

The influence of students' background on their perceptions of success, and how these perceptions influence their experiences of success in a higher education institution in Turks and Caicos Islands

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Abstract

The influence of students' background on their perceptions of success, and how these perceptions influence their experiences of success in a higher education institution in Turks and Caicos Islands.

The study has a focus on the phenomenon of students' success through their individual experiences, and the role backgrounds and perceptions play in influencing their success while at college. It gives clearer insights of the participants psyche at present and their status prior to admission to the Turks and Caicos Island Community College (TCICC). It provides deeper understanding into influences in their lives that have contributed to or impeded their success. The study mainly focused on a purposeful sample of ten students who are enrolled in any Bachelor's degree program offered at the college. It utilized a biographical life history methodology aligned with a social interpretive paradigm that is qualitative in its research and is grounded in hermeneutics.

Narrative interpretive analysis was used as the focus is on the meaning participants attribute to their life experiences. Data was collected using demographic data, participatory photography and semi structured interviews; followed by a two-stage analysis process. The first stage of the analysis was the production of the individual narrative. In the second stage, the model of reflexive thematic analysis of Braun and Clark's (2006) was utilized to guide the analysis and assist with the identification, analysis and determination of different commonalities based on categories or themes found in the data. Supportive evidence was provided through photo-elicitation images.

The findings were discussed through a Bourdieusian lens, utilizing Bourdieusian metatheory with its thinking tools of habitus, capital and field as I sought to address the research questions.

The findings revealed that different socioeconomic backgrounds and past experiences of students have an influence on their perception of success, and these perceptions influence their reality or personal dispositions and experiences of success at college. These perceptions also helped to shape the practices and choices of students and impacted on their thinking, personalities and prospects.

This study can aid TCICC in understanding the impact experiences and context have on their students' success and assist other higher education institutions in the region in preparing for students' success. It can help the Department of Education assist high schools in the preparation of its students for the smooth transition into their higher education experience by providing theoretical and practical knowledge to assist high school teachers to adequately prepare students for college.

Key Words: Bourdieusian metatheory, students' perception, widening participation

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the study

1.1 Introduction

Students' perceptions of success are shaped, created and recreated as a result of their interactions and life experiences (Winkle-Wagner, 2010). Personal factors and life experiences such as socioeconomic class, beliefs, lifestyles, as well as values and cultural background (Bourdieu, 1977; Thomas, 2002) which help shape their view of the world and how they perceive their success, must therefore be considered in this study (Reay, 2004). In fact, their perceptions influence their disposition and attitudes towards learning, as well as how they interpret, coordinate, analyze and experience the stories of their lives in and out of college (Haman et al., 2012; Reay, 2004). As a result, it can be deduced that how students engage with their current experiences and perceive their future is influenced by their past experiences, which can impact their performances and success experiences (Swartz, 1997).

Students' backgrounds experiences and demographics differ and these differences can influence how they perceive their college experiences and success. Students' subjective experiences of college life and success can be positively or negatively influenced by these and other factors such as family, socioeconomic status, prior academic achievements, to name a few.

Early learning experiences and socialization within the family, help shape the students' perceptions, which are molded and recreated as they encounter various life experiences (Winkle-Wagner, 2010). This assertion from Winkle-Wagner's work contributes to establishing a solid framework within which to conduct this study. The way students are socialized, as well as their class settings have an indirect influence on their success, because it is within the home that the educational culture is shaped. As a result, depending on the educational cultures exhibited within the family, students will or will not be exposed to, and be provided or not provided with, educational and social tools that can influence their perceptions of success, and by extension their experiences of success.

Furthermore, I believe that stories about students' high school experiences can influence how they perceived success and that these perceptions can influence their experiences of success in college. This will be further elaborated on in Chapter 2. Studies conducted outside of the context of this study and further afield in New Zealand have shown that when students excel academically in school, it is an indicator they will succeed in college (Engler & Smyth, 2011).

It can therefore be concluded that how students process and internalize their past and present experiences as well as how they perceive their future, can have an impact on their academic performance and success (Swartz, 1997). Furthermore, perceptions can influence students to think in pessimistic or optimistic ways. The decision, whether conscious or unconscious, can influence whether they adopt a growth mindset and succeed or maintain a fixed mindset and have a negative impact on their success and experiences at college.

These assertions are crucial to this study which seeks to understand how students' perceptions of success are shaped by their background experiences and how this influences on their day-to-day experiences of success at Turks and Caicos Islands Community College (TCICC). Understanding the context of the study will aid in framing this research.

1.2 Context of the research

This study is being conducted at Turks and Caicos Islands Community College (TCICC), the lone Government tertiary education institution, established in 1994 (Education Sector Plan, 2013-2017). This college is situated in a small island state, Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI) which has a diverse population of about thirty-five thousand (35,000) persons (Education Sector Plan, 2013-2017). Its indigenous people (known as belongers) are in the minority, with the remainder of persons coming from other countries primarily Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

There are two campuses on the plan. The main campus is situated on Grand Turk which is the capital and the other on Providenciales, the most populated island. From these sites, programs are offered in varying disciplines which matriculate into students being awarded Diplomas, Associate Degrees, and Bachelor Degrees. The TCICC attracts students from diverse backgrounds who are at varying levels of academic attainment and tertiary education readiness. The total enrollment at TCICC is about three hundred and twenty students (320) with about one hundred and twenty (120) at the main campus and about two hundred (200) on the campus in Providenciales (Education Sector Plan, 2013-2017).

In recent years, governments worldwide have become increasingly involved in the creation and support of higher education institutions (McCaffery, 2010) to develop knowledge economies. This participation has seen the gap in access to higher education between the elite and the lesser advantaged narrowed, with universities offering increased number of programs. As a result, opportunities for the diverse groups of students have been accommodated, along with the traditional intake of high school graduates. Notwithstanding, many global policy intervention strategies have also been centered around retention, the success of students and diversity (Jones &

Thomas, 2005) and these have caused small island developing nations to rethink their position about higher education in their various states.

The local TCI government has recognized that there cannot be a one size fits all approach to providing citizens with access to higher education. Strategies utilized in other contexts particularly in the developed countries, may not be the best fit for them as a developing nation. Taking into consideration the different factors that interact uniquely to affect participation within their context, the government determined that different pathways were required if their approach to widening participation and access was to be successful (Trow, 2006; McCaffery, 2010; Gibson, 2016). With that knowledge, the government has used widening participation to advance its agenda on access inequality and development of the “knowledge economy” (Education Sector Plan 2018-2022).

To support fair and equitable access to quality learning opportunities and students’ success (Education Sector Plan 2018-2022), local government has instituted several national directives, created statutory policies, and implemented national and institutional funding instruments (Education Sector Plan 2018-2022). One of its strategic imperatives is to create an educational system that values diversity and equity while also allowing for social mobility and economic prospects for its people and the country (Education Sector Plan 2018-2022). It has been stated that the government is attempting to develop a highly skilled, affluent, appropriately qualified and educated workforce that can contribute to its growing economy. While this helps to reduce the number of expatriates employed to fill the unskilled labour gaps in the country, it is also a way for working-class students to change themselves in order to become liberated or a means for them to improve their quality of living, move out of poverty and make a productive contribution to society (Archer & Leathwood, 2003).

This gave birth to the establishment of the local Turks and Caicos Island Community College’s TCICC (Education Sector Plan, 2013-2017) whose vision for its students is in sync with the government’s strategic imperative. The vision seeks as follows:

“to provide quality education for all sectors of the Community by equipping individuals with the knowledge, skills and dispositions that would enable them to access emerging and existing opportunities, exercise their civic responsibilities prudently, enhance their social and cultural lives and become productive citizens.” TCICC Strategic Plan 2015-2020.

It is Government’s vision that TCICC, the lone government higher education institution in the country, will be a successful training institution, and at the same time an enabler of social

mobility and economic growth. It will produce educated citizens that have competencies, knowledge and skills, that will meet the needs in the labour market and improve the social, cultural and economic capital of the country (Education Sector plan, 2017-2021; Dole & Griffin, 2012; Gibson, 2016; Ramaley, 2015; Hawkes, 2016; Altbach, 1998).

