence, it is an interpretation (hermeneutics) of “their story;” their lived experience (with an abiding concern) as CTE transfer students, framed by the research questions and taking into account van Manen’s (1990) *literal silence* (awkward/reflective communication) and *epistemological silence* (tacit communications). The last section of this chapter will summarize the results of the six CTE transfer students’ stories and provide a transitional lead into Chapter 5.

### Summary of Data Collection Methodology

Hermeneutic phenomenology was used as the method of inquiry in this study to explore the predisposition factors that influence Nevada CTE transfer students to continue their education at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV), the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR), and Nevada State College (NSC). Personal and professional background, oriented towards an “abiding concern” and interest (van Manen, 1990) in interpreting the lived experiences of CTE students, strongly supports the interpretive perspective of hermeneutic phenomenology. Six students were interviewed (two from UNLV, two from UNR and two from NSC), one representing each category of Nevada’s six Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs). The six CTSOs, common among all 50 states, include Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA), Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA), Family Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA), Future Farmers of America (FFA), Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA), and Skills USA. Students were selected based on discussions and recommendations from Nevada CTE secondary and postsecondary faculty, the Nevada

Association of Career and Technical Education (NACTE) current and past Board members, and the Nevada Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education. The intent was to find out more about Nevada CTE transfer students and the factors contributing to their persistence into four-year programs at UNLV, UNR, and NSC.

All six interviews were conducted in an unstructured, face-to-face setting using open-ended research questions emanating from the prior works of Hossler and Gallagher (1987) and Prindiville (1995). Two broad, centralized questions were used to establish the general direction of the conversation with each respondent. As new themes (patterns, categories, perspectives, and issues) emerged during the course of the interview, more focused sub-questions ensued with the intent to capture the essence of each student's lived experience as successful CTE transfer students. All six interviews were audio recorded. The participants exhibited no signs of intimidation from the use of the audio recorder, nor the use of a backup recorder for redundancy measures. The two broad, centralized interview questions and examples of focused sub-questions included for the following.

Broad centralized questions:

1. *How would you describe your career pathway experience as you transitioned from high school to the community college and on to senior institution (UNLV, UNR or NSC)?*
2. *What factors influenced you the most into transferring from the community college to the senior institution?*

A myriad of focused sub-questions were used to engage the students into telling their stories, revealing essential themes and capturing the essence of their lived experience as CTE transfer students. The interviews were continued until the topic was deemed exhausted and no new perspectives of the phenomenon evolved. Examples of focused sub-questions included the following.

Examples of additional focused sub-questions:

1. *How would you describe your overall desire (academic aspirations) to attend the senior institute, i.e., did you fully intend to eventually go to UNLV/UNR/NSC?*
2. *Who, if anyone, has had the greatest impact (parents, teachers, counselors, peers, etc.) on your decision to transfer to the senior institute?*
3. *How has socioeconomic background supported or hindered your decision to continue your education beyond the community college and on to the senior institute?*

As stated in Chapter 3, *criterion sampling* works well when all individuals studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon. Because of their experience, they are also likely to understand the nature of the research problem and willingly grant the researcher a recorded interview knowing their supporting data may be published in a dissertation or other publications (Moustakas, 1994). This was indicative of the responses from all six students. Each student was willing, supportive, and excited over sharing their phenomenon: their “lived experience” and the way they understood their experience to develop their own world view as successful CTE transfer students.

## Nevada CTE Transfer Student Stories

### *Dennis (DECA Category)*

Dennis, a self-proclaimed “street kid” and martial arts expert was a “4.0” transfer student from the College of Southern Nevada (CSN) to the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV). He represents the Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA) category of CTE transfer students. Among the six CTE students interviewed, Dennis was the only late bloomer. That is, he did not seamlessly transition from high school, to the community college, and on to the senior institute like the other five students. “My career path wasn’t at all normal...I really had no desire to go to college at all.”

In high school, Dennis was quite familiar with Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs) like DECA and FBLA. He did not participate in a CTSO, but had friends who were involved. “They were in a different class than I was, same grade level, but they were different people: definitely upwardly mobile, focused on the future...they were definitely leaders...I really didn’t give a damn. I just wanted to get through life. Academics was not my interest then, that’s for sure.” Nevertheless, Dennis gave college a try in 1988, just after graduating from high school in Delaware, Maryland. “It lasted all but five weeks...and at the time, it didn’t feel right for me, so I pretty much decided to earn my own way, make my own keep, be my own man, and off I went.” And that he did, for 15 years, before eventually realizing it was time to focus on a “real” career. To best capture the essence of Dennis’ educational experience, stemming from high school to CSN and on to UNLV, it is necessary to reflect upon his unique socioeconomic background.

Having discovered just out of high school that college was simply not meant to be at that time in his life, Dennis wasted no time in taking on a lifestyle of what he refers to as a “beach bum.” He hitch-hiked the entire east coast, picking up “crappy jobs for crappy money,” and getting by on the quick cash turnaround time in return for his hard work. Cooking, landscaping, and bartending are examples of the jobs Dennis took on during his adventure, with bartending, lasting most of the 15 years. “I happened to know a lot about drinking (laughs). I could go anywhere I wanted to and get a job.” He moved to Atlanta, Orlando, New Orleans...” pretty much wherever I wanted to go, I would take off and go and get a job.”

Dennis’ frequent movement after high school somewhat mirrors his upbringing: A military family, always on the go. His dad served in the U.S. Army. He was strict and influential, particularly during Dennis’ younger years. “The lessons he sort of beat into me, stuck. It was for my own good...and twenty years later, I had to hate the old man and hate myself, and I called him up and told him he was right...My dad and I have a good relationship now.” On the other hand, Dennis’ mom was a military wife. She was supporting and loving, yet aggravating to Dennis because she was intelligent and capable, but continually preaching to him that “failure is okay.” But failure was not okay with Dennis. “I’ve already failed. I’d been failing for ten years. I didn’t want to fail anymore. I love my mom, but she doesn’t do anything. She just exists, and that’s not what I wanted. She’s got potential and she’s a very intelligent woman, but it drives me nuts...why don’t you just do something.” As for siblings, Dennis had a younger brother, seven years younger, who eventually joined the military. “I sort of wrote him off years ago...I was pretty much like an only child.”



Like many military families, they were continually relocating. “I never made any connections...we were constantly on the move.” To make matters worse, or at least more challenging, Dennis experienced military life on the lower end of the spectrum. Apparent to Dennis were two socioeconomic classes in the military: the “grunts” and the “looies,” lower-class and upper-class, respectively. You were one or the other, depending on the ranking of your parent, according to Dennis. Kids whose parents were lieutenants and above were looies, and kids whose parents were sergeant and below were grunts. “I was a grunt...We (the grunts) all lived in our area base and it didn’t matter if you were Marine, Air Force, or Army...We were all blue-collared struggling at the low end of a white-collared world. By the time I was 14 or 15 years old, I could go toe-to-toe with any male adult, regardless of size. I had to learn how to fight to survive, so I turned into a real scrappy, you know, a shit kicker. I didn’t respect anyone who didn’t have a backbone.” When asked what he meant by learning how to fight, he literally meant fist fighting. “You had to learn how to fight in order to survive.” This was what life was like for Dennis on the military bases at which his father was stationed at, both in the United States and in Europe.

Dennis’ yearning for freedom and independence were apparent to many of his high school teachers. He was defiant and unruly, yet curious and inquisitive in his demeanor. “Teachers either hated me or always tried to mother me.” Those that did try to mother Dennis saw something unique: an individual who, if turned around, had the potential to go places. “My chemistry teacher was trying to do everything she could to keep me out of trouble.” Reflecting back, his chemistry and algebra teachers were influencing factors in his life. Clearly, Dennis is uniquely driven, competitive,

passionate, intelligent, confident, perceptive, and determined to be the best at everything he does. His dad even reminded him that he was the best bartender at the number one night club in the United States; they process over a thousand applications a year, and Dennis was one of the chosen few. “Yeah, but I’m just a bartender.”

Dennis eventually moved to California in 2003 to “get a real job.” He attended a job fair looking for a restaurant management job opening, but lacked a degree. Despite an acute awareness that he had hit a ceiling, ironically, he landed an interview with American Express Financial Advisors. They too, noticed a well-spoken, bright individual, with passion written all over his demeanor. Dennis was informed that he would have to pass a series of exams to become a licensed stock broker, which is what the position required. The interviewer encouraged him to apply, even if he lacked a degree. “Well, why don’t you give it a shot, and if it comes down to it, we’ll see what we can do...but it can’t hurt to try,” the recruiter told him. Lingering in the background of his mind, long after his “street kid” upbringing, was the notion that “most of my impetus comes from negative situations, people I don’t like...people who say I can’t do it. As soon as they challenge me, it’s over. I can’t stop. I have to show them, hey, you’re wrong.” The interviewer was not telling him he could not do it, but rather encouraging him to take on the challenge. However, this was an intellectual challenge requiring him to study, not a physical challenge where he had to fight. Dennis studied for three months and successfully passed the series of exams with flying colors. He was a licensed stock broker! Admittedly, this was a turning point in Dennis’ life. “Holy crap, my life can be different if I do something with it. I never thought I had the ability to study.”

Dennis moved to Las Vegas in 2005. He is now married with children. His wife holds a prominent position in IT Management, which has given him the opportunity to pursue a degree in business. In 2006 he investigated CSN and found they had a two-year business degree that transferred to UNLV. "I made the commitment and decision that if I was going to do it, it was going to be to the best of my abilities...just focus hard and get it done." Dennis, a "4.0" student at CSN, graduated with High Honors in 2008. It was an "eye-opening" experience for him. His reaction to every class was, "Oh wow, this is cool!" He even took an interest in geology. "I would have never broken open a rock before if I hadn't found that in college...Without the transfer program at CSN, I probably wouldn't be at UNLV." Dennis is now an amateur rock hound. While attending CSN's commencement ceremony, he noticed there were only eight graduating business students on stage. Dennis realized he had achieved "something fairly uncommon." "It made me feel weird, kind of shy, which I'm not used to...I always want to be the best." According to Dennis, his wife is a real success story. She has been a major source of influence and inspiration. "She's a source of inspiration because she's such a hard worker. I hope I can be half as successful as her." Having had the opportunity to meet Dennis' wife at a fund-raising luncheon, without a doubt, she is very proud and supportive of him and his accomplishments and endeavors.

Dennis is now a full-time student at UNLV, majoring in Finance with a minor in Chinese. His interest in Chinese as a minor stems from his continual training in various forms of martial arts. From an economic standpoint, Dennis believes we are in the midst of a global meltdown, yet "China is still producing GDP's at 10% a year...China is going to be a massive economic power at some point, and I wouldn't mind being able to use the

minor.” However, his focus for the moment is to complete his baccalaureate degree, then return back to the workforce. Eventually, he hopes to become a Certified Financial Analyst (CFA). “I need to cut my teeth as an analyst and learn at a corporation of some size...and years beyond that, I hope to absolutely run my own business of some sort.” Summing it up, Dennis said it best when he commented: “I made the commitment and decision that if I was going to do it, it was going to be to the best of my abilities...just focus hard and get it done.” In all likelihood, Dennis will attain his vision, his goals, and will become even more of a success story. I wish him well.

*Fred (FBLA Category)*

Fred, a self-motivated, former Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) student from a low socioeconomic background is currently enrolled at the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) as a junior with a double major in Marketing and Finance. He transferred to UNR from Truckee Meadows Community College (TMCC), also located in Reno, NV. Fred, only 19 years old, is the youngest of the six CTE transfer students interviewed. He is a first-generation Hispanic student from a family of seven. Fred has one older brother, two younger brothers, and a younger sister. Though his older brother works and continues to take classes at TMCC, he intends to transfer to UNR as well. Fred believes that all of his siblings are college bound. He represents the Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) category of CTE transfer students.

While many students struggle with algebra and geometry in high school and college, Fred was cruising through this level of math in fourth grade. He was identified as a gifted student in elementary school and placed in a Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) program. “I never really developed study habits because I never had to study as

a kid because everything came to me really easily.” In the end, he found out that it didn’t come easy. Fred pulled out of the GATE program prior to middle school. He became bored with the given coursework. It was not stimulating to him. At this point, he could care less whether studying came easy or not. He maintained this attitude through middle school and half way through high school.

Fred wanted to just “hang out” all day, have fun, and avoid doing any homework. “I was actually what you might call a troubled student. It started out being where I did not care much for education because I didn’t see it in my future.” He believes that much of this attitude stems from being a potential first-generation college-bound student, and coming from a low socioeconomic background. “I belong to one of the lower parts of it. I acknowledge that’s my background. I just recognize and acknowledge that I’m limited by my financial standing, by my family’s ability to pay for my college education.”

Fred’s mother graduated from high school, but his father did not. Both are from Mexico (Pico de Coyote) and remain married. Working as a foreman for a construction company, Fred’s father is often asked why his kids are not there helping him out in the same line of work. His co-workers tell him, “Your kids are old enough to work, and they’d be making good money here...or good enough money to help you get a nicer house or a nicer car.” Fred says his father responds to them by saying “he would much prefer us to try and get a college education, try to get that experience, rather than have us breaking our backs and doing the same thing that he’s been doing.” His mother and father stressed the importance of education, but only up to elementary school, according to Fred. Since then, they played a minimal role in Fred’s education. “They weren’t necessarily telling me you need to take these classes, you need to do this, you need to

decide what you want to do...you have to go to college.” Fred’s career pathway was a decision he made on his own. “I inspired myself to do it, and I kind of moved forward with it.” Within time, he did so in an impressively active and aggressive manner.

In order to calm his aggression, Fred participated in many sports, including boxing, football, soccer, and even bowling. He excelled in all areas, until a head injury he received while boxing caused him to stop. Medical reasons prevailed. “I was aggressive, and boxing was my way of getting that out. Through that, I learned to be more calm. After a couple of times of getting hit really, really, badly with some right hooks, my doctor told me that I couldn’t do it anymore because it was giving me severe headaches.” During the interim, however, he noticed his older brother, a Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) member, frequently traveling to places like Colorado, Anaheim, and other locations where FBLA held conferences. This fascinated and excited Fred. The opportunity to travel like his brother is precisely what Fred wanted and needed: “to get out of it being okay to just hang out all day and not do any homework, that avoidance of any higher education.”

If there was ever a thought of going to college, it would have been to study political science or law, according to Fred. Those thoughts were abandoned after Fred was introduced to FBLA. “Once I was introduced to the program, then it was a huge exposure to careers that are out there.” Fred made a 180 degree turnaround on his career and educational aspirations. “I was excited about business, about the possibilities of owning a business, of being an executive in a corporation, and of the travel and of all the experiences that I had been exposed to from the mentors and the coaches and the people, the alumni that were involved with FBLA.” In his junior year in high school, Fred

became the State Treasurer for FBLA. By his senior year, he was fully engaged in FBLA and was elected FBLA's State President. Fred received multiple service and recognition awards, including the *National Service Award* from the White House.

One of the fundamental goals of FBLA is to prepare students for leadership careers in business, management, entrepreneurship, and technology. They stress the importance of an educational career path and the multitude of opportunities that lie ahead. Fred wasted no time in identifying opportunities and seizing them. For example, the second semester through his junior year in high school, FBLA informed him about Truckee Meadows Community College High School (TMCCCHS), a magnet school in Reno, NV. High school students could finish their high school diploma by taking college-equivalent courses that fulfill the high school graduation requirements. Those same courses counted for the degree requirements at the community college level. In doing so, one could get a jump start on college.

Quickly recognizing the valuable opportunity to save time, money, and learn various subjects at a college level, Fred seized the opportunity and was able to simultaneously complete 41 TMCCCHS and TMCC college credits! They applied not only towards high school graduation, but towards his Associate of Science (AS) Degree in Business at TMCC as well. "I figured out I could save money by going to the community college; that I could get, in a sense, a more personal education because of the ratio of students to professors is much lower at TMCC than UNR." So for Fred, the transition from high school to the community college was "really easy because I was already at college." Upon graduating from high school, Fred had essentially completed two-thirds of his two-year Associates degree at TMCC. "I haven't paid a single penny as

far as tuition goes. It's all been through either Washoe County, whether TMCC High School program or through scholarships that I've been awarded."

In addition to the multiple achievement awards Fred has received, he was also the recipient of the Millennium Scholarship; the Bernice Mathews Alumni Scholarship; the Northern Nevada Hispanic Services Scholarship; and the TMCCHS Ambassador Scholarship. No doubt, there will be more. "I do acknowledge that it's an important factor in my education." Still, at 19 years old, graduating from TMCC, and entering UNR as a double major, he is to be commended for his outstanding achievements. Most, if not all educators, K-12 and higher education included, consider this a great accomplishment. Fred, like many other outstanding CTE students, will likely continue to receive scholarships as he advances his education at the university.

Like many community college students, Fred works part time. He is currently employed as a student worker for TMCC's School of Business through the work-study program. "It pays well," according to Fred. Fred also serves as a Student Senator for the Associated Students of Truckee Meadows (ASTM), the student government of the college. As a Senator, he is paid for the hours he contributes. And for a period of time, he worked outside of the college as a part-time disc jockey (DJ) playing "top-40" music for high school events. This did not last long, according to Fred. Working long hours in the evenings, then attending classes in the morning, was draining. Furthermore, Fred quickly grew out of the scene. "It was a phase that I went through...I was lucky, I'm lucky in that sense where I think I was mature from a young age, because I always had friends that were older than myself." One of his friends in high school was 45 years old.



Working at TMCC and taking classes enabled Fred to receive guidance on his career aspirations from surrounding professors. “You know, these are the classes that you need to look at to be thinking of the university...They would guide me in that sense, but not motivate me. I always felt that there was that motivation to continue on to the university.” One particular individual who played an important role in guiding Fred was TMCC’s Associate Dean for the School of Business and Entrepreneurship. She pushed Fred along and reminded him of application deadlines and other pertinent information related to scholarship opportunities and transferring to the university. She also shared her experience as a marketing professional, which may have had some impact on his future endeavors, both educationally and professionally.

Like many students who major in business and/or marketing, Fred does not rule out the possibility of becoming an entrepreneur and owning his own business. “I think that’s a possibility, but I think that would be later on in life, once I’m done with the corporate side of business...My career aspiration is to be a CEO of a large company, a Fortune 500...it’s just one of those dreams to be the CEO of a company like Google. Ultimately, I would like to be a CEO, or just somebody with an influence to help people.” Given Fred’s accelerated academic achievement rate, it wouldn’t be surprising to see him achieve his goals in the near future. He is young, bright, mature, attentive, perceptive, articulate, athletic, and more. He is also fluent in Spanish, English, and he is learning Italian. “My girlfriend knows Italian. She’s fluent, and I fell in love with the language. It’s a beautiful language, and if I could learn a fourth language or a fifth language, I’d do it.” Needless to say, Fred is an inspiration to many. The essence of his lived experience is captured in his comment: “I inspired myself to do it, and I kind of moved forward with

it.” He has already touched the lives of many people, and will continue to do so. He is certainly a tremendous credit to FBLA and CTE.

*Francine (FCCLA Category)*

Books and articles are readily available on the subject of first impressions, focusing on how judgment of an individual is established within the first few seconds of an encounter. Many advocate how to develop skills to ensure a lasting first impression. Some experts believe that once the first impression is made, it is virtually irreversible (Belcheir & Michener, 1997). An encounter with Francine, only 21 years old and already finished with her baccalaureate course work at Nevada State College (NSC), is almost guaranteed to leave one with a positive first and lasting impression. Her youthfulness and enthusiasm radiate when she speaks of her career aspirations: to become a bilingual elementary school teacher. It was during her sophomore year when she decided on her career pathway. As a transfer student from the College of Southern Nevada (CSN) to NSC, Francine represents the FCCLA category of CTE transfer students.

Dual credit programs enable high school students to complete college-equivalent courses and simultaneously receive college and high school credits. A unique dual-credit, 2+2+2 program (2-years in high school, 2-years at the community college, and 2-years at the university or state college) between the Clark County High School District (CCSD), CSN, and NSC is called “STEP-Up,” which stands for Student-to-Teacher Enlistment Program. STEP-Up is a relatively new, fully paid scholarship program that permits qualified CCSD high school juniors and seniors to work towards their associates and bachelor’s degree in elementary or postsecondary education, provided they commit

to teaching within CCSD upon graduation. The intent is to address the shortage of teachers throughout CCSD.

During the latter part of Francine's sophomore year in high school, a STEP-Up recruiter visited her high school in Las Vegas. She informed students about this golden opportunity to have their entire baccalaureate pathway paid for, including tuition, fees, and books, from start to finish. Francine filled out an application and was called in for an interview. She successfully met the STEP-Up qualifications, one of which was to be on track as a recipient towards meeting Nevada's Millennium Scholarship requirements: graduation from a Nevada high school, maintaining an overall GPA of 3.25, passing all Nevada high school proficiency exams; and residency in Nevada, as defined by the Nevada Board of Regents. Francine was accepted into the STEP-Up program. Perfect timing! She was able to begin her career pathway upon beginning her junior year in high school. In 2006, she graduated from high school with High Honors, and continued the STEP-Up program at CSN from 2006 to 2008.

Approximately one dozen students were selected to participate in this new teaching program. "I actually thought I wanted to be an engineer...I've always loved children, so I knew that's the route I wanted to go." STEP-Up did provide Francine that golden opportunity for her to pursue a career path, less the burden of having to work full or part time like so many students, particularly at community college level; nor did she have to apply for financial aid and additional scholarships for her education. Graduating from CSN and NSC without having to pay for tuition, fees, books was an opportunity she greatly appreciated. "Well I didn't apply for scholarships because of the STEP-Up program. I knew I wanted to do that since junior year, so, and they had told us that they

were going to pay up to bachelors degree...STEP-Up paid for everything...I'm 21 (years old). It's an awesome program. I'm so happy I decided to do it."

Francine's family background has been the greatest influencing factor in her career aspirations and decision to attend college. She is an Hispanic, first-generation student with one younger sister and one younger brother. Her mother immigrated to the United States from Guatemala as a 20-year old. Prior to leaving Guatemala, she obtained a teaching degree. However, her degree is in Spanish, her native language. In contrast, Francine's dad is from Merida Yucatan, Mexico. "My father actually got the opportunity to come here when he was five because his father would work in the fields (here in the U.S.). And so they would allow them to have visas to bring their families over and so that's how my father got here. And my father did not even finish high school." Both parents are from "very large, very poor families," according to Francine. They met in Los Angeles, CA. Her dad, an exceptionally ambitious and hard worker, labored in the fields with his dad. Their intelligence and hard work enabled them to work their way out of farming and into their own businesses. "He worked and he worked and he worked his way up, and he had his own company at one point." Francine's grandfather was also successful in elevating his socioeconomic status. He eventually owned a few apartments. This is where her mom lived, met her dad, fell in love, and got married. "My dad supported my mom...and her and her friends stayed in those apartments." Francine's mom has taken on a job with CCSD as a safety assistant. Her English has improved considerably. "She's doing a lot better, especially now that she deals with a lot of parents, and because before she didn't work. When my parents got divorced she got a job, so before she didn't work."

Having arrived in the United States at a much younger age, her dad was able to master the English language, whereas her mother, who stayed at home raising the kids, struggled with English. As a result, Francine and her younger sister and younger brother learned to speak Spanish and English fluently. “So my dad, my father spoke to us in English, and then my mother would speak to us in Spanish.” Francine’s bilingual talent was an influencing factor in her decision to pursue NSC’s Bachelor of Arts degree in Elementary Education with a Concentration in Bilingual Education. While attending NSC, not only did the specific degree concentration in bilingual education become immediately apparent to Francine, but the severe shortage of bilingual teachers within CCSD did as well. “Actually, the bilingual didn’t come until later because I didn’t know about the bilingual program until I came to Nevada State College... there’s going to be so many opportunities...and I’m so grateful to my parents for teaching me Spanish.”

Thanks to Francine’s parents, there has never been a doubt in her mind that she would attend college. “It was never ‘if,’ or ‘I might.’ As soon as I graduated from high school, I knew I had to enroll...and my parents, since we were little, ‘If you ever want to get anywhere in life, you need an education.’” Every night they would be reminded by their mom to do their homework. She would check their homework as well. This went on through middle school, according to Francine. And her dad: “I want you guys to have an education so you don’t have to go through all what we went through...I got where I got because I had to work really hard, hard doing hard labor, and I want you girls to not have to go through that...I wanted to give you everything we didn’t have.” Like her dad and mom, Francine is very ambitious. She wants so much for them to be proud of her accomplishments. “I want a good life for myself, and I see what my parents have been

able to give me and I want to be able support myself and feel that I can accomplish things too on my own and um...I definitely want to make my parents proud in every aspect of my life.”

Reflecting back on her 2+2+2 career pathway transition, Francine also credits her teachers having a positive influence on her decision to continue her education. “I’ve had really, really great teachers. I’ve been very lucky with that...throughout all of my educational career...very great teachers, starting from elementary school.” She especially credits NSC’s associate dean for the School of Education for her continued support from high school to CSN to NSC. “She’s like a mother to all the students. She called up and she’s like ‘What’s going on with you?’ Yeah, and then if whenever we have a problem we know like to go to her and she’ll help us work it out because we’ve gone into her office in tears and she knows, we feel like she’s there for us.” It is often said that the best educators influence their students more in their personal, individualized contact with them, outside of the classroom lecture. Such is the case with Francine’s testimony towards NSC’s associate dean for the School of Education. It is both touching and rewarding to hear, just as her testimony has been with her parents. Francine will complete her student teaching on August 7, 2009. She plans to start teaching full time for CCSD fall, 2009. At 21 years old, having graduated with honors from NSC, and the loving and supporting history she has, one can only imagine how receptive all those children will be when Francine walks into the classroom on her first day of school. The essence of Francine’s lived experience is captured in her comment: “If you ever want to get anywhere in life, you need an education.” She will go down in CCSD, CSN, and NSC history among the best of students.

*Florence (FFA Category)*

Most Nevadan's are familiar with the cliché, "transient town," or "transient state." Why such references to the cities we live in, or the state as a whole? Workers, business owners, home owners, and more are often characterized as "continually on the go," for both good and bad reasons. Rare is the case one meets an individual native to Nevada, let alone a family with a legacy spanning four generations and living in the same city. Florence, a CTE transfer student from Great Basin College (GBC), was born and raised in a small farming town, just southeast of Elko, Nevada, where GBC is located. She is currently a full-time senior at the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) majoring in Animal Science, with a minor in Wildlife Ecology. She represents the Future Farmers of America (FFA) category of CTE transfer students.

Hard work, responsibility, ethic, and pride describe the legacy of Florence's family. This is indicative of her established career pathway: to ultimately become a veterinarian. Florence is a product of a long family history of ranchers, living on the same Northern Nevada ranch for four generations. Among the six CTE transfer students interviewed, she is undoubtedly the most industrious and studious over time. Hard work comes naturally to her. Throughout high school, she worked on the family ranch taking care of animals, selling market steers, bussing tables and washing dishes at the local restaurant, and working at the vet clinic in Elko. "I had been working there since I was a freshman in high school...I worked two jobs almost every day." To date, Florence continues to work, despite taking a full load (19 credits), while finishing off her junior year at UNR. She will start on her senior year, summer, 2009.

Education remains vitally important within the legacy of Florence's family. Her dad, who is self-employed as a rancher, graduated from UNR with a degree in Agribusiness. He minored in Animal Science. Florence's mom also attended UNR. She majored in English, but did not quite finish her degree. Among her two siblings, Florence's older brother graduated from UNR, just as she was admitted, and her younger brother is still in high school. Even her grandmother was a high school teacher. "I definitely knew I would have to get a degree in something...My family pushed me and stuff, and I knew that I would need to do that. And once I figured out what I wanted to do, I knew I would have to do so."

Florence's family also has a long history of actively participating in Future Farmers of America (FFA), one of Nevada's six CTSOs. Her dad and uncles were FFA State Officers; her older brother was an active FFA member; and her youngest brother, currently a senior in high school, is on the high school Ag Mechanics team. "He won the Star Farmer's Awards at the state convention." Florence has been involved with FFA for nearly six years. "It's a great organization, and you get so many skills that you can really use in real-life applications." Even as a senior at UNR, she still volunteers her time with the organization that taught her skills such as leadership, public speaking, parliamentary procedures, supervision, record keeping, competitive debating, and the value of community service activities. "I competed at the National FFA Conference in a parliamentary procedure contest, which is a debating contest. It was my favorite contest." Florence was a Silver Medalist at the Nationals, taking second place among the best of the best FFA competitors from throughout the United States.



Florence was the FFA Chapter President. Like many of her family members, she was a Nevada State Officer servicing as the FFA State Secretary. She is the recipient of the prestigious American FFA Degree, which she was awarded at the National FFA Conference. “The American FFA Degree is the highest level that can be achieved as an FFA member. This final step in the FFA Degree system encourages students to grow toward establishing themselves in an agricultural career. Attaining the American FFA Degree requires a solid commitment to agriculture and FFA.” (FFA.org, 2009). Achieving this award is not exactly an easy feat. One must complete their Chapter Degree first, then their State Degree, and then meet the rigorous national requirement, according to Florence. Her “supervised agriculture experience” included an elaborate beef production project consisting of four years of diligent record keeping, accounting, chapter activities, community service, and sales and the marketing and sale of cows. Her project extended into her studies at GBC and UNR. The American FFA Degree was awarded to Florence in 2008.

Recognizing throughout high school that her parents simply could not afford to put their kids through college, both Florence and her older brother applied for scholarships on a regular basis. “My parents couldn’t have just paid for us to go. We had to work for scholarships...but they definitely still pushed us to go and are helping as much as they can...I apply for scholarships every year...it was going to be expensive and I was going to have to work, but that was just understood.” Florence is a Millennium Scholarship recipient. “...the millennium scholarship, which was a big influence because it was a lot, it really helps so much.” She is also the recipient of a community memorial scholarship for students continuing their education out of high school and studying

animal-related careers; the Nevada Ag Foundation Scholarship; the Reno Rodeo Foundation Scholarship; Macmillan Agricultural scholarship; the Chester A. Brennan Memorial Agricultural scholarship; the El Cierro Memorial Scholarship; the Newmont Mining Scholarship; and others. Florence attributes her scholarship awards primarily to her mom. “She looked up all the scholarships available and made me write essay after essay to apply for them.” Because of her mother’s background as an English major at UNR, “she’s read all of my stuff ever since I was in high school.”

Several influencing factors contributed to Florence’s decision to transfer from high school to GBC, then on to UNR. Certainly, family legacy was paramount. Among family members, Florence’s mom had the greatest influence. “She was definitely the person... ‘you need to get a college degree’ ... ‘you need to continue to pursue education.’ ‘It’s so important in everything, no matter what field you’re going into.’” Not only did she “push” Florence, and help her in acquiring numerous scholarships, she also provided sound advice on her career pathway. Her decision to attend GBC out of high school is an example of a sound decision emanating out of family influence, particularly her mom.

Florence was simply not ready for UNR just out of high school. Though it gave her great comfort knowing her brother was there to encourage and support her, she was still harboring timid thoughts. “I was worried coming from a small town, if I would like Reno, or if I would be able, you know, to even handle it up here. And he definitely was able to tell me, ‘no it’s not that big of a town. It’s not that bad.’ You know, he really enjoyed his time up here (UNR), so he made me more comfortable I guess in coming up here.”

Florence was also concerned about cost and readiness in terms of knowing what degree to pursue at the UNR. Now in her senior year and reflecting back at her decision to attend the community college (GBC) directly out of high school first, she is even more assured it was the right decision. “I always knew I wanted to do something in agriculture, but I didn’t know what for sure. I definitely recommend going to the community college...It’s so much cheaper. You can save so much money...and you’re able to figure out what you want to do and then go from there.” Working with vets at the vet clinic in Elko while attending classes at GBC is when Florence decided she wanted to become a veterinarian. She has become even more convinced after transferring to UNR and landing a job at a Reno vet clinic. “They’re really supportive of my education, and are kind of working around my class schedule.” As with many community college students who choose to work and simultaneously take classes during high school and after graduation, much can be said about how maturation through “real world” experiences factors in college and career choice.

Upon making her career path decision while attending GBC and working at the vet clinic, Florence immediately looked into the pre-veterinarian medicine program at UNR. Having met with one of UNR’s College of Agriculture, Biotechnology, and Natural Resources (CABNR) professors and academic advisor, she was convinced that “Animal Science” would be her major. To date, Florence is still assigned to the same CABNR academic advisor. She has been an invaluable source of advice to Florence, and an influencing factor in establishing and maintaining her career aspirations. Animal Science will eventually lead to her veterinarian graduate work at an out-of-state vet school, since Nevada does not have one. Her reason for choosing Wildlife Ecology as a

minor stems from her role as a Student Ambassador for CABNR and the requirement to learn about other related majors. Wildlife Ecology caught her attention. “Just the cool stuff they do studying bighorn sheep and the hands-on stuff they do...and it was just so interesting. We actually had guest lecturers from the vet for Nevada Department of Wildlife, who is the head mammalogy vet for the state, come in and talk to our class, and he just talked about all the work he does with wildlife.”

Identifying and acknowledging those individuals who have had the greatest influence on Florence’s career pathway would be incomplete without mention of her high school agriculture teacher. From her freshman year in high school until she graduated, she took agriculture classes. It was those classes that taught her about livestock production, horticulture, meat production, floriculture, plant ecology, agriculture mechanics, welding, record keeping, fund-raising, and all of the related business and leadership skills one could imagine in a high school agriculture program. “And even my ag teacher, he always told me, you know that ‘you should go to college once you figure out where you want to go.’ And when I told him I wanted to be a vet, you know, he told me how hard it was going to be and everything. But he really supported me...even though when I was still uncertain of what I was going to do.”

Florence epitomizes the notion that hard work genuinely pays off. Her endeavor to become a veterinarian is nearly a reality at this stage. Already, her accomplishments are being recognized by university professors, community leaders, and more. Florence has been featured as an outstanding student on UNR’s CABNR home page. Her testimonials reflect the lively passion she exhibits in everything she does. It’s no surprise that she has been accepted into CABNR’s Student Ambassador Program: “a volunteer

leadership program that offers CABNR students an opportunity to become directly involved with other students, corporate leaders and alumni through public relations and recruitment activities...A student ambassador is an enrolled student at UNR who serves as a knowledgeable representative that provides information and services to the community about and for the college.” (UNR-CABNR, 2009). As for her experience at UNR, “I have loved UNR; I have loved the whole experience of coming to UNR; and I think it is a really great school, and I’m glad I did decide to come here.” Since there are no veterinary schools in Nevada, Florence is already looking into the possibility of attending Colorado State, Washington State, or University of California at Davis’ veterinary school. One can be assured, her dreams will come true. The essence of Florence’s lived experience is captured best when she stated: “I definitely knew I would have to get a degree in something...My family pushed me and stuff, and I knew that I would need to do that. And once I figured out what I wanted to do, I knew I would have to do so.”

*Henry (HOSA Category)*

Henry represents the Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA) category of CTE transfer students. He is currently a full-time senior at UNLV majoring in Clinical Laboratory Science (CLS), a Bachelor of Science degree program that prepares students to perform complex chemical, biological, hematological, immunological, microscopic, and bacterial test specimens (UNLV-CLS, 2009). Henry, a Chinese-American, first-generation student graduated in 2003 from Advanced Technologies Academy (A-Tech) High School in Las Vegas, NV. Quite, confident, reserved, humble-mannered, and shy may be reasons he chose not to join a CTSO, especially HOSA, since his career

aspiration while attending A-Tech high school was to become a draftsman, designing structural, mechanical, and electrical blueprints using computer-aided design (CAD) software. He even attained a Certificate of Achievement (CA) in drafting prior to graduating at A-Tech high school. “Health science didn’t occur in my mind at the time. But I was good in biology and chemistry classes, but my interest was in design.” Henry is a Millennium Scholarship recipient.

Having investigated UNLV’s architectural program, he found the training he had received from A-Tech was “far more advanced” than what the program at UNLV had to offer. Furthermore, his investigation of what architects do as a career revealed the requirement of long hours, “...even staying up 24/7, so that part didn’t interest me.” Falling back on his passion for biology and chemistry, Henry decided to attend a health science orientation meeting, specifically pertaining to UNLV’s CLS program. He found the uniqueness of their CLS program catered to his science strengths in biology and chemistry. The program’s small size, career opportunities, and the fact that few people know about it are traits that appealed most to Henry. “Pharmacy and nursing, everybody is just more familiar with those career paths.”

Henry decided to test the waters at UNLV, directly out of high school, by enrolling in general education and CLS-related classes. He found his educational venture to be more challenging than anticipated, particularly in a humantology class he took. Though he finished all his biology and chemistry prerequisites, a UNLV professor recommended he digress and enroll in CSN’s CLS program. Henry took her advice and immediately pursued the CLS Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree at CSN. He graduated in 2006 with his AAS degree from CSN.

“My experience at CSN was good actually.” The small classes, student-to-teacher ratio, and individualized attention at CSN appealed to Henry. During his year and a half attendance at CSN, the professors took note of his outstanding work. “Well I do like the material that they taught me at the CSN, and I guess I just wanted more in-depth experience, more in-depth concepts. And since I already was somewhat good at biology and chemistry, I thought I’d further my education. And it seems that CLS is a program that not too many people know about, so when I was looking at a future, there’s going to be a huge demand for MT (Medical Technology) in the future.” His professors encouraged him to pursue the CSL bachelor’s and master’s degree at UNLV. A degree in CSL would prepare him for multiple careers in MT. “I did exceptionally well. I didn’t think I would be the top person there. I didn’t really strive for that in high school, and I didn’t strive for that in college.” Upon graduation, Henry decided not to walk at CSN’s commencement ceremony. At least one of the professors close to him was disappointed. “Yeah, she wanted to see me walk down the aisle ...and like my own way of thinking is going about my bachelor’s degree, and that’s my main goal...that’s walking up the stairwell to life.” Henry felt he disappointed her. His goal was on the bachelor’s degree.

Most parents want their kids to become doctors or nurses, according to Henry. His brother, and only sibling, is two years older. He is also attending UNLV and majoring in Radiology. Henry’s parents are proud that their only two children are enrolled at UNLV and have successfully chosen a career path. However, as is the case with many first-generation students, Henry found his parents to be very encouraging and supportive of his decision to attend college, but played a minimal role in his choice of college (NPEC, 2007). “My parents just encouraged me to do whatever I enjoy. They

really dreaded the possibility of me going into architecture, but they didn't mind if I was into the health careers. Of course they were thinking of you know, a pharmacist or a doctor..." Henry had some explaining to do. Exactly what is a medical technologist, or an MT? When he told them he wanted to become an MT, their response was, "What? What is that?" Having explained to them what an MT does for a living, they were quite satisfied. "...I told them about what's the future outlook for them, they were like, 'Oh, okay. That's great!'"

Though Henry and his brother were born and raised in Las Vegas, Nevada, their parents are from China. They have limited English speaking abilities, and the equivalent of a high school education, according to Henry. His mom has picked up the English language well, but his dad is still in need of occasional translation from English to Cantonese. Why did they settle in Las Vegas? "It's very easy to get a job where you can speak a minimum to no English...I've never considered Las Vegas a good place to raise your family, but it's been okay with me so far."

Initially, several other people were living in Henry's household, and they only had one car. "I remember we had to pinch every penny..." Las Vegas is still a considerable improvement in lifestyle for Henry's parents, in comparison to their socioeconomic background in China. "They had to make their own toys. They didn't have any of those toys you know: GI Joes or Barbies. They had to make a dollhouse out of straw, or a car out of something...rice, fruits, something." And to what extent has American and Chinese culture contributed to Henry's decision to continue his education beyond the community college? "I think that I have more American influence on me than my



traditional Chinese background...lately, I've really seen...I guess the Chinese side *did* encourage me a lot. Encourage me to do your best, move forward..."

Family background, culture, parents, and faculty from CSN and UNLV are factors influencing Henry's career aspirations and decision to continue his education from high school, to the community college, and on to the university. Reflecting back, in addition to the aforementioned factors, there is one meaningful individual whom Henry holds in high regard. His biology teacher in high school successfully captivated his scientific interest by engaging him in a volunteer activity. "I volunteered for an archeological dig program, all day...yeah, it was in Utah, so that got me interested into investigating evidence." The evidence consisted of geological artifacts that "appear out of the ordinary, like a whole lining of rocks," according to Henry. By engaging him in an activity within a broader context of people, places, and environment, his high school biology teacher was successful in providing Henry with a lasting, and possibly a life-long positive impression.

Henry plans to graduate fall semester, 2009, with his Bachelor of Science degree in CLS. His recent ambition is to seek a career that is related to quality control (QC) in a commercial or industrial laboratory environment, such as a fragrance or soda company, whereby he can test chemical substances to company specifications. "Instead of going into a traditional hospital laboratory, I was thinking of more an industrial QC laboratory." Whether it is an MT-related profession, or some scientific laboratory profession outside of the medical industry, Henry will surely succeed. His parents, his brother, and the numerous UNLV, CSN, and high school teachers who had the pleasure of having Henry as a student in their classes will surely be proud of him. The essence of Henry's lived

experience lies in his family and cultural background: "...lately, I've really seen...I guess the Chinese side *did* encourage me a lot. Encourage me to do your best, move forward..."

*Scott (Skills USA Category)*

Merriam-Webster's On-Line Dictionary defines a *techie* as "a person who is very knowledgeable or enthusiastic about technology, and especially high technology." Scott, who represents the Skills USA category of CTE transfer students, is a techie in many regards. "I have an interest in electronics, or engineering technology...I would say yes, definitely a gadget kid outside of school. You know, I was always tinkering with broken phones or things like that...whether it was stereos or TVs, or installing car stereos, or things of that nature, so anything electronic is what I was into." Born and raised in Las Vegas, NV, Scott has spent his entire life in Clark County. As a native Las Vegas, he attended elementary school, middle school, high school, and college here. He transferred from the College of Southern Nevada (CSN) to Nevada State College (NCS) and is currently majoring in Management, with an emphasis in Technology.

In high school, Scott was a college-bound student placed in advanced math and science classes. He genuinely enjoyed taking the college preparatory classes, while on the side, tinkering with electronic gadgets. They fascinated him to the extent he considered attending a vocational high school, clear across town. "I was actually thinking about going to Vo-Tech High School to study electronics, and decided against it because it was so far." Destiny many have taken over his senior year in high school. Much to Scott's dismay, he was placed into a vocational track. Instead of the trigonometry class he was signed up for, he found himself taking photography and other

career and technical education (CTE) classes. “I was shocked, cause I went to the counselor and I said ‘Hey, I think you guys made a mistake. I signed up for trigonometry, not technology.’ I thought it was a clerical error, but no, the counselor informed me that not enough people signed up for the trig class. And to tell you the truth, I thought it was kind of a silly switch going from a math class to a technology class, but I stuck with the class and actually enjoyed it.” Enrollment was an issue at his high school, and they seemed to be making do with what they had, according to Scott. Nevertheless, he thoroughly enjoyed the CTE courses, including photography, audio/video labs, and even building replicas of the living chamber of a space shuttle. “And actually some students lived in it in 6 days, and it was in our classroom. So, it was things like that...but it definitely went along with what I was interested in, cause like I said, I was a gadget guy.”

By the end of his senior year, Scott felt the need to get a job. He graduated from high school in 1996. Despite his college-bound plans, he immediately went to work in the construction industry. For most people, working outdoors in the hundred degrees plus temperature during the summer months in Las Vegas is unbearable. Scott lasted about one year in the construction industry. “Working construction in the Las Vegas heat was really what got me back into coming to school because I knew that’s NOT what I wanted to do the rest of my life. And I had already been a pretty good student, so I knew I could transition back into school and make a better situation for myself.” Whereas money was the motivating factor for Scott to enter the workforce directly out of high school, intellectual stimulation, a career pathway, and a higher-paying job were the motivating factors to return.

Scott's dilemma was money. The Millennium Scholarship did not exist at the time, nor was he the recipient of any scholarships. "I came from a single-parent family. My father passed away when I was one year old...I was raised by my mom and she had to work two jobs, so she was never really around. And so she was breaking her back to keep food on the table and roof over our head, so there was no college fund." Scott had long planned on going to college. "You know, as a kid with wild dreams and money doesn't mean anything, I wanted to go to USC, or UCLA, or the University of Illinois where I'm from, but it's just not possible when you don't have a lot of money...money is always an issue." Scott was a year out of high school. He no longer had his construction job and was still living at home with his mom. "I didn't have to pay rent, but you can't do that forever." Scott's mom wanted him to enroll in college.

Growing up, Scott was unaware of the community college. "I never knew it existed." Going to college meant going to a university, according to Scott. Harboring this notion is not uncommon, particularly among youth. Community colleges have a long history of being regarded as a separate curricular track, serving students whose objective is to gain skills to enter the workforce, not those who are seeking the baccalaureate (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). It was his mother that informed him of the College of Southern Nevada (CSN), a community college alternative option that was more affordable, and an opportunity to test the waters. "I think the reason she pushed me in that direction was that she wanted me to make sure, before sticking me in UNLV and paying UNLV prices, 'let's see if this is for you at the community college first'...definitely the best decision I ever made was going to the community college."

Scott and his mom visited CSN's West Charleston campus and talked to a counselor about a career path in electronics, including the possibility of financial aid. The counselor informed them of CSN's Electronics Engineering Technology (ET) AAS degree program and recommended an introductory class: ET100B Survey of Electronics, a 3-credit class. They were also informed that the deadline for Pell Grant applications applicable for the fall semester of 1997 had passed five months earlier and they wouldn't be able to receive financial aid until the following semester. "...So she paid for it. And you know, at the time, that's really all she could afford was the first class, which I thought was a good idea anyway because I didn't know how I was going to handle college." Scott was grateful that his mom, struggling to make ends meet, paid for his first college class. He took advantage of the time by honing in on his study skills and focusing on his one and only class. Later in the semester, his Pell Grant application was accepted. Financial aid made it possible to take a full load the following semesters.

Scott thoroughly enjoyed CSN's ET program. He excelled in all of his classes. Though he was informed at the onset that his major ET-designated coursework was not transferable to UNLV's Electrical Engineering program, Scott didn't mind. "I was okay with it because CSN offered a more hands-on education, technical with all the equipment than is offered at UNLV...I'll go for my bachelor's degree, even if I have to take some courses over." While completing his major non-transferable ET coursework, Scott simultaneously enrolled in transferable general education courses like English and pre-calculus. His intent was to at least receive some lower-division credit from CSN when he did transfer to UNLV. Additionally, the hands-on ET coursework in electronics would prepare him for the electrical engineering courses yet to come.

Like many community college students, Scott picked up a part-time job on the side. He worked for a local electronics sign manufacturing company performing electronics assembly work. Though his job did not pay much, it was an opportunity to gain experience in the electronics industry. It wasn't long before instructors in the ET Department noticed a bright, inquisitive, and genuinely interested student conducting laboratory experiments with digital and analog circuits. A full-time position for a Development Technician opened up within CSN's ET Department. Scott was asked by many instructors to apply for the permanent position. He was immediately hired by the ET Department. "In addition to making sure all the equipment works, and things of that nature, I also help with the instruction of electronics theory."

Scott's life changed for the better. He was able to move out of his mom's house and become financially independent of her. "I had moved out, and I had money; I had my own car; I was rather content, to tell you the honest truth." Scott married his girlfriend and graduated from CSN in 2002. "We graduated from the community college together, the same year. She went onto UNLV, got her bachelor's degree, and now she's transferring to the University of Phoenix going after her master's. So seeing her doing it, and being able to do it and...keep the 40-hour-a-week job and still studying on top of that...I would definitely think she was a main influence on me seeing, watching her do it herself."

Scott was definitely content with his new life. "Coming from the background that I came from, nothing was going to be given to me or handed down...I spent a period of time living on the streets because of various problems I'd gotten myself into as a youth." Settling into his new life was an opportunity to stop and smell the roses. His

time off after graduating from CSN was well warranted, considering his background experience. Scott was homeless for a period of time. “That’s a place I never want to go back to...and while I was on the street, I got this tattoo. And actually I could get it taken off, but I kind of keep it around to remember where I’ve been, and I don’t ever want to go back there, so that’s a motivating factor.” When asked about his tattoo, “Oh it’s just a clover and it says ‘Mick’ on it because I’m Irish. So um...Mick is actually a derogatory term for Irish people, similar to the “J” word or “N” word.” This is just one more contributing factor to the uniqueness of Scott’s character, his lived experience, and desire to continue his education beyond the community college. “I did the tattoo with a mechanical pencil, guitar string, a remote-control motor, and a nine-volt battery.”

After a four-year break from CSN graduation, Scott decided to get back on track and resume his pursuit of the baccalaureate degree. During the interim, Nevada State College (NSC) began offering a Bachelor of Applied Science degree program, which permitted community college graduates to transfer their AAS degrees and receive full credit. Rather than starting all over with his major coursework at UNLV, Scott decided NSC was the route to take. In 2006, he was admitted to NSC. “I feel good that, you know when anytime you take time off from school, you kind of wonder if you’re going to be able to do it again...going back to Nevada State College that first semester and getting back into the swing of things definitely proved to myself that I can still do it, and do it at a higher level...all the instructor’s I’ve ever had whether it was at CSN or Nevada State, they were all great influences to get you to strive for that degree.”

Scott contends that he would have transferred sooner, even to UNLV, had there been an opportunity to transfer his AAS degree in its entirety. “One last thing I wouldn’t

mind adding is the ability, if those of us who go to junior colleges or community colleges and graduate with associates degrees in career and technical areas...if the universities accepted more, or let's say worked more hand-in-hand with the community college...I think there would be a lot more transfer students. A lot of us get stuck in this track where there's a terminal degree." His point is well taken. Nationwide, CTE transfer students have long faced the challenge of colleges and universities providing a clear 2+2+2 pathway to the baccalaureate. Nevada community colleges in the north and south continue to struggle in this area. Scott is to be commended for setting a remarkable example for CTE transfer students studying under the category of Skills USA to follow. By paving a pathway from high school to CSN and on to NSC for his baccalaureate degree, he remains hopeful that other applied science students follow suit. The essence of Scott's lived experience is captured at the community college level where he states: "...definitely the best decision I ever made was going to the community college."

### Summary of CTE Transfer Students' Lived Experience

Having completed the methodological approach to data analysis prior to writing each students' story permitted an opportunity to optimize their stories in accordance with various phenomenological writing typologies set forth by several noted researchers, many of whom consider phenomenological text an art (Denzin et al., 1989): one that is attune to the deep tonalities of the speaker, sensitive to the undertones of the language, tacit communications, and certainly weighing in on what van Manen (1990) describes as the forces of literal and epistemological silence, both evoking the structural and textural descriptions.



Eight predisposition factors of the phenomenon, ultimately identified in Chapter 5 (Career Aspirations, Teacher Influence, Parental Influence, SES, Academic Achievement, Self-Improvement, 2+2 Career Pathways, and College Location), were embodied in their stories with two major intentions: to create in writing Denzin's verisimilitude, or truth-like statements that produce for readers the feeling that they have experienced , or could experience, the events being described; and to present a phenomenological writing as more than a story or narrative, but one that van Manen (1990) refers to as an anecdote based on phenomenological reflection that manifests itself in the analysis of data presented in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### RESULTS-B: A HERMENEUTIC ANALYSIS OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SIX CTE TRANSFER STUDENTS

#### Introduction

Denzin (1989) likens any effort towards providing a thick description of an account in words an art that “seeks to bring the lived experience before the reader. A major goal is to create a text that permits a willing reader to share vicariously in the experiences that have been captured” (p.83). The stories presented in Chapter 4 were a result of the phenomenological and other complementing methods used to gather the data, analyze it, and present it in an artful way –one which reflects the essence of the lived experiences of six Nevada CTE transfer students, and one which attempts to present it in a *texturally* and *structurally* descriptive way. The data analysis results presented in this chapter were an essential component in rendering their stories.

Qualitative data analysis begins when the researcher places the transcribed interviews before him or her and studies the material through some methodological procedure that evokes meaning and imagery embodied in the work (van Manen, 1990; Moustakas, 1994). Chapter 4, presented as a portion of the Results, was by no means a misnomer. They are the end result. Without the data analysis presented herein, the lived experiences of six Nevada CTE transfer students, presented as “their story” in Chapter 4, would likely fall short of textural descriptions (what they experienced) and structural descriptions (how they experienced it) intended to accurately represent their story.

Moustakas (1994) and others define these “textural descriptions” as describing what the respondent has experienced in terms of the phenomenon and “structural descriptions” as how they experienced the phenomenon, given the context of setting as an influencing factor. This chapter presents the analysis of data and their results used to construct the stories presented in Chapter 4.

### Chapter Organization

Chapter 5 presents a hermeneutic analysis of the data, organized and presented in a manner in which its results are represented as a sequential reduction of the data. This sequential reduction of data conforms, in concept, to the process of *horizontalization*, a dimension of Edmund Husserl’s phenomenological reduction, whereby horizons, or “layers of meaning,” are clustered into themes represented as a coherent textural description of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994, p.97). Content analysis, both manifest and latent, conducted on all six Nevada CTE transfer students’ transcripts, are presented first, followed by an event mapping, domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, and componential analysis of all students. Combined, these methods seek to uncover new horizons that build upon each other, penetrating deeper into the analysis of the students’ lived experience; each method having equal value, according to Moustakas; and each method lending itself to horizontalizing the data with the intent to provide insightful descriptions, both texturally and graphically, of the students’ lived experiences as successful CTE transfer students.

Preceding each of the following sections is a succinct summary of the method, which is intended to serve as a reminder to the reader the way in which the method was

used to analyze the data. They are consistent with the details of the methods described in Chapter 3, Methodology. Major themes captured and identified in this chapter reflect the influencing factors and essence of the six Nevada CTE students' lived experiences as they transitioned from high school, to the community college, then on to the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV), the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR), or Nevada State College (NSC). The final section of this chapter presents an overall summary and salient findings of the results.