In the view of the local government, the development of these skillsets begins before college, while students are in high school (Education Sector Plan 2018-2022). As a result, high schools are expected to prepare students for higher education, and students who graduate from high school should be able to continue their studies at TCICC if they so desired (Education Sector Plan 2018-2022). In this regard, the nation's four government high schools are critical in providing students with the certification required to matriculate into higher education. These four different high school contexts provide students with unique and varied educational experiences within their teaching and learning settings.

It is in these settings that students are graded according to their academic ability with students in the A and B streams expected to gain certification to advance to further education or enter higher education. Students in the C and D streams are at risk of not achieving any academic qualifications. If they do, certification will be in the technical subjects and will not be enough for them to receive entry into higher education.

Largely, at the end of Grade 11 (16 years old) in high school, students complete their Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) meritocratic certificates which are Regional Caribbean-wide examinations that act as admission predictors for matriculation into higher education.

The use of high school examination results as the primary determinant for entry into higher education is a system that is used in many countries. The Turks and Caicos Islands is no exception. The TCICC set the criteria and requirements for students to access any of its degree or diploma programmes and uses the students' academic performance in their CXC's for admission. In the case of TCICC, most students entering come from diverse backgrounds and have a minimum of four general proficiency CXC certificates. One of these certificates is expected to be in the area of study as well as English and Mathematics (TCICC brochure).

The TCI government uses three key indicators to gauge a benchmark to measure success. These include the percentage passes of CXC qualifications acquired to help students matriculate into TCICC; the number of graduates from TCICC (Digest 2017); and the level of unemployment within the country (Education Sector Plan, 2017-2021).

Another of government's strategic imperatives is that irrespective of your socioeconomic background, all persons should have fair access to quality learning opportunities in higher education (Education Sector Plan, 2018-2022). Its principal here is that there should be social equity, thus reducing socioeconomic inequalities (Gibson, 2016). Accordingly, the TCI government has practiced democratization of education from primary to higher education for its locals, providing free education at the lower levels and full sponsored scholarships for some locals at the higher education level.

The socioeconomic status as well as the diversity of the people, present challenges to many gaining access to learning opportunities at TCICC. Due to the lack of finances many students leaving high school (where education is free) with the prerequisites for entry into TCICC, are unable to do so (Education Sector Plan, 2018-2022). However, those students whose parents have the financial resources are often sent abroad to higher education institutions while the peers from low socioeconomic environments remaining on island. To ease the financial burden, government offers scholarships to its citizen to pursue any degree program offered at TCICC regardless of their socioeconomic status. This provides opportunities for its locals to pursue an all-costs-paid college education with funding drawn from the public purse. This approach provided opportunities also for many mature locals and others who did not have a college education but worked to pursue their studies at TCICC. On the other hand, the large number of non-nationals living on island, many of whom are from the low socioeconomic class, are left to finance their own education. Here it can be seen how the differences in nationality caused social economic disparities which benefit the locals and marginalized the others (Kena et al. 2016, Horn & Carroll, 2007).

A closer examination at the provision of higher education access from the Caribbean perspective, a look at Barbados will provide a useful comparison. Barbados is geographically closer to TCI where this study is being conducted. A greater effort is being undertaken to increase higher education opportunities for those students who were previously marginalized and excluded through access (UWI Strategic Plan, 2017-2022). One of the Barbados government's main initiatives in accomplishing widening participation through access is making university education (Bachelor's degree) free for all, regardless of their socio-economic status or diverse needs. This provided greater opportunities for children from working class families and indicated progress towards achieving equity and diversity (Pryor et al. 2007). In fact, the university has made equity and diversity a strategic priority and has taken the initiative to implement policies, programs, and

practices with a view of targeting a diverse student body and making university accessible (UWI Strategic Plan, 2017-2022).

Like Barbados, Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI) realized there is an achievement gap between first generation students (students who are the first in their family to graduate) and continuing generations. The country has therefore provided opportunities for those non-traditional students from disadvantaged backgrounds, mature students, and those in technical and professional roles (Trow, 2006) to advance their education, through the implementation of new programs, policies, and practices. The inclusion of these diverse groups has seen an expansion of the student market (Goodman et. al, 2016), and students who bring with them to university a wide array of diverse prior experiences, that can influence their perceptions of success.

1.3 Understanding Theory

It is not only the individual who attends college that matters, but the “*where and how*” they experience college that should also be explored (Holton & Riley, 2013). This is important, as students attending TCICC are from divergent social backgrounds and encounter different experiences while at college, all of which will be explored and discussed in this study.

Bourdieuian metatheory with its interrelated thinking tools of capital, habitus and field forms the theoretical underpinnings for this study. This theory provides a practical window that allows one to understand and examine how the students’ life experiences of their past contributed to shaping the decisions and practices they make and how these influence their thinking, personalities and prospects (Bourdieu, 1977; Maton, 2012). This theory has been utilized by some scholars to discuss the class structure or social context and experiences of different students in higher education which is also important to this study (Bathmaker et. al, 2016); Grenfell, 2012b). *Capital* refers to the resources or assets individuals have at their disposal that give them position in society (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). *Habitus*, on the other hand, is that series of dispositions acquired throughout life that help shape or guide how individuals perceive and experience the world, their attitudes, aspirations, thoughts, and actions, that remain with them across different contexts (Reay, 2004; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Finally, *field* is those spaces, environments, or settings where persons interact and compete. However, the position of students in any field depends upon how much capital they bring into it (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). These tools are all interrelated and will be fleshed out in more details in Chapter 6 along with some limitations of this theory.

While casually conversing with several faculty members of TCICC, and interacting with students on a regular basis, a lamentation often highlighted was the academic under-achievements of several students and their poor application to their studies. They also questioned the background experiences of the students and voiced that the college work appears too difficult for them. These conversations sparked a curiosity to determine the identities of students that fit this profile, what their background experiences were like, how they perceive success and how their perception influence their success.

Key determinants in the conclusions drawn in this study were possible through open talks with some students registered in the bachelor's degree programs. Participants openly shared about their past background experience, their perception of success, and how their perceptions influenced their experiences of success at college. This information gave a clear understanding as to how their practices and decisions were shaped and how these influence their thinking, disposition and success in TCICC (Bourdieu, 1977; Maton, 2012).

Some researchers have explored the factors that are important to success and what governments and institutions are doing to encourage that success (Kahu & Nelson, 2018; McKendry et.al, 2014). However, a need exists in research to further explore this construct of success from the subjective understanding of the students' perspective through their individual lenses. For institutions to design better programmes and institutional dynamics for greater success, further exploration must be done to discern how the life and past experiences of students work to shape the decisions and practices they make and how these influence their thinking, personalities and dispositions (Picton et. al, 2018). This study is therefore designed to investigate: the influence of students' background on their perceptions of success, and how these perceptions influence their experiences of success in a higher education institution in the Turks and Caicos Islands.

1.4 Position of the researcher

I am a heterosexual woman of colour, who was raised and still resides in a small Caribbean developing island. I grew up in a working-class family with eight siblings, where neither of my parents achieved a formal education beyond Grade 6 (11 years). However, my mom always promoted education as a means of enhancing my life and wanted me to achieve a degree and be more successful than she was.

I received my higher education both in the Caribbean and the UK and currently occupy a middle socio-economic status, which is as a result of continuing my education and working in various education fields.

My professional career led me to several small island developing nations (St. Vincent, Turks and Caicos Islands, St. Lucia, Barbados etc.) all with similar demographics, social and educational structures. Over my 32-year career as an educator, I have focused on how students can be successful or achieve their goals in my capacity of teacher, trainer, curriculum developer, consultant, and mentor. The last four years have been spent working within the Department of Education, in a small island developing nation as an instructional designer for K-Grade 9 (4yrs - 15yrs), also with responsibility for programs offered in High school. While in this position, coupled with the years of experiences in my hometown, I had the opportunity to create structures and frameworks, implement and monitor various programs, as well as work with principals, teachers, and students from K-Grade 9 on various pedagogic practices, personal and social activities to promote students' success.

Having done work at the pre-college level, I have decided to engage students at the college level in TCICC, to gather further knowledge and understanding of the part prior experiences play in their success, and how various environments, personal dispositions, and socio-economic backgrounds, have influenced or impacted on that success and those experiences while in college.

I have decided to explore the intimate details of the hows, whys, etc. of their experiences through their life stories. Therefore, by zeroing in on their success, perceptions of success and prior experiences, allow me to have a better understanding of the factors that are influencing that success and therefore enable me to make recommendations to TCICC, government's policy, high school principals and teachers, to improve future students' lives.

From a professional perspective, this study is particularly relevant to my new career as an education consultant, as I use my expertise and experience to help ministries within countries especially in the Caribbean and Africa, to develop holistic student-centered strategies that will assist in creating institutional designs that fosters the success of students.

Additionally, considering the COVID-19 pandemic which has impacted on many higher education institutions, I have also been approached to address a struggling higher education institution in a Caribbean Island by assisting with their teacher training and widening participation and access agenda.

This research study will help bring a greater understanding to the projects which I undertake by allowing me to utilize the knowledge gained of the wide dimensions of students' experiences or elements that hinder or influence their success at college. This could include their classroom experiences, socioeconomic background, and relationship with family, friends, faculty or the wider community. A knowledge of these factors will provide a wider basis for me to understand the approaches or strategies to which students would respond, with the goal of averting or curtailing the likelihood of failure, or less than satisfactory performances.

From my personal view point I am aware of the inability of students to move beyond their social strata, and I am desirous to see them progress and achieve success despite their background experiences or socio-economic standings. Social class inequalities are prevalent from as early as K1 right through to high school. This has been a cause for concern, and it created in me the impetus and passion to assist disadvantaged students in accomplishing their goals.

As a result, it has set me to ponder how I can positively impact on students' views of success, especially those who come from lower socio-economic backgrounds and how I can provide solutions to effect change. This is a story which I have also lived, thus it allows me to have a greater appreciation of the unique needs and experiences of students coming from a low-income context. As a first-generation college student in my family, I know firsthand the effects past experiences can have on your personal disposition and perception of success, and how these can influence your measure of success in college.

I do agree and share the same opinion of fellow researchers that higher education plays a significant role in the academic development and social mobility of a society. It acts as a vehicle for academic and personal growth, as well as offers instruction and training to help develop skills and competencies necessary for a flexible workforce (Dole & Griffin, 2012; Gibson, 2016; Ramaley, 2015; Hawkes, 2016; Altbach, 1998). I am very much interested in Bourdieusian metatheory and how it will apply to this context.

Through the lens of this researcher, reality is seen from a social and psychological perspective (Wallace, 1999; Soini, et.al, 2011). The phenomenon under study is complex, therefore I have used the stories as told by the participants, who have shared their perspective as they envisage this world viewpoint. They have exposed their day-to-day interactions with their habitus and given insight of their interpretation of such. As researcher, however, I must go beyond mere observation of these elucidations and instead conceptualize their meanings through reliance

on data I obtained through interviews and picture diaries, so as to grasp a true sense of the participants' understanding of the situation.

1.5 Research aim and questions

The overarching purpose of this research was to understand how students' perceptions of success is shaped by their background experiences and how this in turn impacts on their day-to-day experiences of success in TCICC. The questions not only assisted me in acquiring a clearer personal insight of the participants psyche at present but alerted me of their status prior to admission to TCICC. The Bourdieusian metatheory, with its thinking tools of habitus, capital and field, had a notable effect on the questions, which through their link with real life situations and events allowed me to examine and bring a better understanding to answering them.

The main research question is:

How do students' backgrounds influence their perceptions of success and how do these perceptions influence their experiences of success in a higher education institution of Turks and Caicos Islands?

The sub questions to inform the main question are:

1. What are the educational experiences and context that students bring to the higher education institution?
2. How do students define success in college?
3. What are the factors students believe contribute/do not contribute to their success as they define it?
4. How does students' perception of success influence their experiences at the college?

1.6 Overview of the thesis

This thesis has a structure of six chapters. Chapter 1 provides a broad overview of the context of study, the position of the researcher, the research questions and general overview of the thesis clearly stating the rationale for the study.

Chapter 2 outlines relevant literature. It commences with an overview of the success agenda through widening participation, then examines students' perception and how these perceptions are developed, as well as reviews some students' background characteristics. It furthermore distills major findings from the literature surrounding all-encompassing categorization (which includes non-arbitrary definitions) of success. It then addresses first

generation students and takes a look at non-traditional students. This chapter also contains literature that provides a rationale and justification for the variables to be examined in this study and concludes by filling in the literature gaps.

Chapter 3 provides an outline of the research design and comprises seven sections. The first section addresses the aim and research questions. The second section details my choice of narrative inquiry. In the third section the research design is laid out, followed by an analysis of the methodology and methods used. In the fourth section of this chapter the data analysis process is addressed. The data is analysed in two stages: the first stage recounts students' stories, while stage 2 examines the data for commonalities and themes. I utilized the model of reflexive thematic analysis of Braun and Clark's (2006) to guide the analysis and assist with the identification, analysis and determination of different commonalities based on categories or themes found in the data. The fifth section discusses ethics, followed by reflexivity in section six. The final section discusses validity.

Chapter 4 presents the study findings. It has set out the participants' stories highlighting their different educational journeys.

Chapter 5 discusses the commonalities and themes that resulted from the data collected. In addition, it provides supporting evidence through photo-elicitation images.

Chapter 6 discusses the key findings presented in Chapter 4 and 5 and how the study answers the primary research question. It seeks to address the research questions more interpretatively and explicitly through Bourdieusian lens, by using Bourdieusian metatheory with its thinking tools of habitus, capital, and field. It also presents the limitations to the study and set out some implications for knowledge, policy, high school, personal development and practice and future research.

CHAPTER 2 -Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter the context of the study was outlined. This chapter begins with a brief overview around the literature of widening participation policies and initiatives. Whilst my intention is not to critique its policies and practices, it is necessary to provide a rationale for some of the factors being discussed around the widening participation agenda. The discussion also helps frame this research and provide wider context. The chapter then examines student perceptions and how perceptions are developed. It is important to understand how students perceive their past experiences as these perceptions can shape their thinking, disposition, and understanding of their college experiences and what they will become while there. It then distills major findings from the literature surrounding all-encompassing categorization (which includes non-arbitrary definitions) of success that will serve as academic support for the participants in this study. Next it examines first generation and non-traditional students and concludes by filling in the literature gaps.

2.2 Advancing the success agenda through Widening Participation

For many years, higher education institutions were seen as sites of inequality (Reay & Lucey, 2003; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). There has been lower social class participation especially within elite or traditional universities and this has led to the call for social inclusion and the need to foster higher levels of social equality. Politicians globally have acknowledged this, and as a result, have created more inclusive higher education systems that support fair and equitable access to quality learning opportunities for all, where barriers for students to enroll have been removed. (Cambell, 2020; Dole & Griffin, 2012; Gibson, 2016). Notwithstanding, many global policy intervention strategies and programs have also been centered around access (Cambell, 2020), retention (Baines et al., 2022), the success of students and diversity (Jones & Thomas, 2005) to facilitate this agenda and this has caused small island developing nations such as the Turks and Caicos Islands and others, to rethink their position regarding higher education in their respective states.