### Analysis of Data

Data collection and analysis for this study is based on a hermeneutical perspective emanating out of the works of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), who states that, "The meaning of phenomenological description as a method lies in interpretation....hermeneutic in the primordial signification of this word, where it designates the business of interpreting" (p.37). And there is a difference between understanding a phenomenological research project intellectually and understanding it "from the inside" (van Manen, 1990, p. 8). Thus the interpretation (hermeneutics) of student data and corresponding textural descriptions presented in Chapters 4 and 5 were aided by the researcher's own understanding of the phenomenon. Despite the emic nature of this analysis, the researcher has been mindful of the potential for bias, largely through the works of Edmund Husserl's transcendental methodology and *epoche* (bracketing), which argues that phenomenological research is purely descriptive (Creswell, 2007).

As noted in Chapter 3, Green, Camilli, & Elmore (2006) indicate that *The American Educational Research Association's* journals are abound with reports on case studies, inquiry that incorporates ethnographic procedures, hermeneutic analyses, thick descriptions, and narrative accounts of multiple methods serving to complement each other across the disciplines. "Today, it is virtually impossible for any one approach to be used to address the complex issues being explored through research in education. Further, no longer is it a question of alternative research traditions (the concern of Jaegar in 1988 and 1997) but of which approaches are appropriate to the questions under study and which can be productively combined within a program of research" (Green, Camilli, & Elmore, 2006, p.xvi). The authors continue, "As educational researchers, we need to explore which of the complex phenomena that we are examining or addressing are complementary, and if they are related, what the nature of the relationship is...if we are to select appropriate sets of methods to mix and/or use in complementary ways" (p.xvii). The intent of this study's analysis was not to justify the use of complementary methods across various disciplines, but rather to show how they were utilized to generate the given results in a complementary and productive way.

In addition to manifest and latent content analysis, Creswell's (2007) procedures for phenomenological data analysis are used in conjunction with Berg's (2001) recommendations. His procedure for data analysis builds upon the methodological approaches of Berg and other noted phenomenologists like Husserl, Heidegger, Moustakas, Polkinghorne, and van Manen. Creswell recommends highlighting significant words and statements, sentences, or quotes that provide an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon. As stated earlier, Moustakas refers to

this process as *horizontalization*: a dimension of Husserl's (1970) *phenomenological reduction*. "It is a never-ending process, and though we may reach a stopping point and discontinue our perception of something, the possibility for discovery is unlimited."

This study employed horizontalization to develop "layers of meaning," penetrating deeper with each layer, and discovering clusters and themes (domains) that further detail and accentuate the phenomenon. Event mapping, coupled with Spradley's (1980) detailed methodology on domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, and componential analysis is used as added dimensions of phenomenological reduction and horizontalization. This provides further definition and organization of the textural and structural descriptions of the students' lived experiences.

### Content Analysis

Conducting an analysis of any kind involves a way of thinking, according to Spradley. "It refers to the systematic examination of something to determine its parts, the relationship among parts, and their relationship to the whole," (Spradley, 1980, p.85) in this case, the six CTE students' transcripts. Data analysis began with color-coding each of the student's transcripts in accordance with Berg's procedural recommendation for content analysis. His methodological coding technique of blending manifest and latent content analysis is systematic and makes intuitive sense, given a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. Manifest content are those elements that are physically present and countable (e.g., words, paragraphs, people, whereas latent content is extended to an interpretive reading of the symbolism underlying the physical data) (Berg, 2001). Both were used to analyze the data in an equally-weighted manner.

Berg also outlines the definitions of three classes and/or categories used in standard content analysis: *common classes*, *special classes*, and *theoretical classes*. He defines common classes as classes that are used to distinguish between and among persons, things, and events (e.g., age, gender, mother, father, teacher, cafeteria, student union, and so on). Special classes are used by members of certain areas or communities to distinguish between things, persons, and events within their own area or community. Examples can include jargon and acronyms, such as vet (veterinarian), ag (agriculture), CTSO (Career and Technical Student Organization), FFA (Future Farmers of America), NACTE (Nevada Association for Career and Technical Education –pronounced nack-tee), and so forth. Theoretical classes are those that emerge as a result of analyzing the data (Berg, 2001). In most content analyses, these theoretical classes provide overarching patterns that occur throughout the analysis. They can be likened to *semantics*, as defined earlier, or *domains* and *subdomains*, as described in Chapter 3. From these definitions, one sees the manifest and latent content of the transcribed data emerge from the puzzle.

Coding the units of analysis, the major elements recommended by Berg, began with the identification of each student's total words, significant words, semantics, characters, paragraphs, and concepts. These were uniquely color-coded in accordance with the following definitions:

*Total Respondent words* (Manifest Content): Total number of words in the student's transcription. This excludes the interviewer's words (No Color).

*Significant words* (Latent Content): Those words that are deemed relevant in capturing the telos (essence) of the student's transcription (Gray).

*Semantics* (Latent Content): Categories of the significant words due to their impact on the overall sentiment of the interview (Yellow).

*Characters* (Latent Content): Significant people referenced during the interview (e.g, parents, advisors, peers, teachers, etc). (Green).

*Total Paragraphs* (Manifest Content): Total number of paragraphs or responses by the CTE transfer student (No Color).

*Concepts* (Manifest Content): Clusters of words that form a conceptual idea or theme.

Four concepts have been identified:

- (1) Socioeconomic status (SES) (Red)
- (2) Positive career aspirations (Blue)
- (3) Negative career aspirations (Violet)
- (4) Scholastic Achievements (Olive)

The four concept elements of (1) socioeconomic status (SES), (2) positive career aspirations, (3) negative career aspirations, and (4) scholastic achievements were additional elements that surfaced while conducting the latent content analysis on each student's transcript. In addition to semantics, and to some degree, characters, they represent what Berg refers to as "the interpretive reading of the symbolism underlying the physical data." (p. 242). Manifest and latent content analysis results are as follows.



## Manifest Content Analysis Results

The total number of words (respondent only) and paragraphs (or responses) for each of the six student transcripts are shown in Table 5-1. Each student's total word and paragraph count are physically present and countable in their respective transcripts. That is, they represent the manifest content of the student, or what Berg refers to as the *surface structure* present in each student's transcript.

Table 5-1 Manifest content analysis of transcription words, paragraphs, and interview times for six Nevada CTE transfer students.

Category	Total Words	Total Paragraphs	Interview Duration
DECA-Dennis	5,582	139	70 min.
FBLA-Fred	4,455	171	48 min.
FFA-Florence	5,926	143	66 min.
FCCLA-Francine	3,687	274	55 min.
HOSA-Henry	2,484	143	55 min.
Skills USA-Scott	5,032	108	68 min.

Considering manifest content alone, the data reflect the most talkative, least talkative, most and least responsiveness to questions, duration of response, and more. For example, Florence, the industrious, outstanding FFA transfer student from GBC to UNR, had the highest word count at 5, 926 over a total elapsed time of 66 minutes for her interview. These quantities are absolute values, not speculative or subject to interpretation. That is, regardless of the number of paragraphs or how many words the researcher has spoken to engage and evoke dialog, this equates to 89.8 words per minute spoken during the interview with Florence. In comparison, Henry, the quite, confident, and reserved Clinical Laboratory Science (CLS) transfer student from CSN to UNLV,

had the least amount of words at 2,484 over an elapsed interview time of 55 minutes equating 45.2 words per minute. This equates to half the rate of Florence. Gender, ethnicity, age, and all other variables aside, one can still deduce with certainty which individual is more talkative, without any positive or negative implications towards the meaning of “talkative.” Quite simply, Florence has spoken more words per minute in comparison to Henry.

Berg’s reference to “surface structure” for manifest content can also be misconstrued. The foregoing example can also be used to reveal that Florence may appear, to many, as the most talkative person among the six students, when in fact Fred, the high-achieving former Gifted and Talented TMCC-to-UNR transfer student exhibited a much lesser word count of 4,455 over an elapsed interview time of 48 minutes. This equates to 92.8 words per minute, a 3.37% increase in words per minute over Florence’s 89.8 words per minute. Therefore, one should be mindful that “surface structure” may not be immediately apparent to the phenomenologist exercising Husserl’s *epoche* or Heidegger’s *hermeneutics*, unless they engage in some quantitative way of thinking. Does one complicate this surface structure of words over an elapsed time any further with paragraphs between responses, even statistical measures? Perhaps only to the extent that relevant information is gained from the analysis.

Carrying the manifest surface structure analysis one step further, Francine, the 21-year old CSN-to-NSC Elementary Education transfer student exhibited, by far, the greatest number of paragraphs or responses at 274. As shown earlier in Table 5-1, with a word count and elapsed interview time somewhere close to the mean, questions may arise as to why so many responses. Did she provided a multitude of short responses? Were

more questions asked of Francine in comparison to others? This suggests the need for latent content analysis and blending it with manifest content analysis, according to Berg. Regardless of methodology, philosophical framework, method, or technique, this study takes into account the nuances embedded in qualitative data analysis as a whole, and has incorporated them into the interpretive description of each student's story presented Chapter 4.

### Latent Content Analysis Results

Lecompte & Preissle (1993) liken the process of creating a vivid reconstruction of a culture or phenomenon from data analysis and interpretation to building a jigsaw puzzle. Having acquired the surface structure from the transcribed data via manifest content analysis, analyzing the latent content of the data is where patterns, themes, and attributes emerge. "Once a researcher has established the categories, the portrayal of a complex whole phenomenon begins to emerge. The process is analogous to assembling a jigsaw puzzle. The edge pieces are located first and assembled to provide a frame of reference. Thus, analysis can be viewed as a staged process by which a whole phenomenon is divided into its components, then reassembled under various rubrics" (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p.237).

Latent content, the interpretive reading of the symbolism underlying the physical data (Berg, 2001), was conducted on student transcripts using Berg's fundamental descriptions of major categories for *significant words*, *semantics*, *characters*, and concepts. In addition to these categories, four additional categories of concepts emerged during the process. To a significant degree, they were common themes among all of the

students. They included (1) socioeconomic status (SES), which was extended to include financial challenges and the need to work; (2) positive career aspirations; (3) negative career aspirations, such as comments indicating the lack of desire to attend college; (4) scholastic achievements, including scholarships, awards, and financial aid.

Established categories derived from the latent content analysis of student transcripts are color-coded and depicted in Table 5-2. Color-coding across the top of Table 5-2 is in accordance with the units of analysis definitions above and their color definitions listed in parentheses. In coding each student's transcript, the color assignments and respective definitions were consistently maintained while coding all six transcriptions. An example of the color-coding for latent content analysis can be found in Appendix A for Dennis' transcription.

The laborious and time-consuming process of iteratively scanning each student's transcript, color-coding them, as depicted in Appendix A for Dennis' transcript, and enumerating the meaningful chunks of data was essential. This process cannot be overemphasized, as it served two major purposes. First, it closely reacquaints one with the student after the interview, and secondly, it enables one to identify and assemble the bulk of fitting pieces to the puzzle, ultimately portraying the essence of each student's lived experience as successful CTE transfer students. In doing so, the emerging patterns, themes, and attributes among students surfaced thereby creating a coherent pattern of contextual wholeness experienced by all six of the students. The color-coded transcripts resulting from latent content analysis were used as the foundation for subsequent event mapping; domain, taxonomic, and componential analyses; and their resulting diagrams.

Table 5-2 is merely the results of an analytical tool used to quantify student transcriptions into units of meaning. Their meaning is more readily seen when compared against each other. For example, Henry, the first-generation Chinese-American Medical Technologist student attending UNLV, referenced the fewest number of characters during his interview, whereas Francine, the recent NSC graduate in Elementary Education, referenced the most number of characters during the interview. Comparing the two gives some degree of context and understanding, but is relatively meaningless without analyzing the entire results. Likewise, Dennis, a UNLV transfer student, oldest among the six CTE students, and a 4.0 Business graduate from CSN turned his life around 15 years after graduating from high school. Data reflected in Table 5-2 stand out in negative career aspirations for Dennis, particularly in comparison to Francine, who was the only student to not make any negative comments towards her career aspiration. Here again, without a comparison, context and understanding is latent, if not lost.

Though content analysis serves as the foundation for subsequent methods to build upon (e.g., event mapping and domain analysis), extrapolating on one or two details out of a total of 129 pages of interview transcriptions by no means reflects the complex whole of the phenomenon. It is the conceptual application of “phenomenological reduction” and “horizontalizing” (Moustakas, 1994) of data applied to subsequent methods that are equally important, including the tacit interview knowledge integrated into the process from start to finish. “Tacit knowledge is all that is remembered somehow, minus that which is remembered in the form of words, symbols, or other rhetorical forms. It is that which permits us to recognize faces, to comprehend metaphors, and to ‘know ourselves.’” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.196; Stake, 1978, p.6).

Table 5-2 Latent content analysis results: Comparison of units of analysis between CTE transfer students.

<div>Content Analysis Table</div> <div>Comparison of All Six CTE Transfer Students</div>							
	Significant Words	Semantics	Characters	Concepts: SES	Concepts: Career Pathways & Positive Attributes	Concepts: Career Pathways & Negative Attributes	Concepts: Scholastic Achievements
DECA-Dennis	257	46	53	64	59	91	7
FBLA-Fred	243	52	60	33	83	27	52
FCCLA-Francine	276	50	84	77	44	0	15
FFA-Florence	248	97	81	72	102	5	37
HOSA-Henry	91	57	32	35	75	19	3
Skills USA-Scott	212	77	35	80	103	17	15

## Event Mapping

Chapter 3 discussed the frequent use of *concept mapping* as a qualitative method of modeling relationships among concepts within a given domain or theme. Similarly, another method used in providing explicit visualization of relationships among concepts is through the use of *event maps*. Event maps differ from concept maps in that they are used specifically to illustrate the breakdown of “transitional events” into categories and subcategories (e.g., major events with corresponding detailed events). This is in contrast to mapping out “concepts,” as is the case with concept mapping. “Event mapping represents the flow of conduct of an individual member and/or the coordinated activity of multiple actors within a group across time. Event mapping can also be considered a form of transcribing and representing the flow of conduct between and among members of a social group” (Putney, 2008, p. 1). In either case, it involves the analysis of data; a systematic examination of something to determine its parts, the relationship among parts, and their relationship to the whole (Spradley, 1980).

### Event Map Construction and Results

Event maps were constructed for all six CTE transfer students. They are based on the manifest and latent content analysis of student transcripts and the integration of tacit interview knowledge, as defined above by Lincoln & Guba (1985) and Stake (1986). Constructing the event map for each student required an intense focus on their lived experience as a function of time and emotion. That is, another opportunity to refer back to the latent content analysis and mediate reflection on time and emotion for each student. The breakdown of transitional events into categories and subcategories includes student

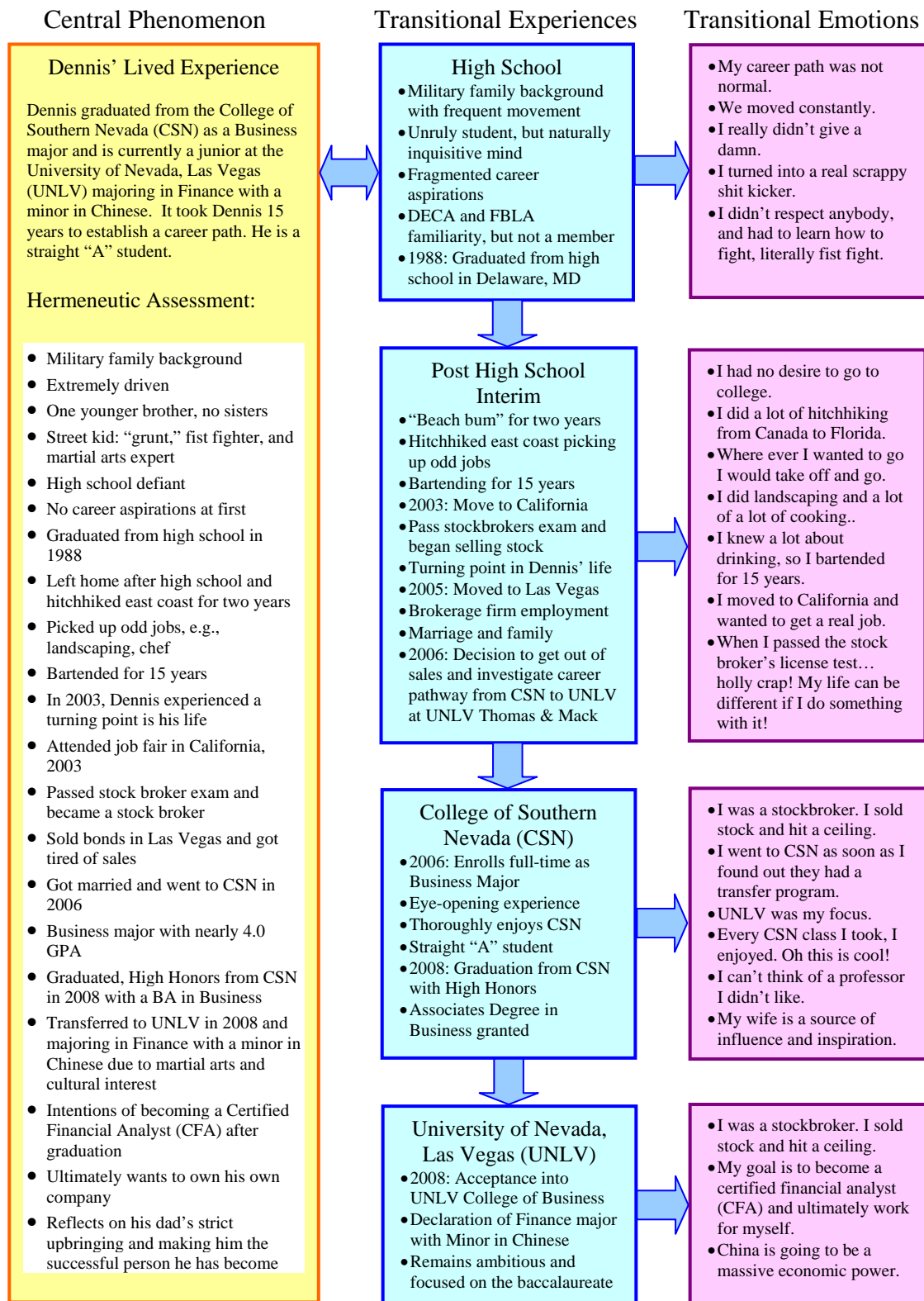


Figure 5-1. Event map depicting the essence of Dennis' lived experience (DECA).



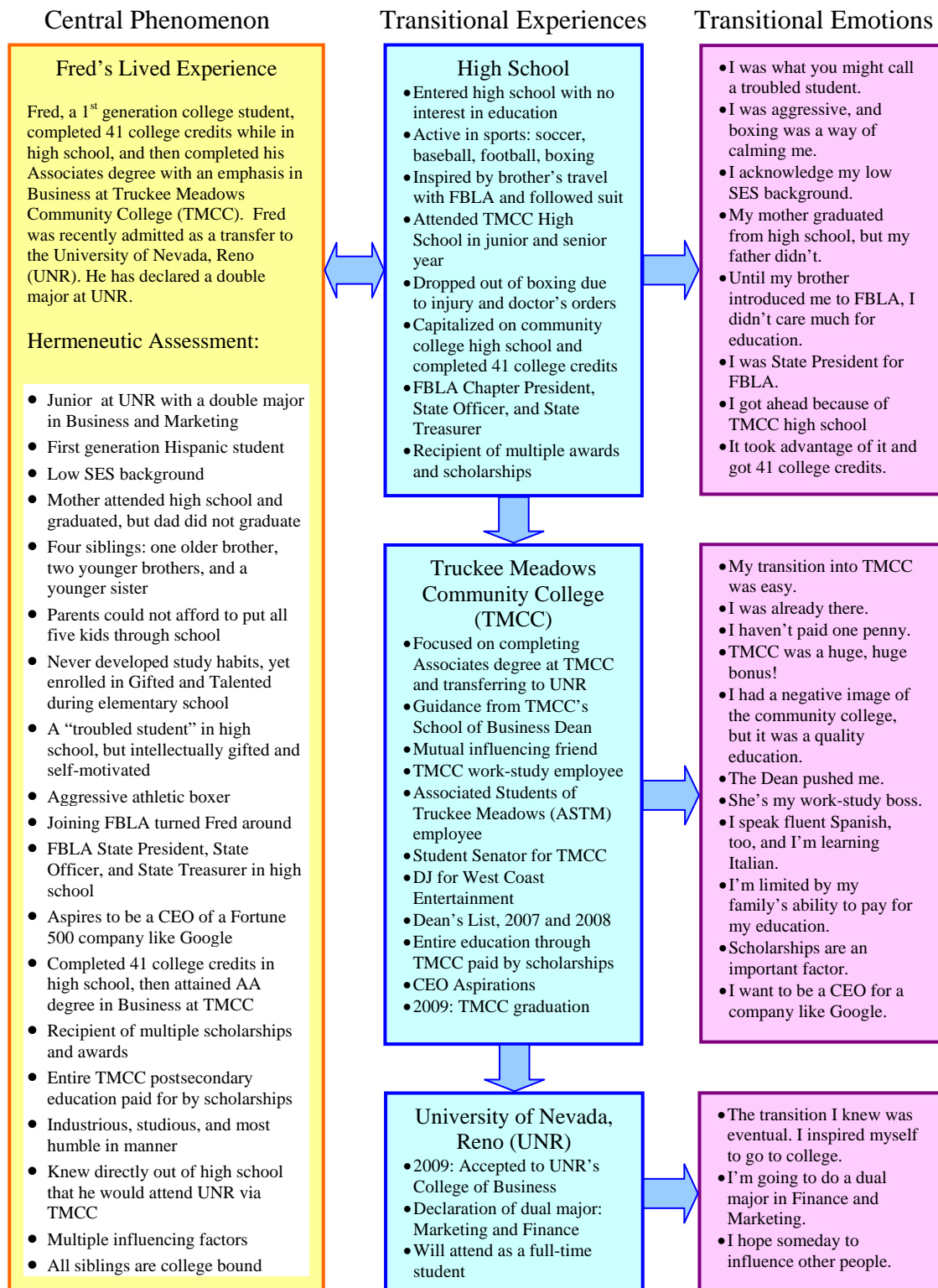


Figure 5-2. Event map depicting the essence of Fred's lived experience (FBLA).

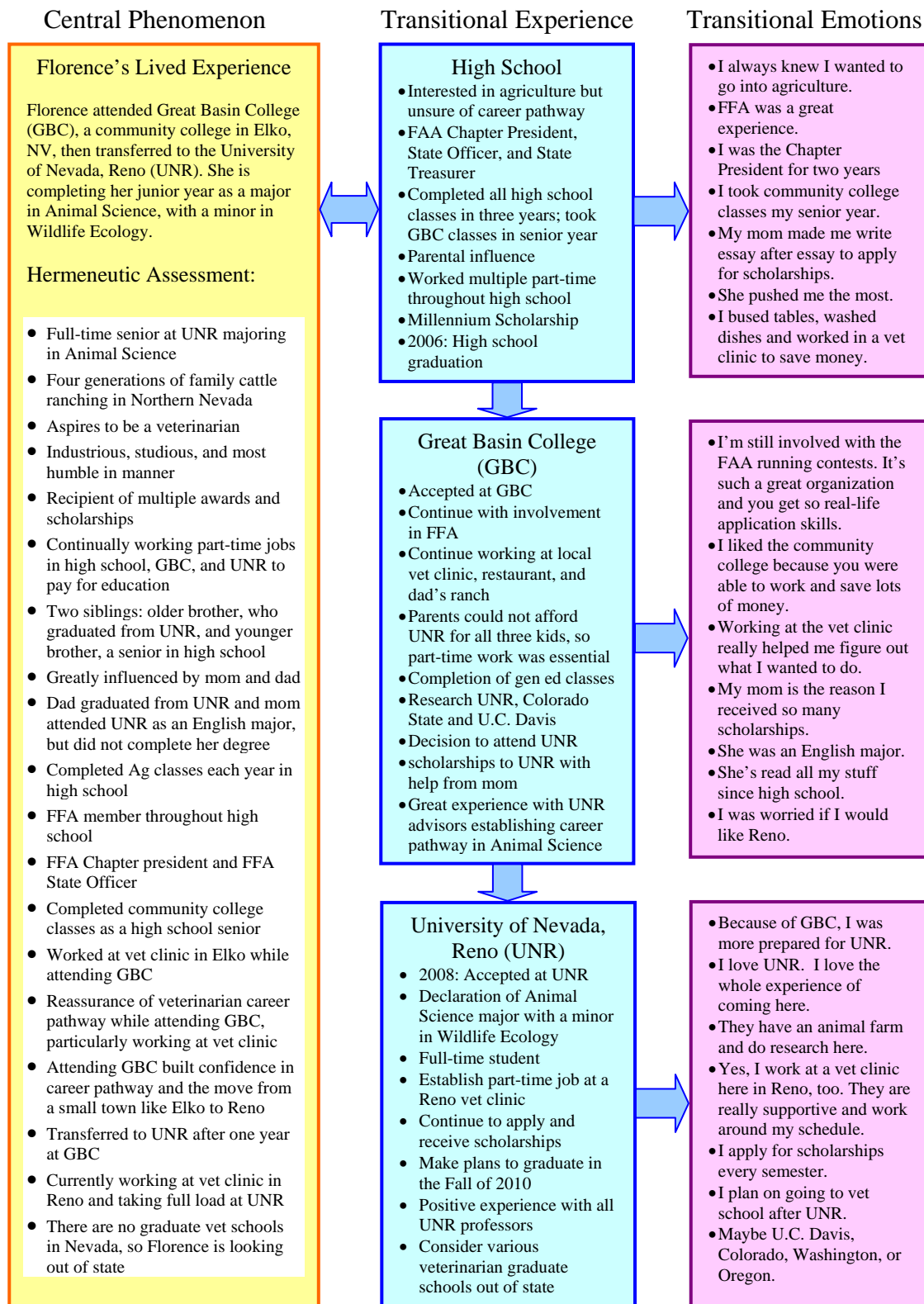


Figure 5-3. Event map depicting the essence of Florence's lived experience (FFA).