This is evident in reports that were commissioned by governments in some developed countries that helped to shape their policies. For instance, the UK government clearly draws on the UK's White Paper 'The Future of Higher Education (2003), to bring into focus their political agenda on providing access to higher education to underrepresented groups of students (Cambell,

2020). As a result, new directives were created and handed down by the UK government which caused higher education institutions to generate different pathways to increase participation and inclusion of underrepresented groups within their institutions (Gibson, 2016; Tight, 1998; Thomas, 2000 (Marginson, 2017). This further caused some to adopt relational strategies (Baines et al., 2022) and explore new approaches and programs in which to support diversity (Quaye & Harper, 2015). The adaptation of these strategies and approaches is great as these will increase, as well as ensure equity practices and help ameliorate some challenges that can impact on the success of students and enhance their experiences while participating in their higher education experiences (Alymer, 2020). Here, widening participation from the UK perspective was seen as a means of providing opportunities for those students from underrepresented groups especially from low socioeconomic or deprived backgrounds to have access to higher education and participate successfully (Campbell. 2022; Boliver et al., 2022; DfES,2006).

Australia, Canada, and even Germany, a country that has practiced social exclusion within tertiary education for many years (Mergner et. al, 2017) are on board with the agenda which is predicated by the notion of differentiation and social inclusion. They placed due care on access and retention especially on students who were from the working class (Gidley, et. al, 2010). Although these working class students do not possess significant cultural, economic and social capital (Carolan & Wasserman, 2015; Jager 2009) as their elite peers, but lacked college preparation (Spiegler & Bednarek, 2013), and stand a high risk of not completing their studies (Finnie et al., 2010), these “cultural outsiders” (Bourdieu 1983) are now given an opportunity to have access to, and advance to higher education, something that would otherwise be out of their reach (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

A proportion of universities globally went a step further than just thinking about access and have reexamined their relationship with individual students and started to look at ways in which they could be committed to their experiences (Kuh, et al., 2005). Although the efforts to support diversity must be applauded, I believe these are insufficient as students need not only to have access to higher education but be successful while there. Therefore, the experiences students encountered while at college, notwithstanding those background factors that might influence their experiences or impact on their experiences and success while there, must form part of the dialogue.

While there is access for these underprivileged or working-class group of students, the extent to which they realize their goals in higher education is dependent on the adaptation of their primary habitus. The perceptions and experiences they attained due to the experiences and

interactions acquired in life, formed their world view and influenced how they perceive success (Bourdieu, 1977; Thomas, 2002, Reay, 2004, Winkle-Wagner, 2010).

Involvement in the widening participation agenda by governments and higher education institutions alike has provided opportunities for social integration and equity, causing the gap in access to higher education between the elite and the lesser advantaged to narrow (Payne, 2012). What was once just for the elite has been widened to become a more diversified system (Campbell, 2020). As a result, opportunities for diverse groups of students have been accommodated, with more students from non-traditional backgrounds being given the opportunity to access education that would otherwise be out of their reach due to their background experiences (Dole & Griffin, 2012; Gibson, 2016.) This resonates with patterns of participation in TCICC, where underrepresented groups are comprised of persons from low socioeconomic backgrounds with families that have no tertiary education experiences. Furthermore, it is also a way of allowing working-class students to change their perceptions of success, to become liberated, or as a means for them to improve their quality of living, move out of poverty, advance the “social ladder” secure improved life- chances, and make a productive contribution to society (Archer & Leathwood, 2003; Payne, 2012; Byrne, 2005; Byrom & Lightfoot, 2013). Evidence suggests that students having access to, and attending college, may not be the portal out of penury for them (Blythe, 2001) and move up the social ladder as many of them might believe. From the UK perspective it was found that students who graduated, and were from disadvantaged backgrounds, were less likely by 5 % to be employed than their peers from a higher social class (Cabinet Office, 2012). This shows that the background of students has some influence on their success.

Pragmatically, it would be great to say there is a level field as it relates to those entering higher education. That’s not the case, because despite advances made by governments and higher education institutions alike to improve access and increase participation in higher education, educational inequality persists, and students from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to attend university than their more privileged peers (Baines et al., 2022; Martin, 2010). It appears the social class gap entry remains (Altbach, et al., 2009), where those students from disadvantage backgrounds are excluded to participate in higher education while most students enrolled are those from privileged backgrounds (Crozier et al., 2010; Vignoles & Crawford, 2010).

The Bradley Report of 2008 into Australian higher education, and Reay et al. (2001), certainly also draw on the view that although some marginalized groups have increased access and participation, there remains an underrepresentation of the indigenous people, students from many

ethnic minority backgrounds, persons from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, disabled students, and those living in remote areas. This is not only the case in the Australian context, for the Turks and Caicos Islands have shown there are some marginalized individuals from different ethnicities, working class backgrounds and “non-belongers” (a term used for non-nationals), who have challenges accessing TCICC. However, despite this marginalization, the Turks and Caicos government maintained that higher education should be accessible to its citizens and has put in place lending mechanism and scholarship to its people to attend TCICC. For those who are not awarded scholarships, the Government introduced a student loan policy for its locals to support financing the cost of higher education (Education Sector Plan, 2017). This lessens the barriers and improves access for some. However, funding continues to be a challenge for those who do not hold “belonger-status” (non-residents) and are from low socio-economic backgrounds.

In summation, the literature has provided some persuasive arguments relating to how widening participation has helped to expand higher education and has benefitted students from all strata of society. However, although the agenda for governments and higher education institutions alike has been to promote fair and equitable access to quality learning opportunities for everyone regardless of socioeconomic background, what happens to students after they enter these institutions must be considered. Students bring into their college experience diverse backgrounds and experiences as well as their perceptions, how they process and internalize their past and present experiences, and perceive their future, can impact their performances and experiences of success while there (Swartz, 1997). There, within the widening participation literature, lies a key issue which is pertinent to this research; that of student backgrounds which can influence students’ perceptions of success. Furthermore, how these perceptions influence their experiences of success positively or negatively by presenting barriers to higher education or impeding on their progression while there (Gorard et al., 2006; Fbarriersuller et al., 2007).

2.3 Students’ Perception

A portion of this study is keen on understanding the impact perceptions have on students’ success. It is therefore important to understand how students perceive their experiences, backgrounds or contexts and their success, as their perceptions can influence how they interpret, interact and understand their experiences while at college and what they will become while there (Knight & Cunningham, 2004).

It is my belief that to understand students’ success, some emphasis must be placed on how students’ experiences influence their perceptions of success and their thinking (Yorke & Longden,

2004). As we unravel the concept of perception and the notion of success, having a subjective understanding of these and how they are perceived and achieved by students provide the opportunity to enrich present knowledge of their encounters (Haman et al., 2012; Reay, 2004). So, what is perception? It is when a person interprets or organizes sensory information from their environment through their beliefs, and this information gives meaning to their environment or world view (Siegle, 2013). Therefore, the perceptions of students impact their disposition and attitudes towards their learning, and can influence how they interpret, coordinate, analyze and experience the stories of their lives in and out of college and the way they view the world (Haman et al., 2012; Reay, 2004).

All students' background experiences are unique and therefore the perceptions generated or created from these experiences will vary from student to student. Their background experiences will have influence on the actual experiences as well as the beliefs or confidence they have in their ability to succeed at, or attend college (Siegle, 2000). In fact, these experiences influence how they think, plan, and interpret their life stories. Rubie-Davies (2006), in an extensive review, noted that whichever field (environment) students interact in can impact their self-perceptions and self-expectations. These studies found that there was a correlation between teachers' low expectations of students, and students' self-perceptions. When the self-perceptions of students decreased, they lacked motivation, which in turn impacted success. Although this study was not conducted in a higher education institution, its findings are also applicable to students in the higher education context.

It can therefore be deduced that the environments in which students interact can negatively or positively influence their perceptions, impacting on their experiences, expectations, and world view.

Perceived importance of college

Students' perception impacts significantly on their disposition role in how they view and interpret their experiences and how they set their goals and aspirations. As stated above, the field or environment in which students interact can negatively or positively influence their perceptions.