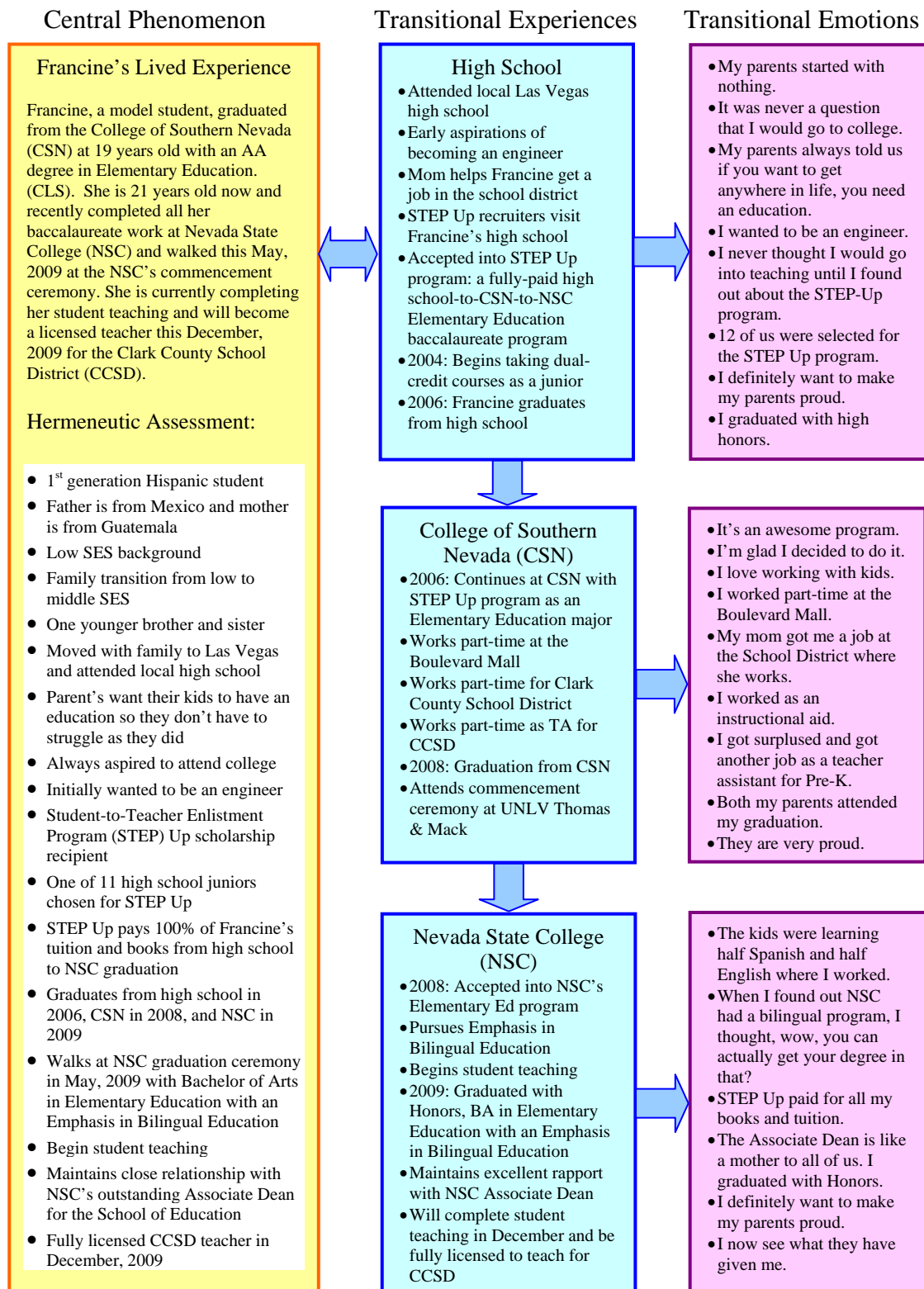


Figure 5-4. Event map depicting the essence of Francine's lived experience (FCCLA).

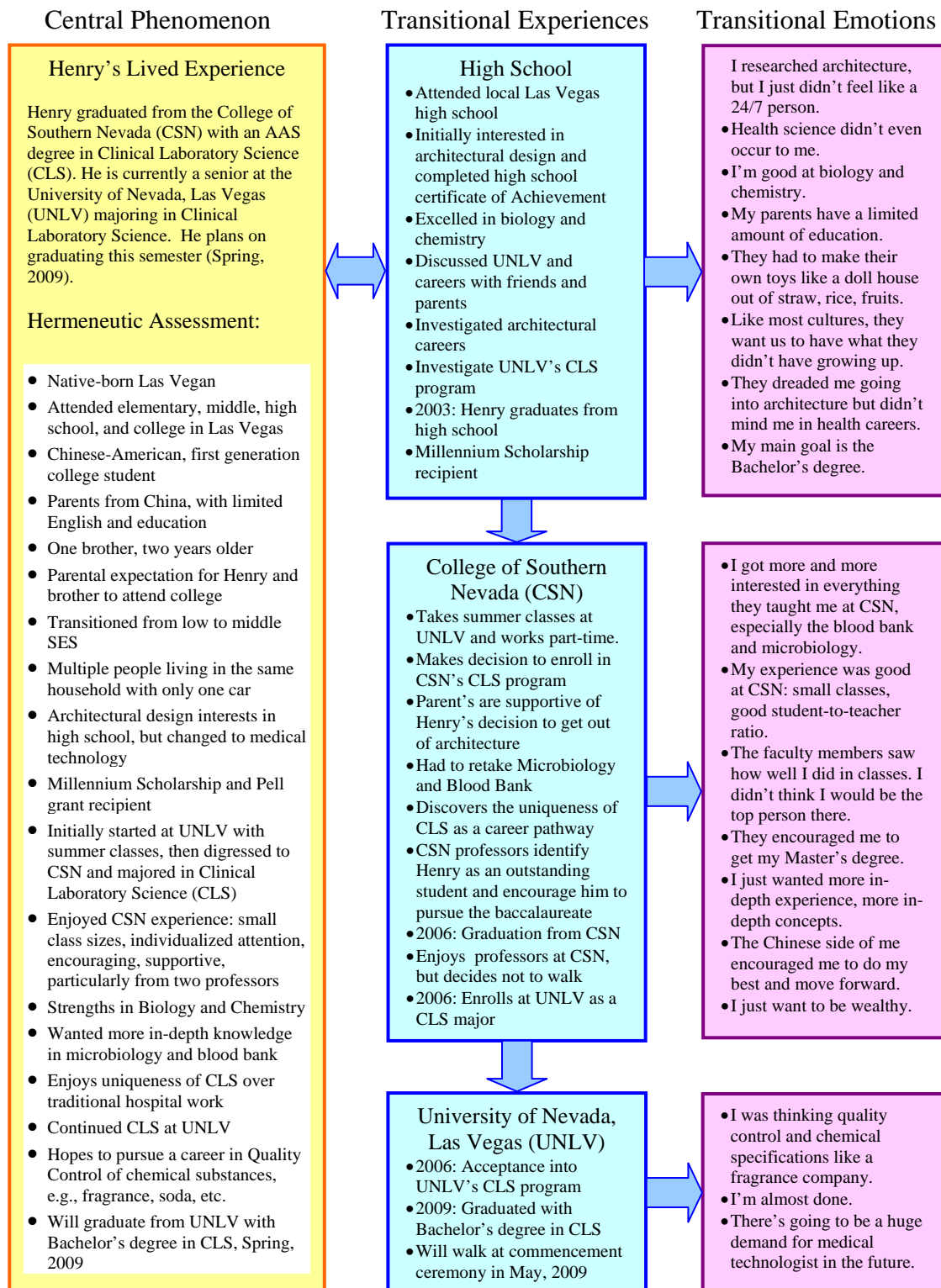


Figure 5-5. Event map depicting the essence of Henry's lived experience (HOSA).

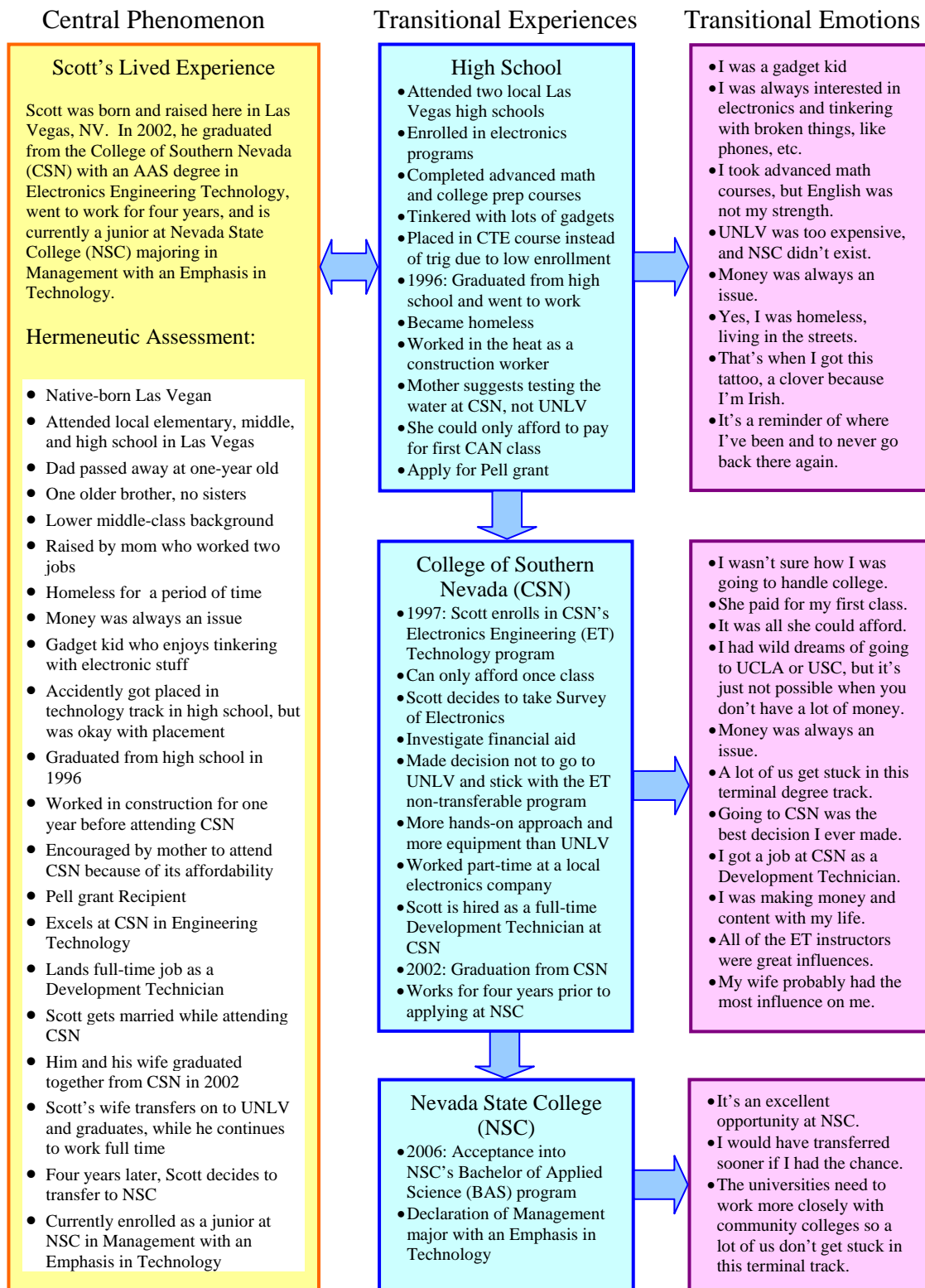


Figure 5-6. Event map depicting the essence of Scott's lived experience (Skills USA).

experiences and emotions as they transitioned from high school, to the community college, and on to UNLV, UNR, or NSC. Figures 5-1 through 5-6 illustrate all six CTE transfer students' event maps. They are shown in alphabetical order by student name and CTSO (Career and Technical Student Organization) category starting with Dennis (DECA), followed by Fred (FBLA), Florence (FFA), Francine (FCCLA), Henry (HOSA), and Scott (Skills USA).

Each event map includes three columns. Located on the left side of the event map is the Central Phenomenon depicting a Hermeneutic Assessment of the student's Lived Experience over time. Bulleted items represent a synopsis of their respective story presented in Chapter 4. The center column for each event map depicts the Transitional Experiences of each student as they advanced themselves from high school to the community college and on to UNLV, UNR, or NSC. The right column is a listing of the student's corresponding emotions during the given timeframe. With the exception of Dennis (DECA category), the structure of all event maps are equivalent. Dennis, the only student among the six to graduate from high school and work an appreciable amount of time afterwards (18 years), has a "Post High School Interim" block included in his event map. Figure 5-1 illustrates Dennis' Post High School Interim experience under his Transitional Experiences column. Significant events occurred during this period of Dennis' life that influenced his decision to continue his education and work towards his bachelor's degree. His corresponding emotions are listed to the right of this column under Transitional Emotions. Further reduction of the data will now be presented with the results of this study's domain and taxonomic analysis.



## Domain Analysis and Taxonomic Analysis Results

Spradley (1980) suggests a number of ethnographic tools for analyzing data in search of cultural patterns of any social situations. He refers to a culture as having patterns of behavior, artifacts, and knowledge that people have learned or created. “In order to discover the cultural patterns of any social situation, you must undertake an intensive analysis of your data *before* proceeding further” (p. 85). Spradley calls this process a *domain analysis*, and identifies steps on how to conduct a domain analysis on ethnographic data so one can understand the nature of cultural domains and the meaning that participants make of their lives within the domain. Domain analysis is the first step of a recommended series of ethnographic analyses. In later steps, he considers a *taxonomic analysis*, which analyses the relationships among things within a domain, followed by a *componential analysis*, which involves a systematic search for attributes or “components of meaning” (p. 87) associated with cultural domains. The process of identifying these components of meaning leads to discovery of contrasts among the members of a domain. Conversely, it also leads to discovery of what is common among members. Therefore, componential analysis will serve as the last step in the overall analysis of data, and will be used to identify the phenomenon: the essence of the lived experience shared among all CTE transfer students. Combined, these three analyses build on each other; they build upon the prior content analysis and event maps; and they provide further horizontalization of data and a more refined textural and structural description of the students’ lived experience.

Figures 5-7 through 5-18 illustrate each CTE transfer student’s domain analysis with its corresponding taxonomic analysis. They are paired together to evoke relative

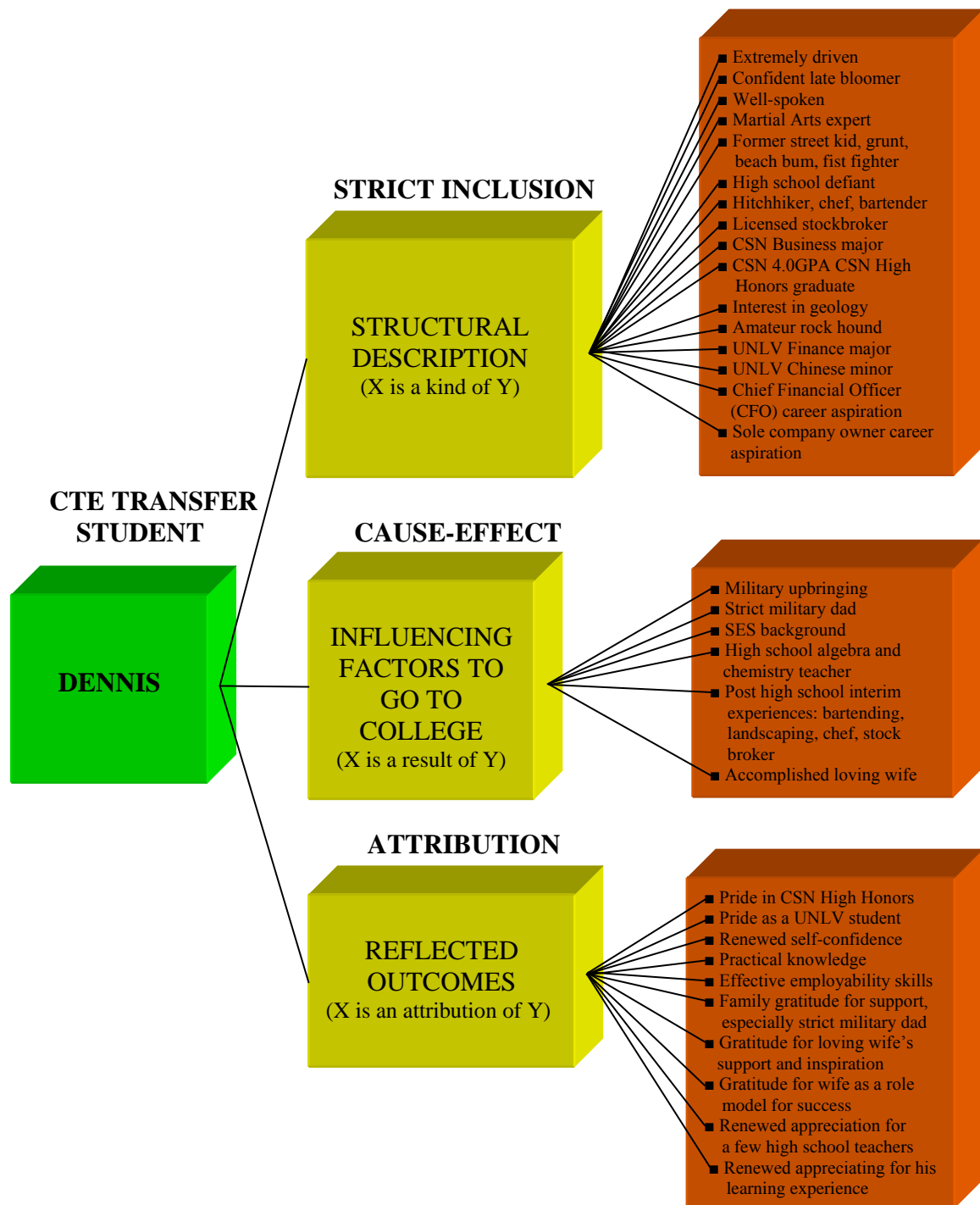


Figure 5-7. Domain Analysis of Dennis' lived experience (DECA Category).



DENNIS' LIVED EXPERIENCE	INFLUENCING FACTORS TO GO TO COLLEGE	Positive Factors	Military upbringing
			Strict military dad
			SES background
			Post interim high school work experience
			Teacher influence
			Spousal influence and support
			Uniquely driven and accomplished
			Renewed positive attitude
		Negative Factors	Military upbringing
			Aggravating but accepting mom
			SES background
			Counselors
			High school principal
			Initial absence of self worth
			No high school-to-college aspiration
			Street kid, grunt, fist fighter
			No scholarships
	REFLECTED OUTCOMES	Gratitude	Educational opportunity
			Wife as role model and inspiration
			Strict dad and accepting mom
			A few caring high school teachers
			Past life-long experiences
			CSN transfer opportunity to UNLV
		Self- Improvement and Pride	Self-confidence
			Positive outlook
			Proud of dad's strictness and encouraging words
			Self-worth and pride in CSN graduation with High Honors
			Successful admittance into UNLV
			Interest in geology and Chinese
			Continued interest in martial arts
			Employability skills
			Work experiences
			Study skills
			Learning skills
			Practical knowledge gained in multiple areas

Figure 5-8. Taxonomic Analysis of Dennis' lived experience (DECA Category).

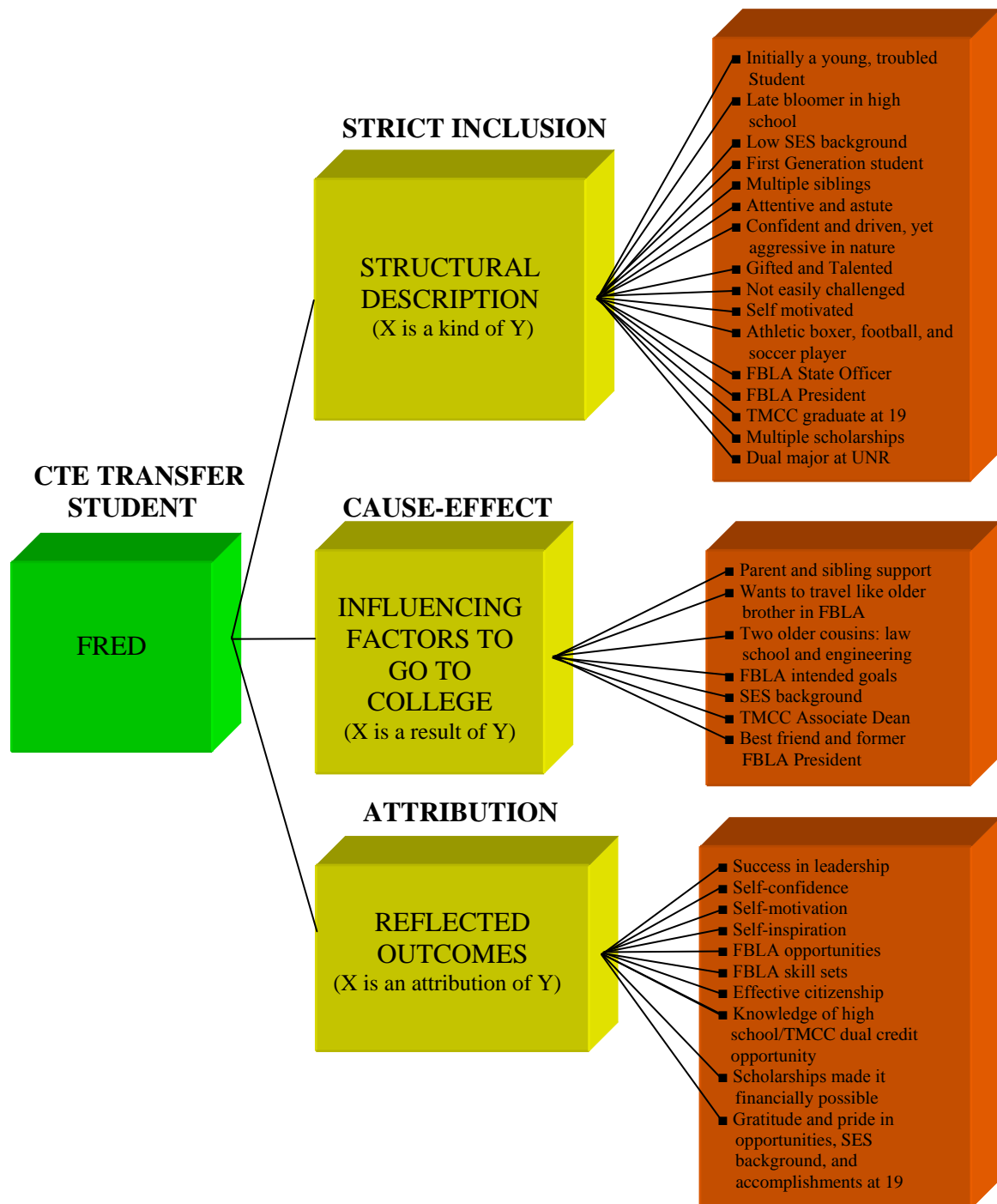


Figure 5-9. Domain Analysis of Fred's lived experience (FBLA Category).

FRED'S LIVED EXPERIENCE	INFLUENCING FACTORS TO GO TO COLLEGE	Positive Factors	Career aspiration: CEO for Fortune 500 company
			Self-motivation/inspiration
			Dual credits completed in high school: 41
			CTSO/FBLA objectives
			Peer influence
			SES background
			Parent and sibling support
			Accomplished cousins
			Scholarships & awards
		Negative Factors	Low SES background
			Initial negative image of community colleges
			Aggression and lack of study habits
			Boredom and lack of intellectual stimulation
	REFLECTED OUTCOMES	Gratitude	FBLA opportunities
			Family, friends, and teachers
			Dual-credit opportunity
			Scholarships
			TMCC Associate Dean
			Renewed appreciation for community college experience
		Self- Improvement and Pride	FBLA skill sets
			Confidence
			Motivation
			Inspiration
			Admittance into UNR's College of Business
			Dual major in Marketing and Business
			Desire to influence an help others
			Bilingual and learning Italian on the side
			Completion of 41 college credits in high school
			Low SES Background
			Aspire to be CEO of Fortune 500 company

Figure 5-10. Taxonomic Analysis of Fred's lived experience (FBLA Category).

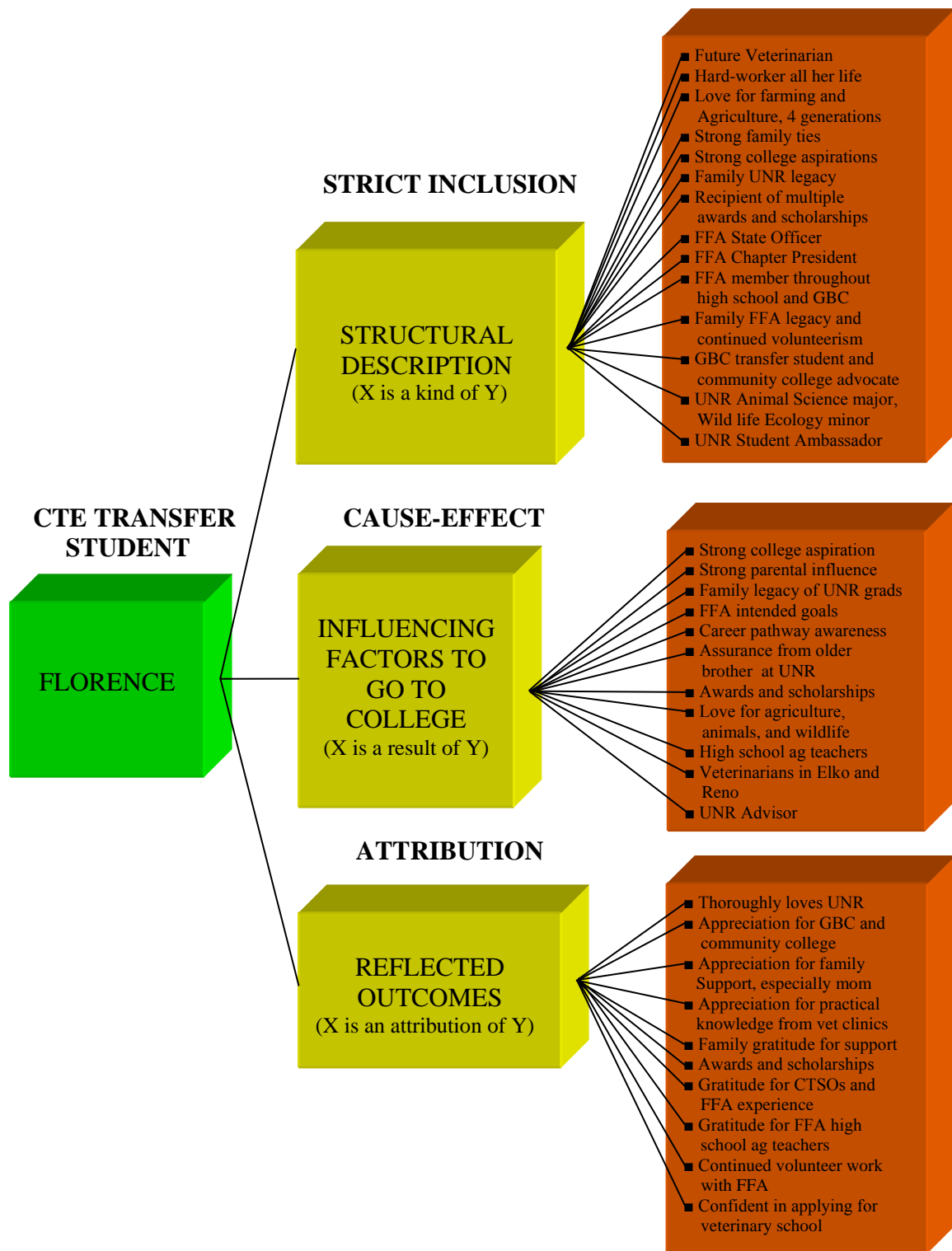


Figure 5-11. Domain Analysis of Florence's lived experience (FFA Category).