A study conducted by Stewart et al., (2007) explored the academic aspirations of African American adolescence students based on their home background. It was concluded that low-income or disadvantaged neighbourhoods had a negative impact or lowers their higher education goals and aspirations. This is understandable because, in some families where education is not prioritized or valued, students may believe that the natural progression after high school is to find

a job and earn a living (Maton, 2012). Because there is little or no emphasis or value placed on education within their households, the decision not to attend college may be regarded as expected social norms of the family (Maton, 2012). This is not true to all students coming from disadvantage backgrounds for in a study conducted by Sikhwariet and colleagues (2019) at a rural South African university on students' perception of some factors that had an influence on their academic performance, some students perceived that coming from a low socio economic background was a driver for them to work hard at college so as to allow them to advance or move up the social strata. These studies are interesting in that they show how your socialization and conditioning can influence your perceptions. They further show how neighbourhood, which is so difficult to control, can have an impact on how students perceive the importance of education and access to college. This is mainly due to their socialization and how education is perceived.

The perceptions of the importance of college is also influenced by the family and family relationships that students have encountered in their lives. Families and family relationships have an impact and play an important crucial part role in how students perceive the value of college and their success. Indeed, Coleman (1988) contends that the family and home environment are more important predictors of children's future than schools, and as such, the family is viewed as the initial providers and motors or the bedrocks of social capital (Coleman 1988; Winter, 2000). Coleman broadens the concept of family to include a broader understanding of kinship and embraces community development as a means of bridging family relationships through community connections or networks. As a result of development of these networks, social capital and value in the creation of personal skills and "human capital" are created. As these families within the community work together harmoniously through their various networks, sharing common values, expectations, and social bonds, their children's perceptions of the world and the importance of college can be influenced (Coleman, 1988). Furthermore, high social capital is associated with a lower likelihood of early school dropout (Coleman, 1988). Here one can see the critical role that social capital plays in raising and sustaining a generation and society in both family and community. Yosso (2005) assures us in her *Community Cultural Wealth* that students of colour from low income families acquire some forms of capital that they bring to higher education. She emphasizes that precollege experiences derived from their extended familial and community networks as discussed by Coleman (1988), provide them with familial capital in the form of knowledge and help shape and foster their aspirations and hope for the future, which they bring with them into college (Yosso, 2005).

In some families where education is not perceived as a priority or important, it might be perceived by students that the natural progression after high school is to find employment and gain an income (Maton, 2012). These students choosing not to attend college might be considered an expected norm of the family as there is little or no emphasis, or value, placed on education within their households (Maton, 2012). Conversely, some students attend college because family members instill the value of having a tertiary education. As a result, they regard it as significant and a natural progression. This is most common among high-capital families who have access to what Bourdieu defines as symbolic and material resources that give them an advantage in cementing their position in society. They have the social and cultural capital to assist their children's development. According to this viewpoint, social capital is a resource that can be accumulated, invested in, and deployed for instrumental personal advantage, with the benefits being passed down from families to their children. Bourdieu like Coleman (1989), sees families as motors of social capital; however, Bourdieu's emphasis is on continuing family practices that perpetuate inequality. He demonstrates how families with access to institutional and material resources can use them to their advantage, and pass on the benefits to their children. This can also influence how children perceive the importance of college, and as a result, they have a strong belief in what they can achieve and they strive for success while in college (Maton, 2012, Fraser & Killen, 2005). Bourdieu's position contrasts sharply with Coleman's contention that social capital connects families and communities and is defined by a shared set of values and expectations. Coleman sees harmonious networks within communities as important for benefiting individuals and society, as well as for building social capital.

This again reinforced the subjectivity of students' perceptions and the influence of socialization, social capital and conditioning. That being the case, how students perceive their learning will determine the type of attitude and behaviour they have towards it, and the decisions they make while at college (Haman et al., 2012), and thus influence their success as measured in their institutions.

Although students do not have the type of cultural capital as defined by Bourdieu, they do bring other forms of cultural capital to college that capture their talents, strengths and experiences. According to Yosso (2005), these are aspirational (hopes and dreams), linguistic (various language and communication skills), familial, social (social and human resources) navigational (skills and abilities) and resistance (experiences of communities).

Perceived Affordability

Family income and parental education are determining factors in children's educational trajectories and their perception of the importance of college. Coleman (1988) sees social capital as a channel through which the effects of parental education and income are passed down to children. He goes on to say that the human and social capital that parents have must be supplemented by social capital embodied in family relationships, or it will have little impact on children's educational growth of (Coleman, 1988). Although the need for fair and equitable access to quality learning opportunities for everyone regardless of socioeconomic background, was explained in the section 2:1 affordability to that access remains a challenge to some students. Many students from deprived background lack the financial resources necessary for them to advance to higher education and this causes them to perceive higher education as out of their reach, an illusion, or an imaginary pathway. Some may even perceive it as a waste of their already limited resources. However, their peers whose families have adequate amounts of wealth and resources at their disposal, who are from prestigious backgrounds and have the resource are not faced with the same financial struggles; they are able to pursue and have higher education experiences. They perceive advancing their education as a priority and important. It can be deduced that, financial resources, or lack thereof, are valued differently from student to student depending on perception. To some students going to college might appear as an investment whereas to another it might be considered as a waste of resources. It is important therefore for students to have a positive perception, or positive image of the importance of higher education and in some cases the affordability of it, if they are to "crack" the barriers of accessibility.

Perceived social transition

How students transition into their higher education setting can create the foundation for success while there (Li et al., 2012). Students bring prior experiences into their higher education setting and this can influence their perception of their college environment, how they cope in their transition and succeed while there (Li et al., 2012).

Although working class students have gained access to college some perceive that the social transition into their tertiary education world would prove difficult and they will need to make fundamental adjustments in an environment that questioned who they are, or who they were before entering college (Bowl 2003; Reay, 1997; Archer & Hutchings, 2000; Adan & Felner, 1995; Wentworth & Peterson 2001). This is in part due to the lack of preparation with experiences or skill sets necessary for them to socialize and achieve while there (Spieger & Bednarek, 2013). In

fact, some working-class students see themselves as “cultural outsiders” (Bourdieu 1983) who have different beliefs, values and experiences than their elite peers who have a better understanding of what is expected in the college environment due to their socialization and background experiences (Carolan & Wasserman, 2015; Jager 2009). The social transition into college will need students making adjustments that will depend on how they perceive themselves and the influence of their prior experiences and various environments in which they interact. This is not true for all working class students; some see their social transition as smooth because of the social capital gained through friendships, social networks, and lessons learned from interacting with peers, social contacts, and mentors during their precollege experiences (Yosso, 2005). As they navigate their college environment, this help students understand the importance of diversity and learning from different cultures (Yosso, 2005).

Perceived social class background

Students are from different designated contexts and different socioeconomic classes, which are defined by their access to capital and this influenced their experiences of reality, or personal dispositions (Lareau, 2003; Gachathi, 1976; Rubie-Davies, 2006). As a result, there will be disparities in their background experiences due to their social class upbringing and those students from low socio-economic backgrounds may view themselves more at a disadvantage than their elite peers. This is because capital is closely linked to social standings, and people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds often have limited access to it. According to this viewpoint, social capital is very class oriented and perpetuate social inequalities (Bourdieu, 1979). This contrasts with Coleman’s view of social capital which depicts groups cooperating and sharing working values and bonds that benefit both the individual and society as a whole. However, Yosso (2005) **views social capital through the lens of students of colour and how they use their contacts to gain access to college and their experiences while there.** These students have internalized dispositions (Byrom & Lightfoot, 2013) and may perceive that due to their low-income background they are several obstacles which can have an impact on their educational experiences (Strathdee & Engler, 2012). This included lack of valued cultural capital (Carter, 2003), having low academic success (Merritt & Buboltz, 2015; Carlton, 2015), negative stereotypes due to social class (Crozier & Millet, 2012) and feelings of social isolation (Rubin, 2012; Mentz, 2012). In a study conducted by Rheinschmidt and Mendoza-Denton (2014) across three USA universities they discovered that some undergraduates from low socioeconomic backgrounds had concerns about negative social treatment, while at college because they perceive their class background as “disadvantaged” when

compared to their peers. Having the stereotyped of coming from a low working class and the stigmas of the sociocultural and socioeconomic barriers experienced earlier in life, could lead to students experiencing some obstacles to progression while in higher education (Crozier & Millet, 2012; Rheinschmidt & Mendoza-Denton, 2014).