FLORENCE'S LIVED EXPERIENCE	INFLUENCING FACTORS TO GO TO COLLEGE	Positive Factors	Family and sibling support
			Family legacy of UNR grads
			Veterinarian career aspiration
			High school Ag teachers
			Older brother at UNR
			FFA & CTSO involvement
			College aspiration
			Vets at Elko and Reno clinics
			Career pathway awareness
			Scholarships & awards
			UNR Advisor
		Negative Factors	Unsure of career path in high school
			Parents inability to afford UNR for all three kids
			Worried about living 290 miles from home (Elko, NV to Reno, NV)
	REFLECTED OUTCOMES	Gratitude	Family support, especially mother
			Older brother's UNR attendance and assurance that Reno, NV is not that big a town
			Veterinarian support and learning experience at Elko and Reno clinics
			Community college role in establishing career path and affordability
			CTSO and FFA experience
			Awards and scholarships
			Hi school ag teachers and FFA experience
		Self-Improvement and Pride	Self-confidence
			Positive outlook
			Practical knowledge gained from vet clinics in Elko and Reno
			FFA CTSO skill sets
			Pride in going to GBC
			Pride in UNR animal science major and Wildlife Ecology minor
			Pride as FFA Chapter President and FFA State Officer

Figure 5-12. Taxonomic Analysis of Florence's lived experience (FFA Category).

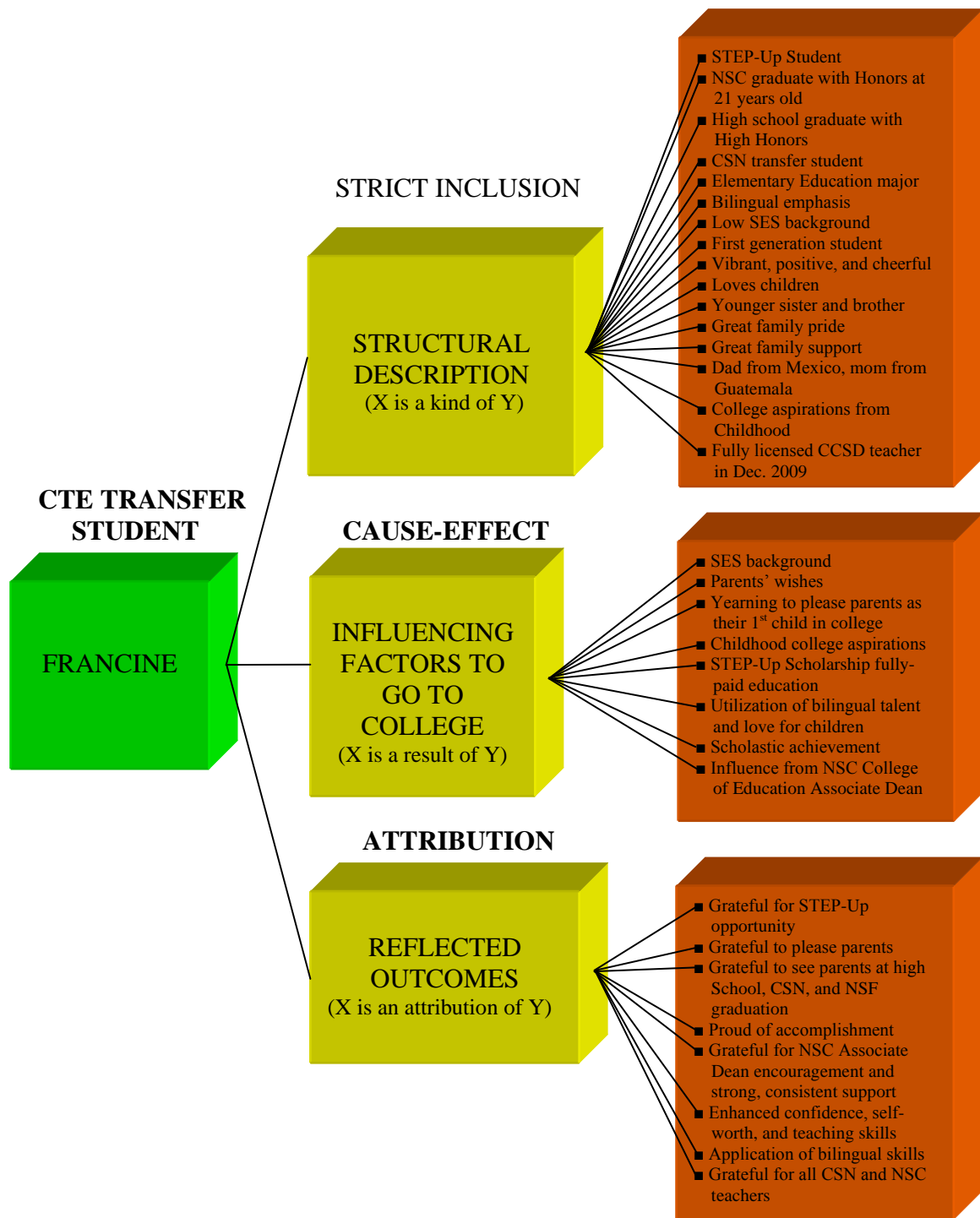


Figure 5-13. Domain Analysis of Francine's lived experience (FCCLA Category).

FRANCINE'S LIVED EXPERIENCE	INFLUENCING FACTORS TO GO TO COLLEGE	Positive Factors	Low SES background
			Parents' wishes
			Satisfy parents' wishes
			Aspire to attend college
			STEP-Up scholarship recipient
			Bilingual talent
			Love for children
			Recruiters announcement of STEP-Up and Associate Dean's visit to high school
			Scholastic achievements
	REFLECTED OUTCOMES	Negative Factors	Low SES background
		Gratitude	STEP-Up golden opportunity
			Parental support and pride
			Parental attendance to high school, CSN, and NSC commencement ceremony
			All CSN and NSC teachers
		Self-Improvement and Pride	Confidence
			Proud of accomplishments
			Proud of pleasing parents
			Application of bilingual skills
			Fully licensed CCSD teaching in Dec. 2009
			Loves working with children as a student teacher and pre-K teacher assistant

Figure 5-14. Taxonomic Analysis of Francine's lived experience (FCCLA Category).

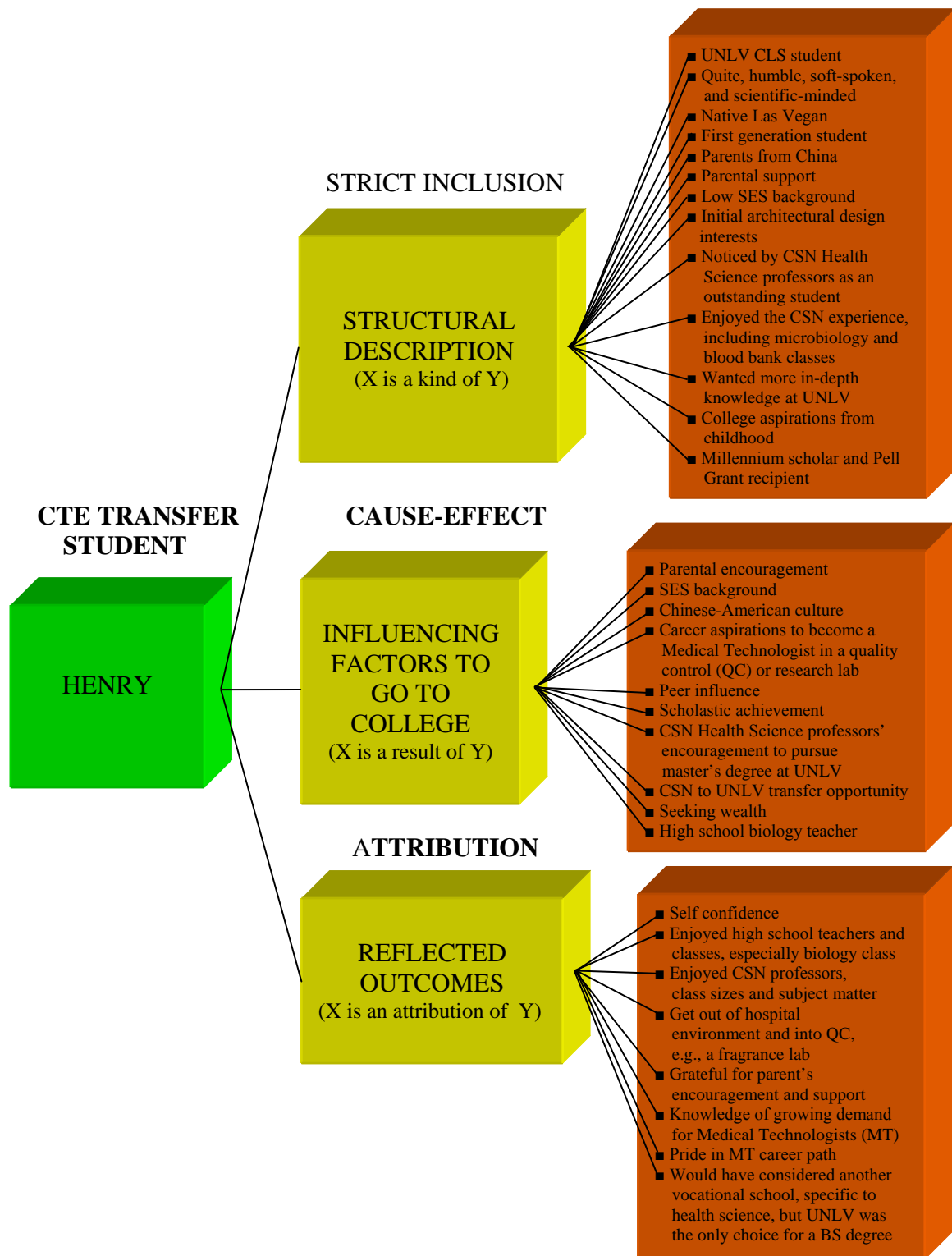


Figure 5-15. Domain Analysis of Henry's lived experience (HOSA Category).



HENRY'S LIVED EXPERIENCE	INFLUENCING FACTORS TO GO TO COLLEGE	Positive Factors	Parent's encouragement
			SES and family background
			Chinese-American Culture
			College aspirations all along
			High school peer influence in researching where to go and what to major in
			Uniqueness of CSN and UNLV CLS program
			Millennium scholarship and Pell Grant
			Seeking a career that pays well
			High school biology teacher and archeological research field trip
		Negative Factors	SES background and limited financial aid
			No alternative to UNLV in Las Vegas for health science programs
			Opposed to "24/7" hours in Architecture, the career path change
	REFLECTED OUTCOMES	Gratitude	Encouraging and understanding parents
			High school and CSN teachers
			CSN transfer opportunity to UNLV
		Self-Improvement and Pride	Self-confidence
			Positive outlook
			Unique and specialized degree
			In-depth knowledge from UNLV in health science-related classes

Figure 5-16. Taxonomic Analysis of Henry's lived experience (HOSA Category).

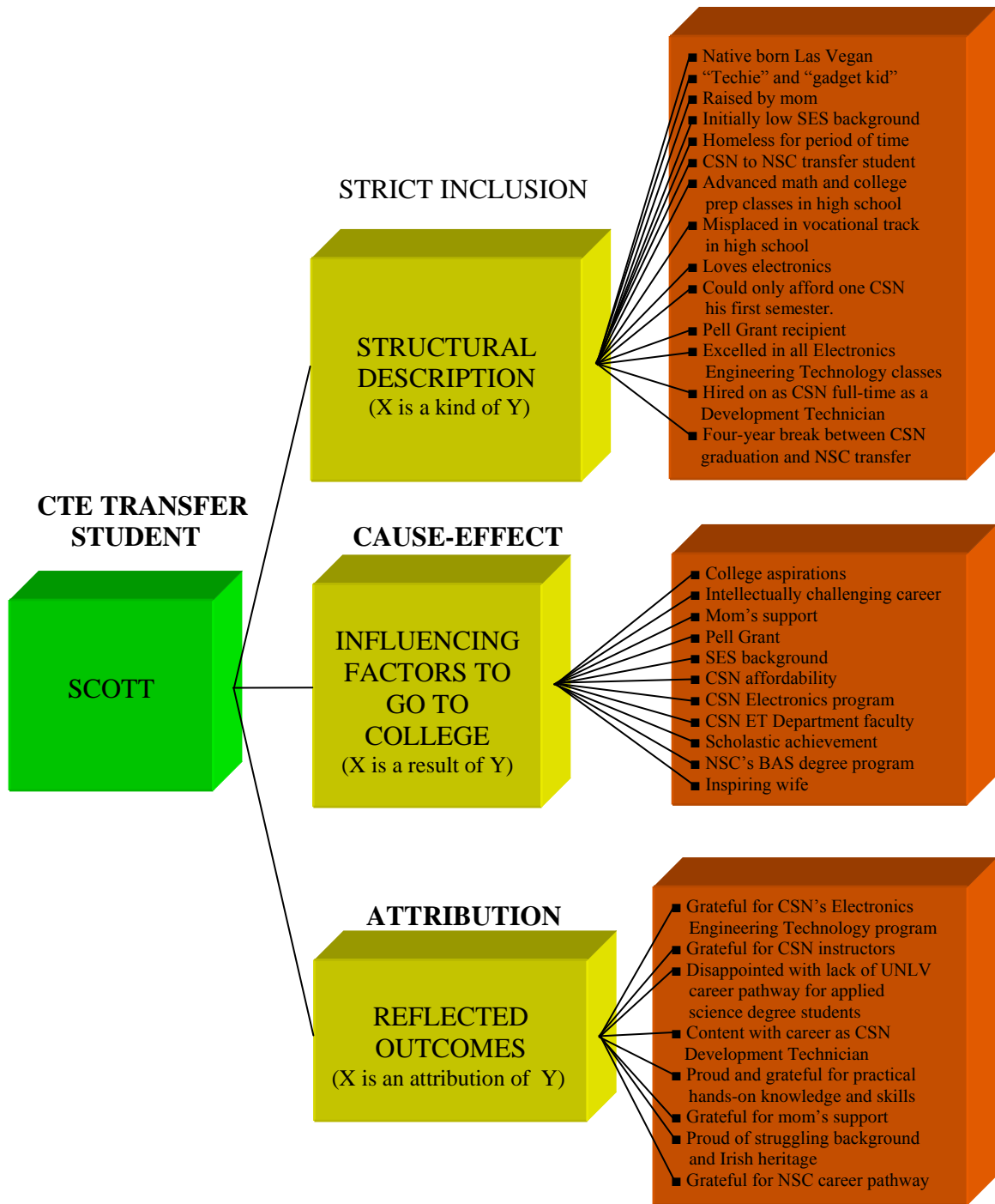


Figure 5-17. Domain Analysis of Scott's lived experience (Skills USA Category).

SCOTT'S LIVED EXPERIENCE	INFLUENCING FACTORS TO GO TO COLLEGE	Positive Factors	Seeking a challenging career in Electronics
			Mom's wishes
			Financial aid: Pell Grant
			SES background
			Childhood college aspirations
			High school college prep classes
			Intellectual capacity
			Scholastic achievement
			Community college affordability
			CSN Electronics Engineering Technology (ET) program
			CSN faculty encouragement
			NSC BAS degree transfer program
			Inspiring wife who graduates from CSN at the same time, transfers to UNLV, graduates with BA degree, and working on master's degree
			Four-year break after CSN graduation
		Negative Factors	Affordability: mom working two jobs to make ends meet
			Misplaced academic career track in high school
			SES background
			No scholarships
			UNLV's lack of applied science and engineering transfer programs
			Laid-back after high school graduation
			Content with new full-time job, marriage, good salary, new car, and moving out of mom's house
	REFLECTED OUTCOMES	Gratitude	Mom's support and encouragement
			Wife as role model and inspiration
			CSN's ET Department faculty
			High school electronics program
			NSC transfer opportunity to baccalaureate degree program
			CSN Full-time Development Technician job
		Self- Improvement and Pride	Self-confidence
			Positive outlook
			Successful career
			depth theoretical and practical knowledge
			Pride in wife's academic accomplishments
			SES background and Irish heritage
			Successful admittance into NSC

Figure 5-18. Taxonomic Analysis of Scott's lived experience (Skills USA Category).

meaning and categorical depth in domains shared among the students. Three forms of Spradley's semantic relationships were used in his *Steps In Making a Domain Analysis* (Spradley, 1980, p. 91), which include (1) *Strict Inclusion* for a *Structural Description* of what the student experienced (X is a kind of Y); (2) *Cause and Effect* for *Influencing Factors to Go to College* (X is a result of Y); and (3) *Attribution* for the student's *Reflected Outcomes* (X is an attribution of Y). Selection of the given semantics was based on relationships common among the students, with the overarching cultural domain being outstanding CTE transfer students. Identifying semantic relationships among the students permitted a focused search and discovery effort towards categorizing domains with corresponding semantic meaning, both tacit and explicit.

Taxonomic analysis provided further depth of analysis by showing more of the relationships among the elements within the domain. Spradley regards this as revealing subsets within the domain and their relationship to the whole. Four *levels* of relationships are shown in each student's taxonomy figure: (1) the student's Lived Experience as a whole; (2) Influencing Factors to Go to College and Reflected Outcomes; (3) Positive Factors, Negative Factors, Gratitude, and Self-Improvement and Pride; and (4) selective terms unique to the given CTE transfer student. Levels 1 through 3 are common for each student. That is, their Lived Experience as a whole was broken down into Influencing Factors to Go to College and Reflected Outcomes. Influencing Factors to Go to College was broken down into more detailed relationships of *Positive Factors* and *Negative Factors*. Likewise, *Reflected Outcomes* were broken down into *Gratitude* and *Self-Improvement and Pride*. Level 4 depicts the unique characteristics of each student and its relationship to levels 1 through 3.

Spradley's *selective observations* were used in conjunction with domain analysis, event mapping, and content analysis to establish the four levels of relationships stated above. He recommends three types of observations. They include (1) *descriptive observations*, (2) *focused observations*, and (3) *selective observations*. He likens these three types of observations to a funnel. "The broad rim of the funnel consists of descriptive observations in which you want to catch everything that goes on...Focused observations require that you narrow the scope of what you are looking for...Selective observations represent the smallest focus through which you will make observations" (Spradley, 1980, p. 128). Spradley considers these selective observations as the "foundation of all ethnographic research" (p. 128).

### Componential Analysis Results

Domain and taxonomic analysis provided an opportunity to organize descriptive, focused, and selective observations among the six CTE transfer students. In the process, contrasts were made between components of meaning. These contrasts, according to Spradley, are considered the initial steps towards conducting a *componential analysis* of students. A componential analysis is one of Spradley's last steps in conducting an ethnographic analysis. It is "the systematic search for attributes (components of meaning) associated with cultural categories...A componential analysis includes the entire process of searching for contrasts, sorting them out, grouping some together as dimensions of contrast, and entering all this information into a paradigm." (Spradley, 1980, p. 131-133). For this study, that resulting paradigm is the phenomenon: the culmination of all analyses, including manifest and latent content analysis, event

mapping, domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, and lastly, componential analysis, all used to describe, texturally and structurally, the lived experience shared among six Nevada CTE transfer students.

Table 5-3 illustrates the componential analysis results. Dimensions of Contrast, depicted on the left column of the table, lists the themes, patterns, domains, components of meaning, and other nomenclature used to identify and describe each student's lived experience as they transitioned from high school to the community college and on to UNVL, UNR, and NSC. Each of these dimension falls within Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) *predisposition phase* on college choice. This phase of the college choice process is when students decide whether they aspire to continue their formal education after high school. For this study, the predisposition phase is when students aspire to continue their education beyond the community college and transfer to UNLV, UNR, or NSC.

Within the body of the table, an "X" is used to identify students exhibiting the given Dimension of Contrast. Areas shaded in light green indicate that all students share the same predisposition factors as an end result of data analysis. This represents the phenomenon. A total of eight dimensions, or predisposition factors were identified as the phenomenon:

- |                       |                         |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Career aspirations | 5. Academic achievement |
| 2. Teacher influence  | 6. Self-improvement     |
| 3. Parental influence | 7. 2+2 Career pathway   |
| 4. SES background     | 8. College location     |

Table 5-3 Componential Analysis of all six Nevada CTE transfer students and the influencing factors to attend UNLV, UNR, or NSC.  
 \*Influencing factors outside of Prindiville's (1995) discriminant variables.

Dimensions of Contrast	CTE Transfer Students					
	Dennis (DECA)	Fred (FBLA)	Florence (FFA)	Francine (FCCLA)	Henry (HOSA)	Scott (Skills)
Career aspirations	X	X	X	X	X	X
Teacher influence	X	X	X	X	X	X
Parental influence	X	X	X	X	X	X
Socioeconomic status	X	X	X	X	X	X
Ethnicity		X		X	X	
Peer influence		X			X	
Sibling influence			X	X		
*Spousal influence	X					X
Counselor/Advisor influence			X			X
Administrator influence		X	X	X	X	X
*CTSO influence		X	X			
Academic achievement	X	X	X	X	X	X
Self-improvement	X	X	X	X	X	X
*Monetary attainment					X	X
Scholarships/Financial aid		X	X	X	X	X
Parent education level			X			
*Family legacy			X			
*2+2 Career pathway	X	X	X	X	X	X
Community Coll. curriculum	X	X		X	X	X
College cost		X	X			X
College climate			X			
College location	X	X	X	X	X	X

The first four predisposition factors of the Nevada CTE transfer students, (1) Career aspirations, (2) Teacher influence, (3) Parental Influence, and (4) SES background, are in unison with Prindiville's study. They are among her highest ranked variables occurring in Hossler and Gallagher's predisposition phase on college choice, and the results suggest they apply to CTE transfer students.

Dimensions of Contrast that are highlighted and marked with an asterisk in Table 5-3 are predisposition factors that distinguish themselves from Prindiville's (1995) study, which included 25 discriminate variables that contributed most to understanding group differences on college choice. Five predisposition factors of Nevada CTE transfer students differed from Prindiville's study. They included the following.

1. Spousal influence
2. CTSO influence
3. Monetary attainment
4. Family legacy
5. 2+2 Career pathway

Among the five predisposition factors, only 2+2 Career pathways is linked to the Nevada CTE transfer student phenomenon. The "stacked" Venn diagram shown in Figure 5-19 is used to graphically illustrate the phenomenon, including Dimensions of Contrast unique to each CTE transfer student.

#### Summary of RESUTLS-A and RESULTS-B

Chapters 4 and 5 presented the final results of this study in two chapters. The interpretation (hermeneutics) of the lived experiences of six Nevada Career and Technical Education (CTE) transfer students was derived from complementary methods of data analysis here in Chapter 5, and presented in Chapter 4 as a story. As stated at the onset of Chapter 4, clarity is gained by separating narratives of each student's lived experience from an inductive analysis of their respective stories embedded in the interview and corresponding transcripts.



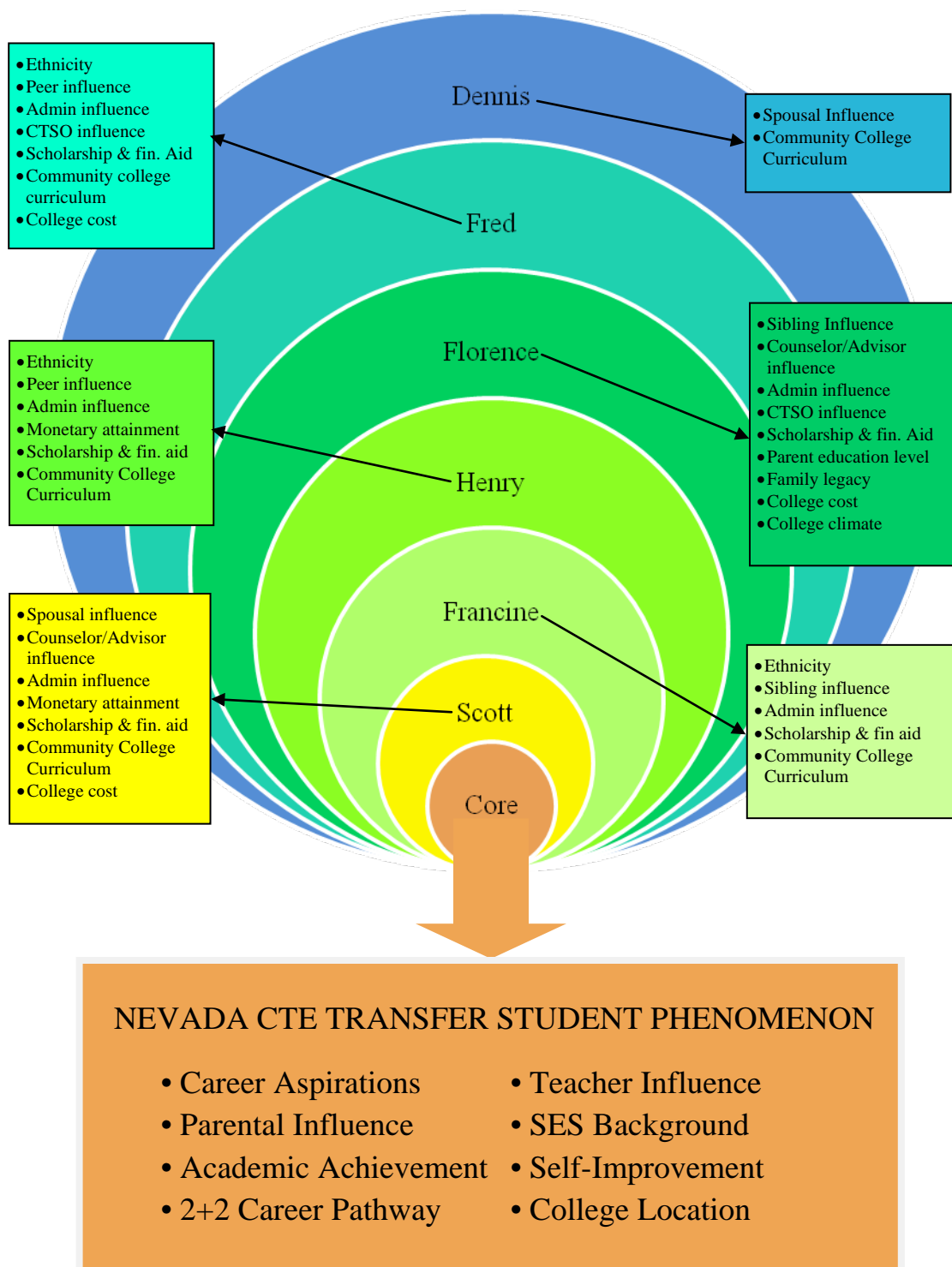


Figure 5-19. A stacked Venn diagram illustrating the phenomenon of the lived experience shared among six Nevada CTE transfer students.

Lecompte and Preissle (1993) recognize that encountering mountains of data can be a daunting enterprise for researchers. “But if they give up on interpretation and simply describe what they saw, they fail to do justice to their data,” (p. 267) consequently, one’s results may be trivialized by some readers, as they may fail to see the connection between the analysis and the story. That connect is the culmination of all analyses conducted in this study. They include manifest and latent content analysis, event mapping, domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, and componential analysis, all used to describe, texturally and structurally (with an abiding concern) the lived experiences six Nevada CTE transfer students, specifically in areas found to be the most influential towards their decision to continue their education at a higher level. Hence, separating the results into two chapters provided focus on the interpretive stories presented in Chapter 4 and the data analysis in Chapter 5 from which they were derived.

Data analysis resulted in the identification of what was shared among all six Nevada CTE transfer students. Moustakas (1994) refers to this as the phenomenon: the essence of the lived experience and its wholeness in meaning and appearance, shared among all individuals. Eight themes, embedded in the data, surfaced as a result of utilizing complementary methods across disciplines. They included (1) Career Aspirations, (2) Teacher Influence, (3) Parental Influence, (4) SES, (5) Academic Achievement, (6) Self-Improvement, (7) 2+2 Career Pathway, and (8) College Location. With the exception of 2+2 Career Pathway, the resulting themes conformed to Prindiville’s (1995) highest ranking discriminate variables. They also conformed to Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) predisposition phase of college choice. Five themes unique to Nevada CTE transfer students and outside of Prindiville’s study included (1)

Spousal Influence, (2) CTSO Influence, (3) Monetary Attainment, (4) Family Legacy, and (5) 2+2 Career Pathway. The interpretation and implications of these results will be presented in Chapter 6, the final chapter, along with the relevance of the study, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

#### Introduction

Upon completing the organization, data analysis, and presentation of a phenomenological investigation, Moustakas (1994) considers the researcher's final chapter an important challenge. Because of his distinguished accomplishments in phenomenological design and methodology, and as a leading authority in human science inquiry, heeding his advice on the organizing and presentation of one's final chapter seems prudent. The organization of this chapter is presented first, followed by a summary of the study. According to Moustakas, the summary section should provide a synopsis of the investigation in a brief span of material. The intent is to enable researchers to promptly determine its relevance with their own scholarly pursuits, and to what extent they should investigate the entire study. Contextual considerations are given to the method of inquiry and its relationship to the research questions.

#### Organization of the Chapter

Chapter 6 returns to the literature review to distinguish the interpretation of this study's findings with prior research on college choice. A discussion of these findings and how they compare and contrast with prior research is presented. Because of the complementary methods used in this study, a section on the implications on research design and theoretical perspective is necessary to provide insight and justification on

establishing one's methodological approach to a study. The relevance of this study's findings and contribution to the existing body of literature is expounded upon and counterpoised by considering its limitations and recommendations for future studies. As a closing to Chapter 6, a conclusion is presented with a summative evaluation of the study, followed by the knowledge gained, both personally and professionally.

### Summary of the Study

Several strands of the literature review germane to college choice were directly aligned with the salient findings of this study. Most prevalent, and a central characteristic to the college choice models that assist in understanding and guiding students through their decision-making stages, is that students interested in going to college are influenced by a myriad of factors interacting together to shape their attitude, consequently impacting their decision to attend college. Hossler and Gallagher's (1985) three-phase model on college choice suggests a developmental process that combines an econometric and sociological framework beginning with an initial *predisposition phase* of the student's desire to attend college, followed by a *search phase* for a college of choice, and ending with a *choice phase* where the student makes his or her decision to attend a college. Drawing on the constructs of Hossler and Gallagher's preeminent three-phase model on college choice, Prindiville (1995) explored the differences found in personal, family background, and school variables among high school seniors electing two postsecondary options: a community college or two-year technical college CTE career pathway, or a four-year baccalaureate-granting college or university.

This study builds upon Hossler and Gallagher's three-phase model and Prindiville's extended focus of their model on college choice by addressing Nevada community college CTE transfer students and their decision to attend one of Nevada's three public institutions of higher education: UNLV, UNR, and NSC. Several conclusions can be drawn from the phenomenological results of this study that deserves consideration, particularly at the transfer level, and specific to Nevada CTE students.

### Interpretation of Results

The phenomenon, defined throughout this study as "the essence of the lived experience shared among all individuals," has been identified through the use of multiple methods in Chapter 5. Eight Dimensions of Contrast are included in the phenomenon. Prindiville refers to these Dimensions of Contrast as simply variables. For purposes of discussion, Dimensions of Contrast will be referred to as variables. The eight variables identified as the Nevada CTE transfer student phenomenon include the following:

- |                       |                         |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| 5. Career Aspirations | 5. Academic Achievement |
| 6. Teacher Influence  | 6. Self-Improvement     |
| 7. Parental Influence | 7. 2+2 Career Pathways  |
| 8. SES Background     | 8. College Location     |

They are the end result of all data analysis and are illustrated in the stacked Venn diagram of Figure 5-19.

## Discussion of Findings

One of the most significant findings in this study is the alignment of items 1 through 4 above (Career Aspirations, Teacher Influence, Parental Influence, and SES) with Prindiville's findings. Her four highest-ranking variables, in order, (1) Student Academic Aspirations, (2) Students' Perception of Staff, (3) Students' Perception of Parental Aspirations, and (4) SES were profoundly rooted in the essence of the lived experiences of all six CTE transfer students. They are shown below in Table 6-1 with this study's equivalent findings.

Table 6-1 Alignment of Prindiville's highest ranked predisposition variables with four factors from this study.

Predisposition Phase on College Choice		
	Prindiville's Highest Ranked Variables	Nevada CTE Transfer Student Phenomenon Alignment
1	Student Academic Aspirations	Career Aspirations
2	Students' Perception of Staff	Teacher Influence
3	Students' Perception of Parental Aspirations	Parental Influence
4	SES	SES

These four predisposition phase variables, along with the remaining four captured in the CTE transfer student phenomenon, were merged into the textural and structural descriptions of each student's story presented in Chapter 5.

On one hand, the alignment of these variables strongly supports Prindiville's findings that "the predisposition stage has the greatest influence on the college choice process," (p. 175) yet on the other hand, they are entirely contrary to the results of this study. How so? Prindiville's study strongly suggests that these four variables, all

associated with the predisposition phase on college choice, reveal the largest discrepancies between the two groups: high school seniors choosing to attend a vocational or technical two-year community college and those who chose to attend a four-year university. They “depict an enormous gap between the two-year and the four-year aspirants, suggesting the need for a closer consideration and treatment of the personal, family background, and school variables influencing students’ on collegiate goals” (p. 176). The results of this study, taken at the transfer level, indicate otherwise. That is, there is no significant gap between the successful transfer students and the four-year aspirants. The six Nevada CTE transfer students are influenced by the same predisposition variables on college choice. Furthermore, they are likely to be equally successful in their junior and senior year, if not more, than their counterpart. “Their prior academic accomplishments at the community college level and high levels of motivation may provide them with the foundation to persist to graduation” (Piland, 1995, p. 4).

The results of Prindiville’s study, suggesting the enormous gap between two-year and four-year aspirants, strongly substantiates and perpetuates the long-standing dichotomy between academic and CTE (vocational) programs, courses, and student characteristics. “According to Rosenstock (1991), academic courses prepared students for college; vocational courses trained the students for work. Academic courses avoided applied, work-related approaches to instruction, while vocational courses were rarely used as opportunities to introduce or reinforce basic academic skills in reading, writing, math or science” (cited in Prindiville, 1995, p. 29). Several other studies support the dichotomy found in Prindiville’s study. However, they do not necessarily hold at the transfer level. As stated above, her study was conducted among high school seniors



choosing to attend a vocational or technical two-year community college and those who chose to attend a four-year baccalaureate-granting university.

In Chapter 2, several reasons for choosing to attend the community college were cited (Cohen and Brawer, 2003), and they are not limited to CTE students. Beyond general growth in population, they include part-time attendance; reclassification of institutions targeting older students; redefinition of students and courses; skill attainment for students from low SES backgrounds with low educational aspirations; and high attendance by low-ability women and minority students. Townsend (2004) asserts that community colleges have a long-standing mission of providing a second chance to students with poor academic records, or students with lower abilities, as measured by standardized high school tests and grade point average (GPA). These studies, albeit community college and college choice related, were not intended to address the community college transfer student, and therefore their findings, like Prindiville's, may not be applicable at the transfer level, as demonstrated in this study.

The remaining four variables of the phenomenon, expounded upon in the following section, were not specifically addressed in Prindiville's predisposition phase. They include Academic Achievement, Self-Improvement, 2+2 Career Pathways, and College Location. Each of these variables predisposed all six Nevada CTE transfer students into transferring to the senior institution. Because this study specifically targets transfer students who are already attending college, the exclusion of these variables in the predisposition phase of Prindiville's results is not surprising. However, College Location is a ranking variable (24<sup>th</sup> of 25) in the search phase of her study. For the Nevada CTE transfer students, College Location is an integral part of the phenomenon. This is

consistent with Cohen and Brawer's (2003) characteristics of transfer students on college choice. They indicate that proximity to the 4-year college or university campus, community demographics, employment or economic conditions, 2-year branch campuses, and 2+2 career pathway partnerships between the community college and 4-year institution, all play an influencing role in the transfer process.

#### Impact and Relevance to Prior Studies

Several studies have suggested there is little doubt that students who do attend the community college and successfully transfer to the university or four-year college compare favorably in performance with their native counterparts (Glass & Harrington, 2002; Cejda, Kaylor, & Rewey, 1998; Piland, 1995). For CTE students in particular, despite the smaller percentage relative to academic transfer students who actually transfer, as demonstrated by several studies (Fredrickson, 1998; Cohen & Brawer, 1987; Kinnick & Kempner, 1988; and Richardson & Bender, 1985), "the ones who do make the transition to a senior institution are the winners" (Piland, 1995, p. 4). Such is the case with the six Nevada CTE transfer students. All six students graduated from their respective community colleges with honors or high honors. Their GPAs alone were likely higher than their native junior-year counterparts. Scholastic awards, community service, employability skills (critical thinking, team work, attitude, oral and written skills, etc.), maturation, and other variables are likely unparalleled as well, even at the baccalaureate level.

Item 7 listed above in the Nevada CTE transfer student phenomenon, *2+2 Career Pathways*, was among five variables (highlighted in Table 5-3) not included in

Prindiville's listing of 25 variables contributing to college choice. Because her study was conducted among two high school cohorts, this variable should rank among the highest. "U.S. schools have historically maintained a dichotomy between academic and vocational education programs, courses and students...This division perpetuated an unfair tracking system and it failed to give students the basic skills they needed to function in the workplace" (Prindiville, 1995, p. 30). Her literature review and findings continue to support the existence of this dichotomy, which leads to the question, why was this variable not mentioned in her results? The qualitative nature of this study has given rise to a "vocational education" or CTE vernacular with more specificity (2+2 career pathways versus student academic aspirations) than Prindiville's study, but still within her framework on college choice. Therefore, 2+2 Career Pathways may be interpreted as an equivalent variable, or subset under her highest ranked variable of *Student Academic Aspirations*. It is considered a predisposition phase variable because it falls within Hossler and Gallagher's first phase (predisposition), which begins with a student's desire to attend a college or university, followed by a decision to attend. School-to-Work and Tech Prep programs emanating out of the Carl Perkins Act have long established the definition of 2+2 career pathways as a two-year high school program of study articulated to a two-year associates degree program at the community college, and more recently, 2+2+2 career pathways that include two additional years at the senior institution leading to a baccalaureate degree. With over 50% of Nevada high school students taking one or more CTE courses (OVAE, 2008), knowledge of career pathways for the CTE professions, including the term itself, are ubiquitous. Above all, one must be mindful that the six CTE student respondents already transferred from their respective community

college to UNLV, UNR, or NSC, each reflecting back on their career pathway aspirations.

Data analysis resulted in four other variables that were not specifically mentioned in Prindiville's study. They are highlighted in Table 5-3. Unlike 2+2 Career Pathways, these variables were not common among all six CTE students, and therefore excluded from the CTE phenomenon. However, they are important factors in that they characterize the Nevada CTE transfer students in this study. The four variables include (1) Spousal Influence, (2) CTSO Influence, (3) Monetary Attainment, and (4) Family Legacy. Each of these variables is considered an influencing factor for Nevada CTE transfer students to attend UNLV, UNR, or NSC. They lie within the predisposition phase on college choice. Similar to 2+2 career pathways, they may be regarded as subcategories or implied specifics among Prindiville's 25 variables.

Associating these variables with the six CTE students, Spousal Influence was a factor in Dennis (DECA) and Scott's (Skills USA) decision to transfer to UNLV and NSC, respectively. Both their wives were inspiring and successful in education and their careers. Both their wives attained baccalaureate degrees before their husbands. Though Prindiville does not mention Significant Others as an influencing factor, Hossler and Gallagher list Significant Others (Chapter 2, Table 2-1) in their predisposition phase on college choice.

The two CTSO students, Florence (FFA) and Fred (FBLA) were heavily influenced by their participation in CTSOs. In Fred's case, becoming a member of FBLA turned his "troubled" life around. Considering the multiple FBLA achievement awards, FBLA President, scholarships, and more, it was likely the most influencing factor in

Fred's decision to attend the community college and UNR. Florence, also an outstanding CTSO student, was the only one who expressed Family Legacy as an influencing factor to continue her education beyond the community college. Not only did her family have a long-standing history of CTSO and FFA involvement, but several generations of family members graduated from UNR, specifically in agriculture. Prindiville, among her 25 variables, includes Students' Perceptions of Parental Aspirations and Parental Involvement under her category of Family Characteristics. Both these variables are listed in the predisposition phase of college choice. They may account for Florence's family legacy influence.

For Henry (HOSA) and Scott (Skills USA), Monetary Attainment was an important factor in their decision to attend UNLV and NSC, respectively. In Fredrickson's (1998) study on characterizing transfer students, she found two dominant reasons for continuing their education beyond the community college: a better job and more money. Since Henry and Scott experienced low SES backgrounds, it is understandable that a relatively high-paying career would be an important factor in their decision to transfer from the community college and pursue their bachelor's degree.

Prindiville's listing of variables for School Characteristics includes School Support, Peer Influence, and High School Program. These three variables align with Florence and Fred's CTSO influence. Once again, specificity and/or subcategory for CTSO Influence versus School Support, Peer Influence, and High School Program; Spousal Influence versus Significant Other; Monetary Influence versus SES; and Family Legacy versus Parental Aspirations and Parental Involvement are all influencing factors

accounted for under the Hossler and Gallagher model and Prindiville's extended version of Hossler and Gallagher's three-phase model on college choice.

Several conclusions can be drawn from this study. Prindiville's results, based on the combined econometric and sociological theoretical framework of Hossler and Gallagher's three phase model on college choice, substantiate the findings of this study. That is, the phenomenon identified in this study includes predisposition variables that heavily influence Nevada CTE transfer students in their decision to transfer to the senior institution. Likewise, the results of this study, as stated above, substantiates Piland's (1995) claims: The ones who do make the transition to the senior institution are in fact the winners. Their academic accomplishments at the community college and high levels of motivation may have provided them with the foundation to persist to graduation (Piland, 1995). Three of the six Nevada CTE transfer students will have successfully graduated upon completion of this study. It is expected the remaining three will graduate within the next year.

#### Summary Statement of Conclusion

The implications of this study are important for all of Nevada secondary and postsecondary stakeholders. Data analysis presented in Chapter 5 resulted in identifying the phenomenon –one which reflects the essence of the lived experiences of six Nevada CTE transfer students, and one which is present it in a *texturally* and *structurally* descriptive way through individual stories in Chapter 4. Combined, Chapter 4 and 5 yield important implications in eight influencing factors identified by the phenomenon: (1) career aspirations, (2) teacher influence, (3) parental influence, (4) SES background,

(5) academic achievement, (6) self-improvement, (7) 2+2 career pathways, and (8) college location all play a significant role in optimizing the facilitation of students' transition to the senior institution. These results are also important in that they support and expound upon the salient literature presented in Chapter 2, not only on college choice (Hossler and Gallagher, 1987; Prindiville, 1995), but the pivotal role community colleges continue to play in the transfer function:

- Optimizing the facilitation of baccalaureate pathways to four-year institutions (Long & Kurleander, 2008): All six CTE students
- Safeguarding the community college open-access and comprehensive character, making sure that it remains particularly open to working class and minority students (Dougherty, 1997): First generation minority students, Francine, Fred, and Henry; and working class students, Dennis, Florence, and Scott)
- Encouraging transfer on the part of CTE students (Townsend et al., 2004): All six CTE students
- Providing collegiate-grade lower-division university course work (Cohen & Brawer, 2003): Dennis, Florence, Francine, and Fred
- Ensuring our community college system remain open for retraining; swirling students, providing for 2+2+2 educational pathways broad enough in scope so that they are applicable to a multitude of CTE occupations (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Laanan & Compton, 2006; Fredrickson, 1998): All six students
- Integration of traditional academic rigor necessary for attaining functional literacy and interpersonal skills (Perkins federal legislation): All six students

## Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

Creswell's cover design for his book, *Research Design –Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*, includes a graphic of a *mandala*, which is a Buddhist and Hindu circular design symbolizing the totality and wholeness of the universe. He uses the metaphor as an implicit comparison to the creation of a research design and how the process “requires looking at the ‘big picture’ as well as the tremendous attention to detail... The mandala also shows the interrelatedness of the part of a whole, again reflecting research design, in which each element shapes a complete study” (Creswell, 2003, p. xix). The madala will be used as a metaphorical tool in the following sections.

### Implications on Research Design and Theoretical Perspective

Reflecting back on establishing the research design for this study calls for the use of the mandala metaphor. According to Green, Camilli, and Elmore (2006), graduate students and researchers alike are now exposed to a vibrant growth and evolution of new epistemologies, perspectives, and methods for research in the field of education, and the landscape is abound with richly diverse sets of research methods that continue to undergo extraordinary change. “The American Educational Research Association (AERA) confirmed Jaeger's (1997) argument that no single individual would be able to develop expertise in all research approaches” (Green, Camilli, & Elmore, 2006, p. xvi). Given this historical and evolutionary perspective among experts, the need to distinguish among various qualitative methods of inquiry at the onset of one's study requires looking at the “big picture” and striking a balance between the whole and its interrelatedness to the



details of richly diverse sets of knowledge claims on methodologies, methods, and techniques that are apparently in a continual state of flux and change. Merriam (2002) attributes this socially constructed dynamic to our ever-changing world, and that reality is not fixed, agreed upon, or a measurable phenomenon. It is assumed to be in positivist, quantitative research. (p. 3). Therefore, the implication for future research design and theoretical perspective is to consider the mandala metaphor in the selection and use of one's method of inquiry and subsequent methods and techniques.

It is also deemed important to share that, as a doctoral student preparing the qualitative methodological research plan for this dissertation with the intent of maximizing focus on interpreting the given problem statement, careful attention was given to developing a sense of qualitative disciplinary identity using specific knowledge claims within a qualitative genre. All qualitative design types or genres appear to have some degree of commonality. For example, in considering the five fundamental approaches to qualitative inquiry: phenomenological research, grounded theory, case study research, ethnographic research, and narrative research, the question arises, which methodology is best suited? Merriam (2002) believes that all five of these philosophical or theoretical orientations have in common "the search for meaning and understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, an inductive analysis process, and a product that is a rich description of the phenomenon" (Merriam, 2002, p. 15). Bearing in mind these commonalities, and equally important, their systematic procedures for inquiry and associated data collection and analysis methods, a methodological stance was taken. That stance was the selection of phenomenology, specifically hermeneutic phenomenology, with Creswell's recommended philosophical

assumption of *ontology*, a paradigm or world view of *constructivism*, and a *postmodern* interpretive community, as defined in Chapter 3.

Once a phenomenological stance is taken, researchers may want to consider using the systematic procedure for data analysis outlined in Chapter 3 and detailed in Chapter 5. The procedure is deemed exhaustive, functional, and non-overlapping. Manifest and latent content analysis provided an iterative coding technique to initially organize the transcribed data in a systematic manner to capture the *telos* (essence) of the lived experience for each student. Event mapping provided another layer of meaning by individually focusing on the phenomenon for each student, independent of each other, through the added dimension of transitional time and corresponding emotion as it pertained to their high school to community college to NSC, UNLV or UNR experience.

Domain analysis provided further horizontalization of the data through the identification of semantic relationships among the students, with a focused search and discovery effort towards categorizing domains with corresponding semantic meaning, both tacit and explicit. Researchers may want to consider semantic relationships that differ, or go beyond this study's use of Spradley's (1980) Strict Inclusion, Cause and Effect, and Attribution. However, this directly impacts one's corresponding taxonomic analysis, which provides even further depth of analysis by showing more of the relationships among the elements within the domain.

Researchers may also want to consider that at this stage of the analysis process, the descriptive, focused, and selective observations necessary in conducting a domain and taxonomic analysis, coupled with manifest and latent content analysis and event mapping, become narrow enough in scope that the intense focus on detail may cause one

to get lost in the interrelated parts of the whole. The mandala may serve as a useful regulatory tool in the phenomenological reduction process of horizontalization. Whereas horizons are unlimited and can never be completely exhausted, according to Moustakas (1994), the never-ending process of interpreting something and providing textural and structural descriptions, at some point, must be discontinued.

Just as the mandala metaphor can be used as a suggested measure in being mindful of striking a balance between the “big picture,” or the whole and its relationships among the various elements within the domain, Spradley (p. 92) suggests the metaphorical use of an artist’s rendition of a tree in which there are hidden faces and animal figures that are not immediately apparent until there is discovery through domain analysis. The implication is that combined, the two metaphors complement each other by serving as mitigating forces in preventing overlap or redundancy.

Data analysis was not entirely complete at this stage, not without a thematic comparison of attributes between student experiences. The componential analysis that followed was used to make the comparison (Dimensions of Contrast) of what students had in common. This permitted the identification of the phenomenon: the culmination of all analyses, including manifest and latent content analysis, event mapping, domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, and componential analysis, all used to describe, texturally and structurally, the lived experience shared among six Nevada CTE transfer students. Lastly, a stacked Venn diagram was used to essentially “tie the loop together” by graphically illustrating the phenomenon along with the unique, influencing themes for each student outside of the phenomenon. Sharing these reflective experiences on data

analysis through the use of the mandala metaphor may help facilitate others in establishing and conducting their methodological design.

Trustworthiness was an integral part of research design and theoretical perspective of this study, and therefore warrants some discussion. As stated in Chapter 3, Marshall and Rossman (1999, p.191) believe that all researchers must respond to the cannons of quality by being held accountable in meeting the traditional criteria in which the trustworthiness of one's project can be evaluated. Four traditional qualitative techniques were used to ensure the overall trustworthiness of this study. They included triangulation, peer review, member checking, and thick descriptions. Their respective definitions and rationale for use as a validation strategy for the overall trustworthiness of this study was detailed in Chapter 3. Whereas the pilot study's trustworthiness rested upon the laurels of Wolcott (1994), who suggests that validation neither guides nor informs his work, but places it in a broader perspective of understanding what is really going on, this was not acceptable by virtue of the dissertation. All four techniques were employed in a detailed enough manner that the findings were interpreted as plausible. How Plausible? Beyond a personal judgment call, and in accordance with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) qualitative constructs of *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability*, and *confirmability*. Peer review and triangulation were addressed throughout this study, primarily through the researcher's Dissertation Chair and feedback from Committee members. Member checking and thick descriptions were satisfied by having the CTE transfer students read their respective story presented in Chapter 4 and their corresponding event map in Chapter 5. Both of these documents reflect their lived experience, which include Denzin's (1989) thick description of going beyond mere fact

and surface appearances, but include the context of emotion and self-feelings. Having reviewed these documents, the students were even more pleased to partake in a formal study on successful CTE students. The implication for future research design and theoretical perspective is to focus on some degree of adaptation and accommodation of Lincoln and Guba's qualitative constructs and corresponding techniques for operationalizing trustworthiness outlined and discussed in Chapter 3 (See Table 3-1).

### Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

During the course of this study a number of questions and concerns regarding limitations to the study were raised prompting a return to the literature review for clarity, understanding, and speculative questioning pertaining to the limitations, contributions to the existing body of research, and recommendations for future studies. These questions and concerns unfolded as a result of aligning with van Manen (1990) and Moustakas' philosophical perspective on reasons for selecting phenomenology as a method of inquiry. That is, an abiding concern of the phenomenon; personal relevance; an intense interest, one that has social meaning, excitement, curiosity, personal significance; and a personal history that brings the core of the problem into focus. Among the more pronounced questions and concerns were transfer shock, student swirl, academic success upon graduation and performance differences between CTE and non-CTE transfer students, post-baccalaureate success among the six students, policy implications, and CTE trends. The limited scope of this study does not include an analysis of these specific areas beyond the literature review. Because of this limitation, it becomes important for others to move forward and address these issues.

Transfer shock, a temporary decline in community college transfer students' GPAs within their first few semesters at the four-year institution, has been investigated in numerous studies (Cejda, Kaylor, Rewey, 1998). A review of the literature indicates several complexities that impact transfer shock, such as the number of credits being transferred to the university, academic discipline, social factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, etc., community college environment, and more. Henry, the HOSA category CTE student, was a unique case among the six Nevada CTE transfer students. He attended UNLV directly out of high school, then immediately digressed to CSN, obtained his associate's degree, and transferred back to UNLV. Excluding this anomaly, none of the six students expressed difficulty in adjusting to their junior year upon transferring, academic or otherwise. Given the methodology, the problem statement, and corresponding research questions, transfer shock was not included as part of the phenomenon with the CTE respondents in this study. This does not preclude transfer shock from occurring among any one of the six students. It was simply not a factor in how they described their lived experience. Cedra, Kaylor, and Rewey (1998) report in their literature review that a relationship exists between the number of credits completed at the community college and academic performance at the four-year institution. Several studies have found that students who transferred with upper-division status (completion of associates degree) experienced a lesser degree of transfer shock than those who transferred at the lower-division level (Cedra, Kaylor, & Rewey, 1998, p. 2). However, future researchers may want to examine the transfer shock phenomenon, or the impact of the resulting initiatives in place that aid students in developing skills to succeed during their transition, particularly with CTE students, as the existing research focuses on

transfer students in general. Qualitative researchers may want to consider the inclusion of a broad overarching transfer shock question, or focused sub-questions seeking to engage participant responses that reveal their experience in this regard. A quantitative comparative analysis of CTE versus non-CTE students on the transfer shock phenomenon would also contribute to the dearth of CTE transfer student research.

Another characteristic of community college students, particularly CTE students, is *swirl* or *swirling*. Community college students tend to exhibit patterns of swirling enrollment as they swirl back and forth between their full- or part-time job and the two- or four-year institution they attend. McCormick (2003) contends that swirling is becoming increasingly common as students balance their busy adult lives with community college and university coursework. After graduating from high school, Scott, the Skills USA category student, opted to work for one year before attending the community college full time. Dennis, the DECA category student, worked for 15 years out of high school before deciding to attend the community college full time. The remaining four students took on part-time jobs as well, but did not exhibit swirling. Similar to transfer shock, swirling was not identified as part of the Nevada CTE transfer student phenomenon. Do Nevada CTE transfer students tend to swirl more than non-CTE transfer students? How do they compare to their native counterpart in their junior year, and has this statistic changed over time? Here again, more research is needed.

LeCompte and Preissle (1993) caution researchers in avoiding wild guesses about meaning, inferences, and long-shot connections to chunks of data or theory beyond the limited scope of the study. “Conjuring up ‘why not?’, ‘what if?’, and ‘just suppose?’” These are playful modes of thought for serious researchers; those who have spent years in

hard-nosed dissection of phenomena may find them perilously ambiguous” (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 268-269). Nearly 30 years of CTE professional and personal experience oriented towards an abiding concern has prompted these so-called playful modes of thought with this researcher. What about the academic success upon graduation, or performance differences between CTE and non-CTE transfer students, and post-baccalaureate success among the six Nevada CTE transfer students? Do they eventually achieve their career aspirations, and if so, how long after graduation? What are the implications for articulation-related policy and best practices, such as Dare’s (2003) CTE “boundary-spanning” initiatives discussed in Chapter 2? LeCompte and Preissle’s words of wisdom are well taken. However, these are more than playful modes of thought. They are questions and implied recommendations for future investigations. Limiting this study to the predisposition factors of community college transfer students warrants the need for further research on CTE transfer students who successfully attain their bachelor’s degree.