Yosso (2005) asserts in her Cultural Wealth Model that, despite coming from disadvantage or low socioeconomic backgrounds and facing challenges, students of colour can still develop knowledge referred to as resistant capital from their parents and communities. This puts them in a good position to solve difficult problems and inspires them to pursue professional careers in order to give back to their communities and families.

Perceived family support

Finally, students perceived that having familial support in the form of encouragement and a positive educational culture within their homes, were starting points in helping promote their views for success and pushing them to strive for success while at college (Bourdieu, 1984; Moore, 2012). Emotional support, strong positive relationships within families, and positive feedback provided to children will facilitate the establishment of adult norms and promote the children's success (Coleman, 1988).

This section brought home the point that perceptions of students can influence how they interpret, coordinate, analyze and experience the stories of their lives in and out of college (Haman et al., 2012; Reay, 2004). Furthermore, how students approach their studies is influenced by their perceptions about what will increase their chances to succeed or decrease their chances to fail. Therefore, a closer look at understanding how these perceptions are developed is necessary and critical to this study.

2.4 How Perceptions are developed

There are several factors that play a part in shaping the perceptions and behaviours of students (Dimaggio, 1982) both in their decisions to progress to higher education and their experience of participating while there. In fact, what students think about their experiences, their beliefs and thoughts about their experiences at college and what they will become while there is shaped and influenced by their early learning encounters, socialization within their family, socio-economic background (Fitz et al., 2005), demographic attributes such as age and gender (Kuh et al., 2008; Mentz, 2012; Newman-Ford et al., 2009), high school influences (Khawaja & Dempsey, 2008), peers and faculty interaction (Kuh, 1995), inadequate finances (Yorke, 1999), levels of parents' education and income (Kuh et al., 2008; Bourdieu 1973), external responsibilities

(Khawaja & Dempsey, 2008), as well as their higher education experiences. These factors help to create their predispositions or perceptions which are recreated throughout their interactions and life experience. While some of these factors may have some effect on all students, others only affect a minority group (Alfaifi et al., 2020). In the previous section we discussed the notion of student perception. This section investigates how these perceptions are developed by exploring familial, socioeconomic, age and gender and high school factors.

Family

It is within families that students acquire most of their early learning encounters or education and socialisation. Although its delivery is different from the formal, professional knowledge acquired at any educational institution, these early learning experiences and socialization within the family, help create individuals' predispositions or perception (Bourdieu, 1984) and these are recreated throughout their interactions and life experiences (Winkle-Wagner, 2010).

The expectations of parents towards the academic success of their children is considered as one of the greatest variables impacting on their academic success and it impacts how their children perceive success (Yan & Lin, 2005; Jeynes, 2007). Since it is within the home that the educational culture is shaped, the learning experiences and socialization of students within their families will have an indirect influence on their success. Therefore, it is the family that is viewed as the main source for passing physical and cognitive predispositions from generation to generation, that cause members within the unit to act a particular way (Grenfell, 2008).

It is against this backdrop that I consider families as institutions of learning from early in our development (Winkle-Wagner, 2010) and agree that it is the familial context which also plays a role in influencing, shaping, creating and recreating life experiences namely socioeconomic class, beliefs, lifestyles, as well as values and cultural background (Bourdieu, 1977; Thomas, 2002) which help structure their view of the world (Reay, 2004; Thomas, 2002). Therefore, the family as an institution plays a significant role in how students view education, and this can potentially influence their aspirations for higher education and how well they succeed while there (Miller, 2007). Therefore, depending on the value placed on education and the educational cultures exhibited within the family, students will/will not be exposed to, and provided/not provided with, educational and social tools which can influence their perceptions of success, and by extension their experiences of success (Winkle-Wagner, 2010).

The experiences and societal conditioning students are exposed to within their family cultures (Maton, 2012), will influence how they perceive situations and things. As a result, their perceptions will be subjective in nature, causing them to interpret and respond differently to the same content, as they create structures of their life experiences (Black, 1996). To put this into perspective, students are faced with the decision as to which pathway they should take after graduating from high school. The decision they make hinges on their experiences, upbringing and societal conditioning within their family (Maton, 2012), and this can influence how they perceive themselves. To further elaborate, to some students after leaving high school the natural progression might be to advance to higher education and further their studies due to the expected norms of their families, and the emphasis or transmission of shared values placed on education within their families (Maton, 2012). To others, their disposition might be to find employment and gain an income instead of furthering their education. This again, reinforced the subjectivity of students' perceptions and the influence of socialization and conditioning. It can also be emphasized here, that the way students perceive education will influence the decision they make about college, their attitudes and behaviour (Haman et al., 2012).

It can stand to reason that, students socialized in the same environment in this case TCICC, in the same way, should have similar behaviours and perceptions about some things. (Di Maggio, 1979; Bourdieu, 1984). This may be due to the unwritten rules (doxa), the norms and values that guides the practices in that environment (Maton, 2012).

The education level of parents must also be taken into consideration as we examine how perceptions within students are developed (Kuh et. al., 2008). Education levels also plays a significant part in the stratification of persons within the high, middle, and lower classes (Ominde, 1964) also helps shape the educational experiences of students (Carolan & Wasserman, 2015; Jager 2009) and influences their perceptions of success (Winkle-Wagner, 2010; Jager, 2009, Carolan & Wasserman, 2015; Cheadle & Amato, 2011).

Differences in educational outcomes of students and how students perceive their education have been examined using measures pertaining to family characteristics such as parental occupation and their academic qualifications and the possibility of students gaining academic qualifications (Kuh et. al., 2008; Carnevale & Strohl, 2013; Stephenson et al., 2015). There is some research which provides a link between parental education and the ability for students to be successful academically. If parents of children have a degree or do not have one, it can directly influence the ability for their children to succeed academically or advance to higher education

(McKnight, 2015). Stephenson et al., (2015) corroborate this and indicate that less than fifteen percent of students whose parents are not higher education certified can expect to acquire a degree themselves. What is noteworthy is that those parents with tertiary level education are able to cultivate an educational culture within the home that promotes students' success. As a result, these parents have higher academic expectations of their children and are more involved in their education (Carolan & Wasserman, 2015, Cheadle & Amato, 2011). It is also their expectation to have their children advance to higher education and acquire a degree as they see this as a means for them to be successful and progress in their life (Lareau, 2003; Devine, 2004).

As a result, students coming from home environments or operating in fields where the expectation for them to achieve excellence at school is high on the family's agenda and where there is also high perceptions of the competences of them, they in turn, develop high expectations of their own competences, have high expectations and strive for success at college as they have confidence in their ability to achieve (Fraser & Killen, 2005; Parsons, et al.,1982). In fact, it is believed that when parents have high expectations of the academic success of their children, they are more successful academically, maintain higher grades, perform better on standardized tests than other children, have a greater possibility of attending a higher education institution and persist longer in school (Davis-Kean, 2005; Yan & Lin, 2005). In essence, parental expectations reflect the personal goals, expectations or realistic beliefs of the future academic success of their children while in college (Carpenter, 2008).

Due to having higher education qualifications parents are more capable of attaining higher quality professional jobs or what might be considered as prestigious occupations or those in the high status in classification such as doctors and lawyers, to name a few (Gachathi, 1976). These generate adequate amounts of wealth (Gachathi, 1976) carry occupational prestige and as a result they are able to provide their children with a high level of financial support, and create conducive learning environments, promoting a perception that education is important. As a result, students perceive education as important (Kuh et. al., 2008; Thomson, 2018) and see the importance of advancing to higher education. As a result of that exposure and the messages received about the importance of education within the home, these students have internalized dispositions which Byrom and Lightfoot (2013) reasoned, allowed them to view themselves as successful academically. Furthermore, these parents expect their children to acquire great test scores (Goldenberg et al., 2001), independence where they can develop the skill of decision making and negotiating (Cox & Strange, 2010) or reach education achievement (Bloomer & Hodkinson, 2001).

Although some working-class parents may not have a higher education, they too recognize the importance of a degree and desire their children to pursue high education (Bradley, 2015). As a result, they create a culture within their home that promotes education and their children perceive it as important (Thomson, 2018). Conversely, those students living with families in poverty do not have the financial means or social and educational supports that is depicted within families of greater wealth. Many parents lack a higher education degree and therefore engage in lower ranking jobs such as housekeepers and janitors which pay less and are less valued than the prestigious occupations. In many cases they have inadequate resources that aid in the promotion, support and development of academic readiness of their children, and this can further impact on their success. To put it into perspective, when faced with formidable challenges parents must prioritize basic needs such as shelter, clothing, and food, and as a result there is a deficit in equitable access to resources such as internet access, technology, and books that students will need to help them succeed academically. Again, this is mainly due to some inadequacies in the skill set of family members and finances to provide educational support and this causes the children from these households to have a sense of constraint and perceive higher education as out of their reach (Fraser & Killen 2005; Lareau, 2003). Katz et al., (2007) remind us that parents living in poverty along with not having a higher education certification will be faced with a range of challenges that can impact on the educational outcomes of their children. These challenges include lack of jobs and access to resources which can be said to underpin the intergenerational mobility within families (Blanden, et al., 2007; McKnight, 2015). This is a case where the family background experiences continue to impact on educational opportunities of successive generations. However, in recent times there has been an increase of first-generation students (their parents do have tertiary education) pursuing higher education opportunities and entering colleges (Carlton, 2015). Such students usually come from families with lower socio-economic backgrounds (Carlton, 2015; Pike & Kuh, 2005) who receive less family support than their continuing-generation peers (parent has a degree) (Mentz, 2012) and this can influence how they perceive their success while at college. Furthermore, due to the lack of financial and family support these first-generation students in some cases often need to work full time while studying as a means of financially maintaining themselves (Pike & Kuh, 2005), and often feel isolated in their college environment, factors that lead to them acquiring lower academic achievement. This is a salient factor at present in the Turks and Caicos Islands where there is evidence of unequal educational opportunities especial among those students whose English is not their native tongue and come from deprive living environments. Furthermore,

many students entering TCICC come from lower socio-economic backgrounds and lack the familial support.

It can be stated that the contextual factor of family, which Bourdieu indicates play a critical role in students acquiring what he calls cultural capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) help shape and influence their perception of success which in turn impact their attitude, decisions, and experiences of success in higher education (Haman et al., 2012).

Socio-economic Status

Like family, socio-economic status plays a key role in helping shape the perceptions and behaviours of students (DiMaggio, 1982). In our earlier discussion on access and widening participation, social class was a key factor discussed. It continues to be integral in shaping the predispositions and perceptions of students, and this begins early in their life's journey (Aronson, 2008). The concept of class is not very straightforward to explain, for there are many definitions of it. Class is viewed as trajectory based and not positional (Apple, 1992), discursive and cultural (Burke, 2012). Eder (1993) provides a broader definition and defines it as:

a "...structure that translates inequality and power into different life-chances for categories of individuals. It is therefore a structural determinant of life-chances" (p12).

This definition is of interest to me as it shows some form of comparison between persons and further suggest that the capital they have (social, cultural, economic) creates an individualized class structure that influence who they are. Here class can be seen through the lens of cultural control and power (Bernstein, 1977). This comparison segregates into three social classes namely high, middle, and low based on several variables such as family income, level of education, occupations, and social standing. Students are from varied socio-economic backgrounds which have different forms of predispositions (Swartz, 1997) that have been, or can be passed down from generation to generation (Bourdieu, 1992). This has provided students with differential childhood opportunities and varied life experiences, giving birth to the development of many dispositions which include cultural preferences, belief, and networks, which in turn impact on their self-perceptions and self-expectations and influence their reality on how they view the world (Aronson, 2008; Lareau, 2003; Demarest et al., 1993; Gachathi, 1976; Rubie-Davies, 2006; (Pinxten & Lievens, 2014)). These personal dispositions they possessed or accumulated emerged from their socioeconomic class experiences and interactions in the form of knowledge, values, beliefs,

behaviors, education credentials, skills, and cultural goods. These gave students the social status or position in society and influenced how they socialized (Bourdieu, 2011; Winkle-Wagner, 2010). Bourdieu refers to these personal dispositions as cultural capital. (Bourdieu, 2011). It can be said therefore, that the predispositions students possess as well as their socialization within their families, will have an indirect influence on their experiences and choices and can negatively or positively influence their level of success (Bourdieu, 1986; Flere et al., 2010; Jaeger, 2011). Hence, there will be disparities in the educational experiences of students due to their social class upbringing (Rubie-Davies, 2006). In a study conducted by Reay et al. (2005) which investigated Higher Education choice and decision-making of working-class students, findings revealed that the choices made by them are mainly shaped by their social class. This reinforces the impact conditioning within social class have on decisions made. To further support this point, let us take a brief look at the Coleman Report (1966), the result of a survey concerning the unavailability of equal educational opportunities for persons to attend public educational institutions at all levels in the United States. This report presented some fifty-four years ago, found that the social and economic circumstances of students were the most prominent and consistent markers to gauge the success of students (Coleman et al., 1966). Though the report is somewhat dated, the educational success gap is still prevalent today because of unequal opportunities that help shape the lives of students from varying socio- economic backgrounds and impact on their success (Ready, 2015).

Those students whose families have elite social networks are positioned to be part of the dominant class or having higher socio-economic status (Bourdieu, 1984). As a result, these home environments are characterized to have adequate amounts of wealth, resources at their disposal, provide learning experiences (Dilworth-Bart, 2012) and can provide opportunities to favour success for their children (Bourdieu, 1984), and this influences how students perceive their success. This is so too for some middle-class parents who are active participants in the education and development of their children due to the availability of financial and social capital. They have very high expectations and aspirations for their children and utilize various forms of organized, scheduled activities, fostering talents in their children and the children perceive they can become successful in their various talents (Lareau, 2003). However, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (do not have the same privileges as compared with their economically advantaged peers. They lack critical social, educational, and economic resources and in many instances their parent (s) did not attain higher education certification or may just be qualified to the high school level. In such cases, these students are less likely to be encouraged to advance to college and they

might perceive higher education as not important as it was not promoted as a priority (Vargas, 2004). The homes of these students are further characterized as providing limited learning opportunities and academic aspirations, something the more affluent students have, and this may affect the scholastic attitude and influence their perception. This places them at a greater risk of commencing higher education inadequately prepared unlike their peers from affluent families. It could therefore be inferred that there will be different educational experiences of students depending on their socialization and that underprivileged or working-class students may have difficulties positioning themselves socially and academically outside of their local geographical context (Byrom, 2009; Ingram, 2009) or within the higher education field.

In a study conducted by Rheinschmidt and Mendoza-Denton (2014) across three USA universities they found that:

“undergraduates, particularly those from lower income backgrounds, may perceive their social class background as different or disadvantaged relative to that of peers and worry about negative social treatment” (p. 101).

These perceptions may be because of the disparities in their educational experiences due to their social class upbringing. This could lead to students experiencing obstacles that can have an impact on their experiences while at college. These obstacles which can have an impact on the educational experiences of the students (Strathdee & Engler, 2012) included negative stereotypes due to social class (Crozier & Millet, 2012), lack of valued cultural capital (Carter, 2003), having low academic success (Merritt & Buboltz, 2015; Carlton, 2015) and feelings of social isolation (Rubin, 2012; Mentz, 2012).

Students live their lives within their neighborhood and form an attachment which influence and impact on who they are, as well as help form their identity. This class identity they developed will impact how they interact outside their local geographical context (Ingram, 2009). Their background, early learning encounters and socialization within the family, help create positive or negative predispositions or perceptions which are recreated throughout their interactions and life experiences and can present barriers to higher education or impede on their progression while there.