#### Limitations and Recommendations to Methodological Approach

Most of this study’s methodological process was exercised beforehand in a pilot study, including participant selection, data collection, and data analysis. Areas that were identified as problematic, or could pose a potential limitation to the study, were remedied beforehand through strategic planning. As a precautionary measure for future studies, participant sampling warrants some discussion, as the integrity of one’s results hinges, by and large, on the selection of respondents. Upon establishing the methodological framework for this study, selecting participants was the next important task, and possibly



one of the most crucial. Purposeful sampling, or more specifically, criterion sampling, was used on the basis of selecting participants who have experienced the phenomenon and met some degree of criteria deemed useful for quality assurance. Because criterion sampling involves judgment calls, and one's results are predicated on these judgment calls, sampling of respondents could be a severe limitation for future studies. Having completed this study, it has become clear why Miles and Huberman (1994) stress the importance of initial judgments regarding the complexities of sampling, including preparedness in setting, deployment of time, information adequacy, and efficiency. Data collection, data analysis, and the end results are directly related to the participants of the study. Choosing the wrong participants for one's study could severely limit the quality of the study.

Student participants in this study were selected based on discussions and recommendations from Nevada CTE secondary and postsecondary faculty, current and past Board members for the Nevada Association of Career and Technical Education (NACTE), and the Nevada Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education. Careful attention was given to maximizing variation criteria such as diversity in age (19 through 38), gender (2-females, 4-males), ethnicity (2-Hispanic, 1-Asian, 3-Caucasians), and institutional attendance (2-UNLV, 2-UNR, and 2-NSC transfer students). According to Merriam (2002), the logic behind maximizing variation criteria "is that if there is some diversity in the nature of the sites selected (an urban and a rural school, for example) or in participants interviewed, or times and places of field visits, results can be applied to a greater range of situations by readers or consumers of the research" (p. 29).

In order to ensure Nevada CTE representation in its entirety, students were intentionally selected from career categories representing the six areas of NACTE CTSOs. Two of the six CTE transfer students were former CTSO members: Florence (FFA) and Fred (FBLA). The remaining four, Dennis (DECA), Francine (FCCLA), Henry (HOSA), and Scott (Skills USA), were *not* former members of their respective CTSO category. Attempting to find six transfer students, all former members of Nevada CTSOs, would have been an unrealistic challenge for two reasons. First, Nevada CTSO students make up a small percentage of the overall population of CTE students within the same category. Secondly, many attend the university directly out of high school, both in state and out of state. Some may argue the results may have been compromised by the inclusion of CTE transfer students who were not CTSO members, but that is highly unlikely considering the success stories of Dennis, Francine, Henry, and Scott. Conversely, a similar argument can be made on behalf of the non-CTSO students. That is, because the majority of CTE transfer students are not former CTSO students, results could have been a more accurate representation of the CTE transfer student phenomenon if former CTSO students were excluded from the study. Researchers may want to consider the option of studying a more homogeneous group of CTE respondents by including one or the other, exclusively.

Lastly, as an accountability and informative measure, more so than a limitation, the methodological approach to this study is deemed worthy of some important comments. The arduous job of interviewing and applying the given complementary methods of data analysis, though time consuming, was necessary. Questions may arise regarding the use and effectiveness of the complementary methods of data analysis used

in this study. Some may err on the side of the historical and evolutionary perspectives of Jaeger (1997) and the AERA discussed earlier –that no single individual would be able to develop expertise in all research approaches. Yet others may debate the traditional theoretical and philosophical perspectives to one’s methodological approach to data analysis should suffice. Taking precedence over this richly, diverse debate are the qualitative tools deemed appropriate and best suited towards investigating the research problem and research questions within the context of this dissertation study. The given process is logical, systematic, productive, and made trustworthy through the traditional practices of triangulation, peer review, member checking, and thick descriptions. In addition, the process was without redundancy and overkill. This process lays the foundation for exploring the CTE transfer student phenomenon, and possibly for others to follow suit or expound upon.

## Conclusion

In bringing closure to this study, it seems appropriate to provide a textural description of the salient findings of this study. A comprehensive summative evaluation will be presented first, followed by the knowledge gained from this study from a personal perspective in hopes that it will provide a basis for future studies on Nevada CTE transfer students, and CTE students in general. Because the salient findings are essentially embedded in the hermeneutic phenomenological description of each student’s story, and detailed earlier in this chapter, emphasis will be placed on the personal perspective and knowledge gained.

## Comprehensive Summative Evaluation of the Study

Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) preeminent model on college choice was used as a theoretical framework for Prindiville (1995) to explore the differences found in personal, family background, and school variables among high school seniors choosing between two different postsecondary options: a CTE pathway to a two-year technical or community college, or a baccalaureate program at a four-year college or university. Her findings strongly suggest the predisposition phase of the Hossler and Gallagher model has the greatest influence on the college choice process. Four discriminant variables occurring in the predisposition phase that have the greatest influence on the high school seniors' decision to attend college, in ranking order, are (1) Student Academic Aspirations, (2) Students' Perception of Staff Aspirations, (3) Students' Perception of Parental Aspirations, and (4) SES.

The results of this study, in part, support Prindiville's findings. Four of the eight variables identified as the Nevada CTE transfer student phenomenon are essentially equivalent to Prindiville's four top ranked disposition variables (Table 6-1). They greatly influenced all six students' decision to continue their education, not only beyond high school, but as transfer students from the community college to UNLV, UNR, and NSC. The remaining four variables identified in the phenomenon, Academic Achievement, Self-Improvement, 2+2 Career Pathways, and College Location, are of equal importance. Unlike Prindiville's study, they are not ranked, but they contribute to characterizing the phenomenon –the essence of the lived experience of all six Nevada CTE transfer students.

Most importantly, these six Nevada CTE transfer students, from a variety of backgrounds, have proven themselves to be talented and exemplary students, likely among the best at the four-year college and university level. They support Piland's (1995) study nearly 15 years ago, which showed that those students who do successfully transition from the community college to the senior institution are accomplished, highly-motivated individuals that are demonstrated winners. In essence, they have successfully defied the historical and long-standing research odds that work against "vocational students" succeeding at the baccalaureate level—students with low academic aspirations, less teacher and parental influence, low SES backgrounds, high dropout rates, ethnicity challenges, transfer shock and swirl challenges, and all of Prindiville's other discriminant variables such as lack of planning, financial aid, working moms, peer influence, college planning, and more. They have defied the critics whose findings suggest that attending community colleges significantly reduces the probability of attaining a bachelor's degree (Alfonso et al., 2006). Their success adds to the body of literature that exposes the myths of CTE being viewed as an undesirable curricular track (Dare et al., 2006).

### Personal Perspective and Knowledge Gained

Prior to the onset of this study, several general rules of engagement were presented to UNLV doctoral students preparing to embark upon the mystique of the dissertation. What constitutes a quality dissertation? Are there quality standards? How long should the dissertation be? How does one conduct an effective literature review? What are the differences between qualitative and quantitative frameworks? How does one go about selecting a dissertation topic, let alone a methodological framework? These

are lingering questions that were addressed by the professor, former doctoral students, and class handouts representing the collective judgments of hundreds of faculty members from various disciplines, all discussing the purpose of the dissertation. “Its structure, content, and its very existence is, and has periodically been, a topic of debate among faculty, administrators, and policy makers, not to mention a source of much grousing among students who are writing one” (Lovitts, 2007, p. 29). Few would argue that the dissertation is a learning process, one in which the doctoral student demonstrates the ability to conduct independent, original, and publishable results. “Your dissertation is your dissertation, but if you knew how to do one, you wouldn’t need a chair or committee.” (Wolverton, 2007). These perspectives served as the motivating factors to begin the study. There are now compelling reasons to end this study, but not without mention on personal tribute and knowledge gained.

Several chapters throughout this study cited the scholarly works of noted phenomenologists who in some way provided insight in turning to the nature of the lived experience with an abiding concern. For example, van Manen (1990) recommends that every project of phenomenological inquiry should be driven by a commitment to an abiding concern. As for the textural nature of phenomenological inquiry, specifically hermeneutic phenomenological work, as represented by this study, writing is closely fused into the research activity and reflection itself. “To write is to measure our thoughtfulness. Writing separates us from what we know and yet it unites us more closely with what we know” (van Manen, 1990, p. 127).

The abiding concern for CTE, its long, historical background and dearth of research, particularly at the transfer level and in Nevada where no such research exists,

prompted the rationale for this study. Moreover, the criteria set forth by Moustakas (1994) for a phenomenological study: a topic of intense interest, one that has social meaning, excitement, curiosity, personal significance, and personal history that brings the core of the problem into focus, are the predominant criteria that resonate with my own personal ascriptive characteristics and identity. I share in virtually every aspect of the CTE transfer student phenomenon identified in this study. Growing up, I was dubbed as a non-achiever, a troubled student, a street kid from a low SES background and family of nine, etc., and consequently placed in a “vocational track.” Like Dennis, Scott, and so many other CTE students, I was confronted with the same predicament in attempting to get out of it, long after high school. The abiding concern stems from these reasons and more.

Consider the eight influencing factors identified as the Nevada CTE transfer student phenomenon in this study. For Career Aspirations (1), as a first-generation Japanese-American student, I was expected to go to college, and preferably major in a stereotypical engineering field. For Teacher Influence (2), one high school teacher in particular (a vocational drafting instructor) was an influencing factor to attend college. Parental Influence (3) played a vital role in setting the expectations, but similar to Fred’s (FBLA) parents, they did not attempt to intervene in the college choice process, nor the pursuit of a particular major or profession. Sharing the experience of low SES Background (4) is another connection with the Nevada CTE respondents. From a family of nine, continuous work was necessary and expected. Similar to Florence (FFA), working day in and day out, as far back as one can remember, was the norm. Summers consisted of working with migrant workers for nearly ten years. Delivering newspapers,

busing tables, selling shoes, welding mini bikes, performing custodial work, electricians work, and more were jobs that paid for my entire college education. There were no scholarships, financial aid, nor were my parents able to afford college expenses.

Academic Achievement (5) was not monetary, but scholastic like Dennis (DECA) and Scott (Skills USA). Strongly embedded in all six CTE transfer students, Self-Improvement (6), is also acriptive characteristic of my identity, still to this date. I share Henry's (HOSA) 2+2 Career Pathway (7) experience in attending the university directly out of high school, then digressed to the community college and transferring back. Lastly, College Location (8) was an influencing factor. The university I attended was in close proximity (cycling distance), offered on-campus work, and a CTE career pathway to the baccalaureate degree.

Therefore, it seems entirely fitting to end this study with a personally rewarding excerpt from Moustakas (1994). In a phenomenological investigation, he believes that “during the course of the study, one becomes an expert on the topic, knows the nature and findings of prior research, has developed new knowledge on the topic, and has become proficient in recognizing the kinds of future research that would deepen and extend knowledge on the topic” (p. 162). Where are these six Nevada CTE transfer students now and what are they doing?



APPENDIX



**UNLV SOCIAL/BEHAVIORAL  
IRB APPROVAL**

**Social/Behavioral IRB – Expedited Review  
Approval Notice**

***NOTICE TO ALL RESEARCHERS:***

*Please be aware that a protocol violation (e.g., failure to submit a modification for any change) of an IRB approved protocol may result in mandatory remedial education, additional audits, re-consenting subjects, researcher probation suspension of any research protocol at issue, suspension of additional existing research protocols, invalidation of all research conducted under the research protocol at issue, and further appropriate consequences as determined by the IRB and the Institutional Officer.*

**DATE:** March 13, 2009

**TO:** Dr. Mario Martinez, Educational Leadership

**FROM:** Office for the Protection of Research Subjects

**RE:** Notification of IRB Action by Dr. Paul Jones, Co-Chair  
Protocol Title: **Predisposition Factors of Career and Technical Education  
Transfer Students: A Hermeneutic Phenomenology Study**  
Protocol #: 0902-3006

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This memorandum is notification that the project referenced above has been reviewed by the UNLV Social/Behavioral Institutional Review Board (IRB) as indicated in Federal regulatory statutes 45 CFR 46. The protocol has been reviewed and approved.

The protocol is approved for a period of one year from the date of IRB approval. The expiration date of this protocol is February 12, 2010. Work on the project may begin as soon as you receive written notification from the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS).

**PLEASE NOTE:**

Attached to this approval notice is the **official Informed Consent/Assent (IC/IA) Form** for this study. The IC/IA contains an official approval stamp. Only copies of this official IC/IA form may be used when obtaining consent. Please keep the original for your records.

Should there be *any* change to the protocol, it will be necessary to submit a **Modification Form** through OPRS. No changes may be made to the existing protocol until modifications have been approved by the IRB.

Should the use of human subjects described in this protocol continue beyond February 12, 2010, it would be necessary to submit a **Continuing Review Request Form** *60 days* before the expiration date.

If you have questions or require any assistance, please contact the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at [OPRSHumanSubjects@unlv.edu](mailto:OPRSHumanSubjects@unlv.edu) or 895-2794.

## LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT



Office for the Protection of Research Subjects  
4505 Maryland Parkway • Box 451047 • Las Vegas, Nevada 89154-1047  
(702) 895-2794 • FAX: (702) 895-0805

UNLV Department of Educational Leadership  
Letter of Informed Consent  
Doctoral Dissertation Study of  
Career and Technical Education (CTE) Transfer Students

Dear CTE Student,

January 18, 2009

I am a registered doctoral student in the Educational Leadership Department at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV). For my doctoral dissertation, I am conducting a study that includes interviewing outstanding Nevada Career and Technical Education (CTE) transfer students who have successfully completed their Associates degree at the community college and are now working on their baccalaureate degree at UNLV, the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR), or Nevada State College (NSC). My study will include interviewing one outstanding CTE student from each of the following six Career and Technical Student Organization (CTSO) areas:

1. DECA (An Association of Marketing Students/Delta Epsilon Chi Association)
2. FBLA (Future Business Leaders of America)
3. FFA (Future Farmers of America)
4. FCCLA (Family Community Career Leaders of America)
5. HOSA (Health Occupations Students of America)
6. Skills USA

Because of your outstanding achievements as a CTE transfer student from one of Nevada's four community colleges, you have been selected to participate in an approximately 60-minute audio-recorded interview so that more can be learned, directly from you and your CTE peers, what factors contribute to your persistence into UNLV, UNR, or NSC.

Please know that your participation is voluntary and involves minimal risks. The confidentiality of your data will be preserved at all times, and you may rescind your permission at any time with no negative consequences. All information gathered in this study will be kept confidential. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study.

If you agree to participate, please indicate this decision with your signature below and return this Letter of Informed Consent to me in the self-addressed stamped envelope. If you have any questions regarding this doctoral dissertation study, please feel free to contact me, Warren Hioki, at 702 461-3666, or the Principal Investigator and UNLV Professor, Dr. Mario Martinez, at 702 895-2895.

For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted you may contact the UNLV Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS) at 702-895-2794. Audio recordings, field notes, and transcribed data will be kept in a secure place on the UNLV campus for a period of 3 years and destroyed thereafter by erasure of digital recordings and shredding of field notes.

Sincerely,

Warren Hioki  
UNLV Doctoral Student  
Higher Education Administration  
702 461-3666

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this doctoral dissertation study on outstanding Career and Technical Education (CTE) transfer students. I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this form has been given to me.

---

(CTE Transfer student signature)

---

(CTE Transfer student printed name)

I agree to be audio recorded for the purpose of this study.

---

(CTE Transfer student signature)

***Student Participant Note: Please do not sign this document if the Approval Stamp is missing or is expired.***

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND PROTOCOL SHEET

### Broad centralized questions:

1. *How would you describe your career pathway experience as you transitioned from high school to the community college and on to senior institute (UNLV, UNR or NSC)?*
2. *What factors influenced you the most into transferring from the community college to the senior institute?*

### Examples of focused sub-questions include the following:

1. *Have you always aspired to attend the senior institute?*
2. *Who, if anyone, had the greatest impact on your decision to transfer to the senior institute?*
3. *Describe how your socioeconomic background has supported or hindered your decision to continue your education beyond the community college and on to the senior institute?*

### Additional focused sub-questions:

1. *How would you describe your overall desire (academic aspirations) to attend the senior institute, i.e., did you fully intend to eventually go to UNLV/UNR/NSC?*
2. *Who, if anyone, has had the greatest impact (parents, teachers, counselors, peers, etc.) on your decision to transfer to the senior institute?*
3. *How has socioeconomic background supported or hindered your decision to continue your education beyond the community college and on to the senior institute?*
4. *Are you familiar with Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs)? For example, DECA, FBLA, FCS or FCCLA, FFA, HOSA, and Skills USA. Were you a*

*member and to what extent has the CTSO influenced your decision to go to college,  
especially the senior institute?*

Prindiville's Top 4 Ranking Predisposition Discriminate Variables:

1. Students' career aspirations
2. School support (teachers and counselors)
3. Parental influence
4. Socioeconomic status (SES)

Prindiville's 25 Discriminate Variables in Ranking Order:

1. Student aspirations
2. Student perceptions of staff aspirations
3. Student perceptions of parental aspirations
4. SES
5. College admissions applications
6. Peer influence
7. Parental education level
8. High school program
9. Parental involvement
10. Occupational aspirations
11. Taking PSAT exam
12. Academic performance
13. School support
14. Mother working
15. Ethnicity
16. College costs/financial aid award
17. College entrance acceptance
18. College features
19. School climate
20. Who decides
21. Pre-college planning
22. Student aspiration motivation
23. Gender
24. Discussed financial aid
25. Location of college

Other:

Age = \_\_\_\_\_

High School name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of high school graduation: \_\_\_\_\_

CSN \_\_\_\_ TMCC \_\_\_\_ GBC \_\_\_\_ WNC \_\_\_\_

Date entering community college: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Graduating community college: \_\_\_\_\_

UNLV \_\_\_\_ UNR \_\_\_\_ NSC \_\_\_\_

Date entering UNLV, UNR, or NSC: \_\_\_\_\_

Field Notes:

## DENNIS' TRANSCRIPTION

Dennis' (DECA) Interview

March 6, 2009

7pm-8:10pm (70 min.)

### BEGINNING OF SIDE A

\*So I'm interviewing with Dennis, a Junior at UNLV.

Yes, yes.

\*And it's March the 6<sup>th</sup>, Friday, about 7:00. And as you know Dennis, my dissertation is on characterizing transfer students from one of the four community colleges: Community College of Southern Nevada / or College of Southern Nevada, Truckee Meadows Community College, Western Nevada, and Great Basin. And a student will have transferred to UNLV, UNR, or Nevada State College. So you currently are a Junior or Senior?

Junior.

\*Junior. And I'm going to ask a couple of broad, what we call broad overarching questions, and then maybe some more specific questions and it shouldn't take more than maybe about an hour. But again I just want to find out a whole bunch of things. Your educational background and ...

OK.

\*Let's start with out first of all, your major.

OK my major is finance. And I'm also working on a minor in Chinese. Chinese language.

\*Oh great. And you said you're a Junior.

Yes.

\*And you graduated or transferred from College of Southern Nevada?

Yes. It was (pause) we graduate and get our diploma, but we also transfer into UNLV however they have that set up, it's like a final (pause), they just bring us right over, it's very easy.

\*That's great. And your wife Missy had mentioned you're like a 4.0 student.

(Laughs). Yeah, well, I missed it. My last semester, last class, my statistics class I got a B. So I missed 4.0 by, you know, a squeaky hair.



\*Just one class. It's just ... I would have talked to the professor "Hey look, I'm batting a hundred here."

Yeah

\*But you know I congratulate you and that's rare for anybody to do that well. I know that your wife spoke very, very highly of you. And I don't know if she received those photos from that luncheon we had at the college ...

I'm not ... I really don't know. I'm not positive ... she...

\*I had one of the assistants send out a whole bunch of photos from the fundraiser. We're trying to start an internship at the college, but uh...

Mmm, K.

\*Let me start of with this first broad overarching question. And this is called an open-ended interview where specifically it's called hermeneutic phenomenology, it's a method of inquiry. And the idea is just to take the conversation wherever it goes, related to you as a transfer student. So the first question is: How would you describe your career pathway experience as you transitioned from high school to the community college and onto the senior institute, namely UNR. And when I say career pathway does that kind of ring a bell? Like 2+2+2? Two years in high school, two years in community college ...

Yup, um, actually my career path is, wasn't at all, I don't think it's, probably not normal. Maybe for community college because I met a lot of community college people that were older. Um ... so there was a large proportion of people in some of my classes that had business experience, been in the "real world" so to speak. That's kind of the path I followed. Out of high school, I actually attempted college, it did not go well at all. And so, uh, that was in 1988 and it lasted all of about five weeks. And at the time, it didn't feel right for me. So, I pretty much decided that I could earn my own way, make my own keep, and be my own man, and off I went. And you know, I really had no desire to go to college in the beginning. Ten years later, I really wished I gone and I started to make it a focus, something I really wanted to do to get back in school. And that's sort of where I was in Florida. And then uh California. And then, you know over the years I kept trying you know to get back in. Finally we got here to Vegas and we just really, it was a stroke of luck for my life as far my wife's career path, came here to Vegas and it offered us an opportunity for me to stop working and try to go back to school. Because I realized that having worked for a few years I needed to be in school, I needed to be getting the education because I was reaching a ceiling. So that's why I decided you know, well this opportunity presented itself. So I went back, but I made the commitment and decision that if I was going to do it, I was going to do it to the best of my abilities. And that's really all I've been trying doing since then is just to focus hard and get it done.

\*So you went to high school in Florida?

I went to high school in Delaware.

\*Delaware.

I've done a lot of moving.

\*That's OK. And there's nothing wrong with going to work and uh ... I went to college right out of high school and just totally bombed.

(Laughs) Right.

\*So I well I'm going to go to work and get some experienced. And I realized, and I grew up real quickly.

Uh-huh.

\*Well anyhow, uh, when you graduated from high school in Delaware did you immediately go to work? Was there like a ten year period or so before you ... ?

Yeah, I sort of became a beach bum for awhile. (Laughs). You know, I really, that's really what I did probably the first year and a half, almost two years, I did a lot of hitchhiking. I hitchhiked from Canada to Florida, and everything in-between on the east coast. And I just kind of picked up odd jobs. I did a lot of landscaping. Because for some reason, landscapers will hire you to do a job, and you get done, you get paid in cash, and you go on. So, I did a lot of landscaping for a few years and uh, ended up. I also did some cooking, things like that. Ended up in a kitchen. And one day they had a bartender or something not show up, and I happened to know a lot about drinking (laughs), so I figured I could serve the drinks also. And I ended up working for them and from there I just became a bartender and I spent the next 15 years as a bartender. The nice thing about the bartending is that it satisfying, because I could go anywhere I wanted to and get a job.

\*You had a skill that uh, ...

Yup.

\*... you could work anywhere.

Yeah, so wherever I wanted. I moved to Atlanta, and I went to Orlando, and New Orleans, and.... Pretty much wherever I wanted to go I would take off and go and get a job.

\*When you were cooking where like you a chef too?

Um, no, I wasn't a chef I was just a cook. I mostly steamed shrimp, and lobsters, or seasoned plates on the east coast.

\*You were in New Orleans?

Actually I was on the east coast. Yeah we did a lot of ... Maryland crabs, Maryland blue crabs are really popular along the east coast. So that's pretty much what I did.

\*So you like seafood.

Yes.

\*And uh, when you were in high school, Dennis, you are familiar with the acronym FBLA and DECA?

Yeah, DECA definitely.

\*And were you a member, or you just heard of it, or your friends ...

No, I wasn't a member but I knew the organization, other people I knew were in, I had another friend in DECA but I wasn't, it wasn't my interest. You know, academics was not my interest then, that's for sure. (Laughs). I know what they were, but I wasn't involved.

\*I grew up as a street kid so ...

Right (laughs). Yeah, it's, no.

\*Your impression of those people in DECA or FBLA-Future Business Leaders of America, were they outstanding students?

Yeah. I mean, it was kind of odd that I had friends of that level. I looked at it as, they were in a different class than I was. Same grade level, but you know, they were different people. Definitely upperly-mobile, focused on the future, what they were going to do, and I really didn't give a damn. (Laughs). I just wanted to get through life. And uh, but yeah, they were definitely leaders. Yeah.

\*But you picked up a lot of experience in that ten, fifteen years.

Yes.

\*And so then you got into College of Southern Nevada and you majored in ...?

Just uh, business.

\*Business.

Business degree. Just their Associates of Business. I went in there with the, as soon as I found out they had a transfer program to UNLV, I went, that was my main, my major

focus. I mean, as soon as I found that out, I said, "OK that is definitely, this is worth doing." Because I really, I was afraid that if I went into the community college, I'd be taking time off and I wasn't really sure what a two-year degree would do for me. You know, I was already a stock-broker; I had already got my license, but I was hitting a sealing in that. Because with the high net-worth clients, as soon as they find out you don't have an education, other than a street education, they're not too interested in you anymore. Um, so I really was afraid to take two years off and then I found out they had sort of have a transfer program straight into UNLV and I was like, "OK sign me up, I'm ready to go now."

\*Wow that's so uh ... can I ask how old you were when you started at CSN?

Oh I just started two years ago.

\*So you finished quick.

Yeah.

\*And what's the degree title at CSN that graduated in?

Umm..

\*Associate of Business?

Yeah. It's kind of extra-A in there. It's just that ...

\*Associate of Applied Science? Associate of ...

Yeah I think it might be Associates of Applied Science – Business. Something like that, I don't even remember.

\*But it transferred to UNLV?

Yes, yes. Everything was fully transferable directly to UNLV, and it satisfied all but one class and that one I had to uh, oh I don't remember what it was. I don't remember specific work for it but I had to take a higher, a 300 level class at UNLV and validate it. I had to validate the class. So that was the only one that did ...

\*You're lucky. 'Cause sometimes people start entirely all over because there's trouble with degrees ...

Right

\*... at the community college level.

See that's what I was afraid of, I didn't want to get boxed in.

\*So when you started at CSN, it sounds like your full time.

Yeah.

\*And you knew for sure that you were going to take that pathway to UNLV?

Absolutely.

\*And major in either business or finance, or did you have your heart set on finance?

Actually it was a toss ... this sounds odd ... but well, it was a tossup between finance and economics. But then finance is something I can get back out there and get to work in, economics I really need to be doing a master's, so, it's not very usable. Um, and then the other degree option was, I looked at geology, I kind of kicked around the idea of becoming a geologist. That's more of one of my habits, one of my hobbies, then ... but I ended up deciding on finance.

\*And the reason being that you feel like your entire being, your makeup, all your experiences, you feel that your strengths are in the business area?

Yeah, absolutely...stemming from being a stockbroker.

\*A stockbroker?

Yeah.

\*Where was that at?

Uh, California.

\*Whereabouts in California?

Uh, Irvine. I worked at. I worked for American Express Financial Advisors out of Irvine, California. And they actually (Laughs) ... I went to one of those cattle calls in L.A., uh, where, what do you call it? For a job fair.

\*Oh yeah.

I'd never been to one and this was in 2003. And uh, moved out to California and I decided I'm going to try something different, I'm going to get a job. A real job. So, no bartending, I'm going to get a real job. So I went to one of those job fairs, and I was actually looking for something in restaurant management. And I uh, stopped at one of the tables in the Am-Ex, I was asking him about something, and the lady standing at the Am-Ex table next to it she said "What do you do? You're looking for a management position?" I was like "Yup, but you guys are in finance." So we started talking and

twenty minutes later I had an interview set up to, for American Express and she said, "You definitely, you fit the bill really well." She said, "You're likeable, you're conversational, you know, you like to talk obviously." And we just decided, you know she said "I think that you should give it a shot." I said, "Well, I don't have a college degree." She said, "Well, why don't you give it a shot, and if it comes to it, we'll see what we can do, we can see if we can work around something. But it can't hurt to try." "You know what, you're absolutely right." So I went down to there, interviewed with them, passed the interviews, passed all their tests, went back like three times, and then they said "you're here", they signed me up for my stockbroker's license, three months later I took the test, and next thing you know I was a stockbroker. That was kind of scary.

\*They told you what to study then.

Yeah. You know, they give you these books like this (pause) and study all of it (laughs).

\*So, the fact that you passed was a confidence builder?

Absolutely. Really when I passed that test, that's when I said, "Holy crap, my life can be different if I do something with it." Because I never thought I had the ability to study like that then actually do something with it. And to study that hard, and it wasn't like I could get help from my wife because she goes to sleep as soon as I start talking about it so I had to do it all on my own. And I had...

\*You weren't married yet at that time.

Uh not yet, we weren't married yet, but, so she was, we had just moved in, I had left Florida and moved in with her. And uh ...

\*And that was a turning point in your life ...

Yeah.

\*...When you passed that exam? And that was in what year?

Uh, 2003.

\*You graduated from high school in what year?

'88. And 2003 was definitely a turning point.

\*So it's about 15 years later?

Yeah.

\* And then you started at CSN in what year?

Oh, 2006? We moved here in 2005. And yeah, I guess, I worked at uh, a local bond house selling bonds. I forgot to name them, Ernel-Stern (sp ?), it's actually at the Vegas.com building, off Green Valley 215. I worked there for about six-months and I decided I don't want to be in sales, I want to do something, I really want to. If I can get into sales with just a high school diploma, and everybody in my office have college degrees, then with a college degree I figure can do a lot more than this. So that's, I was like, ok, we decided to go for it.

\*So as it became apparent to you as you matured, if you will, through all the jobs and the places you live that you can only go so far with a college diploma.

Unfortunately yes, that's exactly what I did. That is the exact the conclusion I came to, there's only so far I can get.

\*I'm glad ran into that turning point with the license and the fact that "wait a minute, everything is possible."

Yeah.

\*The light turned on then?

Yeah.

\*Um, now again, when you went to CSN you knew where you were heading then?

Yeah.

\*OK good. And what was your experience at CSN. Did you enjoy what you were doing there?

Yeah, I really did. CSN was sort of a, kind of a, there was a lot of eye-opening going on, you know. There was a lot of "oh wow this is cool." Every class I got into was like "oh this is cool." You know, I got into Geology and discovered I really like rocks, whatever that's worth. You know, and I'm like. And you know now I'm an amateur rock hound, and I would have never broken open a rock before if I hadn't found that in college. So it, yeah, it was a lot of little things that I truly enjoyed. Um, I did a lot of classes online simply because I could get 'em done, you know I could get more classes, and I could get 'em done. And I really like the online option because I can kind of go at my own pace.

\*Be at home with the family?

Yeah, I can still, I can juggle the family a lot better as far as .. Since I'm at home, I'm kind of, you know, daddy day care and things like that. So that was uh, a little easier to juggle with the online courses. But you know, even at the school, the professors I had at the school were all very good. I enjoyed all of my classes. I can't think of any professor that I didn't like.

\*That's good. So you, you feel like you're an individual that looks, looks at the positive side of life? The positive side of your faculty, your friends, your colleagues?

Now.

\*That's very rare. Some people say ... I'm glad you said "Now." You don't see ... you prefer to look at the positive attributes of the teachers, because most people will probably complain and that's not good.

Yeah, I think a lot of students fixate on, it's almost they feel like "Oh, the professors making my life hard." Well, you're in college. Whatever it is, you're here to do it. But I think that mentality came from working, you know, and working crappy jobs for little money but I had to get what I had to get. You know, so, you got to do it. If it's not you, someone else is gonna do it, and you're out on the street and you've got nothing. So, the buckle down mentality came from the experience, but you know, there was ten, even high school I sort of had a chip on my shoulder. You know, that's just the kind of person I was.

\*Big family?

No, not really. Um, my dad was military. We moved a lot. Um, I think I, you know I never really made any ... you know there's a lot of psychology there; I never really made any connections or anything like that. We moved constantly, you know. Every new place we moved to, I had, I learned by the time I was 14 or 15 years old, I could pretty much, I could go toe-to-toe with any male adult regardless of size because I had to learn to fight to survive. So I turned into a real scrappy, you know, shit-kicker, you know. And all of my friends were the same way because I didn't respect anybody that didn't have a backbone or what I perceived in, for me you had to be able to fight.

\*Literally fight.

Yeah literally fight. Fist..

\*Would you consider yourself a street kid?

Yeah, yeah definitely, yeah. Uh, that's. A lot of wrong turns, a lot of bad choices, and all the bad things the street could present, they were there.

\*But you don't regret that do you?

Uh...

\*Do you think it's uh, something that made you who you are?

Yeah, I do.



\*That helped you in growing up ...

It made me mature differently on my own path, but uh...

\*Maybe a little more tough skinned maybe than if you were spoon fed?

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. Um...

\*What branch of the military was your dad in?

He was army, but um, he was specific in military intelligence. And yes, I know it's an oxymoron, but ... (laughs). But uh that's, we actually traveled to several military bases and most of the military bases that we ended up stationed on or near because we did a lot of, we lived in Europe, we lived on the economy you know outside the base pretty much in the German towns. I went to a German school. Um, so yeah, everything was, it was big military influence.

\*Was your mom military or just...

No, she was just, yeah sort of, she was there. (Laughs) You know.

\*You have brothers or sisters?

I had a younger brother, he was seven years younger. So it was, I was pretty much like an only child. Had like older only child and then ...

\*You had a younger brother.

I had, well, no I still do. I sort of wrote him off years ago, but he's still alive (laughs).

\*I've got four sisters, I always say I wrote them off years ago. Four sisters and two brothers, so six kids.

Shooo that's a lot of kids.

\*My parents put us out in the fields to keep us out of trouble.

Yeah, right.

\*Always it was crazy.

Wow, I need to find a field for my oldest to work in (laughs).

\*So, coming up or growing up in a military family, how would you describe your upbringing as far as, have you ever heard of socioeconomic background?

Yeah

\*Lower-class, middle-class, upper-class.

Right. Uh I would, being military, it's, your sort of all the same with all the G.I.'s, if you're not ... well, definitely upper-class and lower-class. I don't know much about a middle-class in the military, you know from what I saw. Because you're either an officer or in the upper echelons or you weren't. And if you were, you know, except for the sergeants. You know, but everybody bellow a sergeant you're all grunts. And we all lived in our area of the base and it didn't matter if we were Marine, or air force, or army. Which most of the bases we were on were combination. We had the Marines because they were point, they did like the MP's, the base MP's or whatever. And we had air force and army because they were doing the intelligence work.

\*The kids would hang out in the social stigma where ...?

Yeah, oh yeah. And it's kind of weird.

\*The military hierarchy in a base.

That's pretty much where the split was. There was like a half split. You know it was, whatever base, you're the Lieu's kids or the grunts. And that's it.

\*Lieu's?

Yeah Lieu's kids. Lieutenants, colonels, or above. You know so. You were the Lieu's kids or the grunts, and that's you know, we didn't really make any differences to ...

\*What were you?

I was a grunt (laughs). You know ...

\*This is hilarious.

We were the grunts. You know all the kids, most of the kids I hung with and then as I got older and we moved back to the states and I guess I was 11 or 12 when my dad got out of the military ... maybe 13 ... 12...and then it was uh, yeah then we were just blue-collared struggling at the low end of the white-collared world. Because my dad raised, he's very blue-collar. He used to have a pick-up truck he'd drive to work, although he rose to high ranks with MCI and British-Telecomm, he still drove an old pick-up truck with a bumper sticker that said "Executive Redneck" that he had made for his truck (laugh).

\*OK lets move on to this next question. This is again a broad question but feel free to give me any type of specifics you'd like, Dennis. What factors influenced you the most

into transferring from CSN to UNLV. And it can be a million in one different things, you're wife, to something as passing the bar exam to becoming a broker, to your mom, your dad, your old high school buddies. Maybe it just came within and you felt...

Right. Uh, well really I think, it worked kind of backwards for me actually. UNLV, that was my prize, my goal when I started CSN.

\*So you saw...

Yeah, I was already...

\*You had a goal.

I was already looking through, the fact that, like I said when I found out there was a transfer program that would just shoot me directly into UNLV, all I had to do was graduate CSN ... to me, that was my ticket, that was my opening to get a university diploma. So, I was looking at the 4-year degree. I was looking at the UNLV bachelor's degree, how do I get it? And then they said UNLV will shoot you right through, bam! So for me it was kind of backwards I guess. I wasn't looking at it from CSN, CSN was just my first stop. And I'm glad it was there you know, but that's where my focus was.

\*So probably, it sounds to me like the biggest influencing factor is you knew what you wanted before you got started.

Right. You know I do want to say one thing. It's funny to say something about your mother or father having an influence. When I first started, like in my first class, I was working and taking a class, because we hadn't decided to do it full time yet. And I was having a hard time with the instructor. And not the instructor, but a hard time with the math class. And I talked to my mother on the phone, I guess you'd probably have to understand the relationship between me and my mother, but I'm not going to get into it she's my mother, I love her, that's about it. But you know other than that she isn't very motivated to do a whole lot, never has been. Um, I called her up and I was complaining about this class, about how difficult it was, and she said, "Well, you know it's not such a big of deal if you don't do it, if you just quit." And I don't know what that was but that really pissed me off, I didn't want to quit. You know.

\*Is this like an old-fashioned mentality? Because it wasn't uncommon at all for younger generations that didn't have the education, they didn't want their kids, you know the further you go back in history. You know, you gotta be out here in the farms and the coal mines, you've got no business in school, you need to make money and bring that back to the family. Was it that mentality or was it just...

No, I ...

\*...Envy?

I think in her own way she was just trying to let me know that failure is OK. That's just what I viewed. I was like "She's trying to let me know that failure is OK, but it's not OK. I've already failed. I'd been failing for 10 years." I didn't want to fail anymore, you know.

\*So it kind of angered you because ...

Yeah. That's what she's done her whole life. Every time the going gets tough, she quits. You know and she just, she has no career she has no motivation. I was like, I love my mom but she doesn't do anything, she just exists and that's not what I wanted. And when she told me that, what she said, I know she was trying to support me, but it sort of ...

\*She's still married to your dad though right?

(laughs) Yeah. Well, no, no, no. She's not. No, my dad divorced her after my brother moved out and joined the military. They were together 27 years.

\*Wow, that's something, that says a lot about your mom.

Yeah, yeah.

\*So yeah, I'm sure there's some very positive things about your mom because you're a product of her. Whether it's through her shortcomings that made her who you are ...

Yeah.

\*Well at least you love your mom.

Yeah. She aggravates me because she's got potential. You know, she's an intelligent woman and it drives me nuts when she calls me up and tells me she's got this great idea and another six weeks go by and you talk to her and she's completely forgotten it. Why don't you do something? Pick something and do it.

\*It's a little like my turn on.

Yeah

\*You're young and I'm sure that she's still willing to learn, perhaps through the example you are setting. It's never too late. Look at me I'm in the Doc. Program and I'm 56.

That's awesome.

\* I swore I would never go back to college, and 15 years later I was going after my master's degree, and after that, I'm never going to go back. And then. You know you can, well the same thing you experienced, you can only go so far as an administrator. I'm only a few without the P.H.d.

SIDE B ON TAPE, COUNTER RESETS TO 000

\*After this tape here Dennis. And I stopped it just 'cause it ran out on the first side. So we're on Side B here. Anyhow we were talking about, I was talking about me, but we should be talking about you.

(laughs)

\*People that have influenced you. And it sounds like your mom in an uncanny way has influenced you.

Uh-huh absolutely. Yeah, she's a source of influence. She's a source for inspiration simply because there's choices she has made in life that I don't want, like, and I don't want to do that.

\* How about your dad, or your wife?

She's a source of inspiration because she's such a hard worker (Dennis's wife). I mean, yeah, she's, I dunno, she sometimes ... I hope that I, you know, can work as much as she does. You know, I hope that I'm as successful, I'd like to be half as successful, she's very successful. And she's great at what she does and that's something to always admire and... One of the things my dad taught me a long time ago was, no matter what you're doing, if you don't like what you're doing, either change it, or look at somebody who does it better and do what they do. And that's pretty much all I've been doing for the last few years.

\*So you think your dad had any role in this? If you don't like what you're doing, change.

Um, not, yeah (pause). My dad had a lot of, all of his influence came when I was younger. The lessons he sort of beat into me ... stuck. And twenty years later, I had to hate the old man and hate myself and called him up and told him he was right. Yeah that was, that was tough. Yeah, since my dad and I have a good relationship now but most of his influence was something he seeded a long time ago.

\*He's pretty strict.

Yeah, he's very strict. Yeah. And it was for my own good, I just didn't see that when I was a kid.

\*So really, if there's anything, any factor that got you to transition from high school to CSN to the University, is it that aspiration that you had, would you say that's the highest, or was it maybe that incident with your mom or, and it could be more than one. Just..

I, it's kind of hard...

\*To rank them, or?

Yeah, I mean it's kind of hard to put my finger on it. I guess whatever do, my wife says I'm very driven. I don't think I am. I always feel like I'm lazy, I always feel like there's more that I need to do and I'm not doing anything so I feel lazy all the time. She says that I'm very driven and that I'm a bit obsessive about certain things 'cause they have to be done just right and if they're not, then I do it again until I can get it just right. So she says in that light I can be a little compulsive, a little obsessive but fairly driven.

\*You having a 4.0 says a lot.

(laughs)

\*It's very uncommon.

I don't know 'cause ... I guess so. Well at graduation at CSN when there was only eight of us on the stage, that's when it sunk in that yeah, I had achieved something fairly uncommon. So, uh that was kind of cool. Um, kind of made me feel a little weird, kind of shy, but you know, I'm not used to...I just want to get it done and go, you know? So I guess when I was a bartender I was always the best, whatever nightclub I went to I was always looking for the next better nightclub. Where could I make more money? What nightclub was...where was the hotspot because that's where I wanted to be the bartender. Um, so in that respect, my dad pointed this out to me, I worked at a nightclub in Florida and it's like the largest nightclub in the U.S. and they have like 1,000 applications a year for bartenders and they only hire six a year. And when I got hired, I ended up working there for five years. And he said, one time I was complaining I said, "I'm just a bartender" and he said "You know what? Yeah, but you're a bartender at the number one place in the country." And I was like "Yeah, but I'm just a bartender!" You know? And he said, "Every time you go to work you become the best bartender in the club or you go find another club where you can be the best." So I guess I've always been driven and have never really had a place to apply it.

\*Yeah I hope you don't stop with a bachelor's degree, I hope. Everything I've heard so far, you're setting the bar a little higher it sounds like.

Yeah I do every time. I'm over it, you know. My goals after this is my bachelor's, I want to go back to work and I want to go for my CFA: my Certified Financial Analyst. And then if I get that, that takes like three years. You test each year, unless you're familiar with it, or not, it's a working degree I guess certification. So, as a financial analyst you really want to have that.

\*You want to have your own business someday or do you want to work for somebody...?

Ultimately I want to work for myself, I definitely do want to ... I would really like to go to work to begin with "I know I need to cut my teeth as an analyst, I know there's things I need to learn, and I'm only going to learn at a company, at a corporation of some size.

Mid-level, something like that, and I'm going to need to do that. Um, beyond that, in the years beyond that, I hope to absolutely run my own business of some sort. I'm not sure where I'm going to go with it. I haven't gotten that far yet.

\*We talked a little bit earlier about influencing people in your life, especially (pause) who were part of that decision to go after the baccalaureate degree. Did the teachers or counselors have any influence or were they just part of the overall process. You know what I'm saying? Sometimes, like my high school teacher never gave up on me.

Right.

\*I thought for sure I was not college material. Looking back he was just someone that never gave up on me. Someone that probably, I think in the eyes of a lot of people, I was most likely to fail. But I look back, and I'm very thankful for that individual. And I've run into people over the years, and I've been in education for many, many years, probably about thirty years. Where one faculty member can make or break a student's career pathway.

I think uh, I've had, I had two teachers in high school who were influential in the long run, because I look back now and I can see what they were trying to do with me. It was my geometry teacher and my uh, my science, my chemistry teacher. My chemistry teacher was trying to do everything she could do to keep me out of trouble, but because she saw something there. And she told me, she said, "You have a natural inclination to question things. You want to know more. Ever time I put something down, you immediately go 'Oh that's cool!' and you get excited and you start doing something and you want to learn more. But when you leave here, I can't get you back because you don't take it out of the classroom with you. You've got to learn to expand and carry it with you and try to learn." And that was a big problem for me because I had other things going on out of school. But you know I'd come into chemistry class and I was doing really well in that class. My geometry teacher, I was, actually she was my algebra teacher, not my geometry. I transferred in from another school, 9<sup>th</sup> grade, came into 10<sup>th</sup> grade, had horrible scores in algebra, wasn't very good in math. And she worked really hard with me. She said, "You have no problems with math." She said, "You need to learn to sit down and do it more."

\*It was just a matter of focusing.

Yeah. It was just a matter, pretty much that was the bottom line with all my teachers. With anybody who tried to, any of the ones who, teachers either hated me or they were always trying to mother me. You know, and that's to me when I was in high school, teachers you're just, it was like, "Look, back off. I'll do what I want to do." Those teachers either hated that, it was the bane of their existence, or I had the teachers that would spend a lot of time lecturing me. Trying to, you know, and most of it was "You need to focus..."

\*They saw something in you.

Yeah, yeah. But those two teachers: Mrs. Millers and Ms. Vagan (sp?) As far as CSN, I don't...

\*Counselors? You ever have a need to go to counselors?

No I didn't, no. I went to a counselor in high school and I pretty much walked out of there with the impression that I was stupid and I refused to ever go to a counselor again because I knew I wasn't stupid but I wasn't, and I haven't been to a counselor since. (Pause) Now I figure I just, uh, if there's something I want to learn I'll figure it out on my own or go a round-a-bout way.

\*Some of the people you met in your classes, did they have any influence on your direction? These are kind of like side-line questions...

No, that's fine.

\*I'm just trying to find if we've exhausted everything here as far as influencing factors for you to eventually go to UNLV.

Um, I'm trying, I'm really thinking if there's.

\*And if there's not, that's OK.

Yeah, I don't think there is any.

\*I just want to make sure that we consider all possibilities.

You know, I think I'm one of those kind of people, I take more of my ambition and my drive and my, most of the impetuous that I have to do things comes from negative situations, people I DON'T like. You know, people who tick me off and say I can't do it. Then, then as soon as they challenge me then it's over. I can't stop. Then I have to show them "Hey, you're wrong."

\*There's a lot of characteristics I see in myself—a backwards approach to education. I was terribly weak in science. I picked up some magazines, Psychology Today, and the article focused on confronting your weaknesses. I don't know how in the hell I ever got in an engineering program. There's more math in engineering, electrical engineering than most, compared to mechanical engineering, civil engineering, aeronautical engineering, production engineering. Including graduate school there was just so much math and I hated it. The only thing that got me through was competition.

Right, right.

\*Which is weird. It was like it was wrong because I would do all that I could to try to finish the exam faster than anybody else, get an A, try to get a perfect score, and if you



gave me that same exam a week later I'd probably flunk it. I didn't care what I was learning, I just wanted to get that A to prove to people that said I couldn't do it. Which is backwards, but I think you understand.

Yeah. (Laughs) A little competitive with my classmates.

\*Do you ever look up your buddies from high school, although they probably weren't your buddies, from the student organizations?

No. No, I have absolutely. Last year was my 80 thousandth anniversary, whatever they keep track of those things. I guess 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, reunion, that's it, reunion. I had, I know one guy, because of my wife we contacted him a couple of years ago. He was a friend of mine in high school, and I have no desire to talk to anybody for those years and he called last year and said, "Oh you got to go to the reunion." "No," I said, "You can go, tell them I'm dead." (Laughs) "I'm not going back there."

\*I kind of knew what that answer would be, it's just, I wanted to get it here because I feel the same way about high school. So,

Right.

\*It might be a novelty, but I'm sure all of the brainy kids are "I just don't give a damn about this" you know.

Right.

\*Move on, you got your life, I've got mine.

Exactly.

\*Although some of my high school teachers would be totally flabbergasted. Doing what I'm doing, or accomplished what I've accomplished over the years.

Oh I know my principal would be. Oh he would be, he was one, he was always trying to, as far as he was concerned I was the next prisoner at the local prison, he just couldn't get me there fast enough.

\*So, your minor is in Chinese?

Yes, yes.

\*Why is that? I mean, is that something you thought of a long time ago, or?

No, it's just something that... actually I didn't think of that until (pause) until I found out they had that at UNLV.

\*It's just the...

My wife says it's because of the challenge. I don't, I'm not really sure, a lot of things.

\*Why not Russian? Why not Japanese? Why not Spanish? Why Chinese?

Well, I think it comes, it comes more from, I've always sort of had a thing for Kung Fu, for martial arts. And I uh, I train in Hung Chow (sp?), which is Chinese fast wrestling and I also do Chow Lung Far Gow (sp?). But um, it's always been something I guess in, from my younger days as a kid. 'Cause the martial arts movies, the Kung Fu, the Bruce Lee stuff was always ...

\*What's your favorite one?

Uh, well, actually, uh, "Big Boss" is one of my all-time favorites, but I also like "Enter of the Dragon." I like any Bruce Lee but "Big Boss" was definitely, yeah I mean that was probably about my favorite one.

\*That was a Bruce Lee flick?

Yeah, yeah.

\*That was before "Enter of the Dragon."

Yeah, yeah. Well, it's an older one. They were out before I was allowed to watch them. But, you know, "Big Boss" was one of his movies that he made from Hong Kong and "Enter of the Dragon" was the one and only American-made.

\*That's my favorite martial arts. I've watched that about 10 times.

Yeah.

\*If you rewind it when he goes up against the big tall guy and breaks the...

Oh, oh. Karem Abdul Jabar? No no, he's in the...he's not in that one.

\*Enter the Dragon where he goes into the island.

Yeah yeah.

\*Mr. Han man.

Yeah, with the claws. (Laughs). At the end, yeah.

\*You see the scene of the big coliseum there where he goes up against the tall guy that kills his sister.

Yes. Yes. OK. That's the one where he starts off, where they do the back of the hand. It's "POW!" It's great. That's awesome.

\*I rewind it several times and watch it over and over.

That's wang-chung.

\*Because when he's practicing in his room before the match and the lady comes in while he's doing his routine exercises and he stops with his leg straight up in the air...what phenomenal speed.

Yeah, amazing speed. He's reflexes are just unbelievable.

\*I don't know what this has to do with my dissertation! ☺

(Laughs) Sorry about that. We were talking about. Oh that was the Chinese. We were talking about why we chose my minor.

\*It was just a novelty because it related to your side interest in martial arts.

And that's pretty much, uh, the culture. I just...

\*And it might come in handy some day in business.

It's a good, you know, I have to look at it from an economic standpoint. There, you know, even though the entire world is, right now in a global meltdown basically, China is still producing GDP's 10% a year. Even though they're shrinking quickly, I mean, so, they're going to be, China's going to be a massive economic power at some point. And I don't know, I wouldn't mind being able to use the minor.

\*Very good. I think we've pretty much exhausted everything here. Um, that's about 45-50 minutes.

Yeah.

\*And anything else you want to add to your experience. High school, to where you're at now, and even where you're headed, just...

The only thing I can say is whatever towards, I'm glad the opportunities are out there. Like community college, because I wasn't one of those students that ever would be able to do it the first time. I wasn't a student, I was just a guy that somebody was trying to teach. And I had to go through my life, but I'm glad that the opportunities, that there is the transfer program, you know, because without the transfer program I probably wouldn't be at UNLV. Because there's no other way in. You, you know.

\*You just weren't college bound on a high school...

NO.

\*You weren't thinking "I'm going to the university."

I didn't see any reason for it. I had to go live for awhile before I realized "Oh, yeah, they're right, there is a reason for it." You know and then, then with community college out there you have the opportunity to go do that. And the ones who had the transfer programs, that you can get back on that track that you should have been on fifteen years ago, but however it works, I'm just glad it's all there.

\*Very good. OK that's pretty much it. Um, let me turn this off here...

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## VITA

Graduate College  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Warren Glen Hioki

### Work Address:

College of Southern Nevada  
3200 E. Cheyenne Ave  
North Las Vegas, Nevada 89030

### Home Address:

1846 Bogey Way  
Henderson, Nevada 89074

### Degrees:

Bachelor of Science, Engineering Technology, 1975  
California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, California

Master of Science, Electrical Engineering, 1992  
San Jose State University, San Jose, California

### Special Honors and Awards:

TBAN Tech-Nevada Technology Educator of the Year, 2006  
Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce Educator of the Year, 2003  
Certificate of Commendation, U.S. Senator Harry Reid, 2003  
Senatorial Certificate of Commendation, U.S. Senator John Ensign, 2003  
Cisco Systems Achievement Award, 2003  
Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce Educator of the Year Finalist, 2002  
Las Vegas Asian Chamber of Commerce Educator of the Year Award, 2000  
Community College of Southern Nevada Most Outstanding Faculty Award, 1999  
Nevada Technical Education Leadership Award, American Technical Education Association, 1999  
UCCSN Outstanding Faculty Award, 1998  
California Polytechnic State University: Honors Graduate  
Cal Poly State University: W. T. Wells Sr. Memorial Scholarship Award  
Japanese American Citizens League National Scholarship Award

Publications:

Hioki, W. (2001). *Telecommunications* (4rth ed.). Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall Publishing.

Hioki, W. (2001). *Telecommunications Laboratory Manual* (4rth ed.). Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall Publishing.

Hioki, W. (2001). *Telecommunications Solutions Manual* (4rth ed.). Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall Publishing.

Dissertation Title: Predisposition Factors of Career and Technical Education Transfer Students: A Hermeneutic Phenomenology Study

Dissertation Examination Committee:

Chairperson, Dr. Mario Martinez, Ph.D.

Committee Member, Dr. Cecelia Maldonado, Ph.D.

Committee Member, Dr. Robert Ackerman, Ed.D.

Graduate Faculty Representative, Dr. LeAnn Putney, Ph.D.