Informal networks

It is also apparent that informal networks help with the creation of the perceptions of success of students. When students have regular, positive peer interaction it is perceived to have an influence on their academic behavior and success (Altun, 2015; Strydom, et al., 2010; Mentz,

2012). Observing how their peers maneuvered around college, can provide new learning experiences that help create or rather reshape how students think, act and also achieve some of their personal goals (Cooper & Liou, 2007; Jones, 1997). Their new learning experiences form connections with their dispositions which were already formed out of past experiences, and this create their perceptions that influence their behaviours and how they view the world (Jones, 1997).

Faculty interaction and contact relationship with students is one of the keyways in which learning is facilitated and these interactions have influence on the academic behaviour and how students perceive success (Reed, 2015; Strydom, et al., 2012, Atun, 2015). The interplay of relationships at college between faculty, peers and students will help form how students perceive success and how these perceptions influence their experiences of success as well as how they will adapt while there (Bourdieu 1993).

Age and Gender

The demographics attributes (age, gender) of students must be taken into consideration when exploring their academic success (Mentz, 2012) as various researchers highlight their impact on success. Studies by Mentz (2012) at a South African university and Newman-Ford et. al, (2009) at a university in South Wales, UK, found that although mature students are admitted into degree programs, in some cases with lesser academic attainment than their younger peers, their performance academically is equal to, or excels their counterparts. Drawing on a survey conducted by Chow (2007) of students in a Canadian university, Chow (2007) points out that male students underperformed their female counterparts academically. This is not a surprise, for an earlier study of Baker (2004) on second year university students in the UK indicates that female students are more intrinsically motivated towards academic activities and their academic success; they are more desirous to finish their higher education and, in some cases, sought assistance and resources from the academic resources on campus unlike their male counterparts. Bandura (1997) asserts that when students believe that their individual efforts are being recognized and valued, they are more likely to reap success. Conversely, students who are not motivated will not be inclined to ask for assistance when needed (Winston et.al, 2015), will not be as systematic in their learning, and this can lead to a decline in their academic performance. It is no doubt that these factors will have a direct or indirect influence on students' success at university (Baker, 2004).

High School influence

We cannot overlook the important role high school play in the preparation of students for higher education. High schools have been positioned as one field where the foundation for higher

education is laid and students are equipped with the knowledge and skills to make them higher education (Kuh et. al, 2006) or workplace ready (Senechal, 2010). Thus universities in many countries are using the academic results students received at high school as the primary factor for matriculation into many of their programs. In the UK for instance, the final year high school Advance level (A Level) examination results are used by universities as a standard for selecting students for higher education (James et. al., 2010). This practice is also evident in Turks and Caicos Islands whereas indicated in Chapter 1, most of the final year, high school students take their CXC examinations (O' Levels) and their performance in these examinations is used as the main criterion for selection into TCICC. Although high school results (cognitive factor) are not perfect indicators for students' success when they advance to college, they are the strongest indicators so far in a range of disciplines (Kuh et. al., 2006; Shulruf et. al., 2012; Duff, 2004; McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001), and are enhanced when other non-cognitive factors (academic mindset, beliefs, academic behaviour) that have an impact on student success are considered (McLaughlin, 2012; Choy, 1999). It must also be understood that although the technique of using prior academic high school results has merit in predicting matriculation, one cannot guarantee to predict the success, failure or dropout of specific students at post entry into university (Winston et. al., 2014; Shulruf et. al., 2012).

If students are to be prepared for the higher education experience and be successful while being there, they need to be equipped with more than just theoretical knowledge. They should possess in their "toolkit" a wide range of skills, competencies and attitudes: problem solving, critical thinking, creativity and reflectivity (Ali et.al., 2017; Silva, 2008), all necessary skills for higher education.

The quality of high school preparation of students must be in alignment with the expectations of universities. Therefore, the experiences students received there are important precursors to their success at college. As a result, students who are provided with a solid foundation and are adequately prepared to matriculate into college are most likely to be successful while there, regardless to their socio-economic standings, the college attending, who they are or their financial situation (Kuh et al., 2006; Mentz, 2012). In fact, some research is saying that experiences students have while in high school, in addition to the depth and breadth of a rigorous curriculum they are exposed to, are critical antecedents to the success they experience in higher education (Kuh et. al., 2006; Mentz, 2012). In addition, students perceive that when their teachers are adequately prepared

and are approachable, they are more committed to learn and more likely to achieve success (Mearns et al., 2007).

Studies indicate that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds while at the high school are placed in developmental classes where they are exposed to limited course content and undertake less in-class courses (Bragg & Durham, 2012; Goldrick-Rab, 2010). This places them in a position where the likelihood to advance to higher education and earn a degree is limited as they are not prepared with the content knowledge required to effectively manipulate the higher education environment (Bragg & Durham, 2012; Goldrick-Rab, 2010; Roderick et al., 2009). This is especially important in Turks and Caicos Islands, where many students who do not speak English as their native language and in many cases are from disadvantaged backgrounds, are placed in developmental classes and as a result do not advance to college. If these students do advance to college, many are not equipped or adequately prepared with the academic skills and struggle to cope with the academic challenges at TCICC. This is mainly because students experienced this gap while in high school, and this may lead to higher rates of attrition (Kuh et. al., 2006; James et. Al., 2010) impacting on their success while there (Kuh et. al., 2006).

The ability for students to succeed academically is dependent not only on their intellectual abilities but also on several other background individuals, social and academic factors which helped shape their perceptions and these cannot be overlooked (Lotkowski et al., 2004; Alfaifi et al., 2020). The value of identifying and examining some of these background factors that impact on or influence the perception of success of students is critical if we are to comprehend how these perceptions influence students' experiences of success in TCICC.

2.5 Success independently measured

In the previous section the factors that help shape how students perceive their success were explored. This section distills major findings from the literature surrounding all-encompassing categorization (which includes non-arbitrary definitions) of success that will serve as academic support for the participants in this study.

There have been varied approaches and perspectives taken to research the research of student success from an international higher education perspective and a plethora of views and empirical evidence provided. Differentials in student success were presented from a sociological, economic, social, cultural and organizational perspective (York et. at., 2015; Kuh et. al., 2006) and interpreted quantitatively or qualitatively depending on the school of thought.

Success is a multidimensional concept with an abundance of definitions (José Sá, 2020). Key institutional players use the following measures as key indicators of success (Nyström, et al., 2019; Cox & Strange, 2010; Kuh et al., 2006; Weaver, 2011): registration rates (José Sá, 2020), achievement using test scores, aggregate grades and examination results (Wilson-Medhurst, 2016; Tinto & Pusser, 2006), retention rates (Cox & Strange, 2010), completion of degree programs within a particular time frame (José Sá, 2020; Nyström et al., 2019; Strathdee, 2011; Wilson-Medhurst, 2016). TCICC like the international players has linked success closely with measurable outcomes such as retention rates and successfully finishing of degrees within identified periods (TCICC brochure). While the success of students can be measured there are several factors that can influence it. These include: academic paths student took prior to entering higher education, finances, national policies and practices, fields, institutional structures, and students' perceptions and mindset (Hovdhaugen et al., 2015; Lane et al., 2019). In following this path and embracing a few indicators, TCICC and their stakeholders have excluded the full range of considerations of what really constitute success. This list of quantitative measures can serve as a form of support for the participants. However, these measures alone cannot be used as accurate benchmarks of success. Moreso, the measures could be misleading as they have neglected the complexities of the factors of students' success. Critical reasons for success and practical skills that address student perception of their learning and valuable qualitative outcomes have been ignored (Zepke & Leach, 2010). Indeed, the fundamental benchmark of retention rates, completion of degrees and grades are all relevant, but measures of success exceed these linear views. These measures alone cannot be used as accurate benchmarks of success, without taking into account students' feeling about their accomplishments and the personal criteria they use to self-assess their level of success (Cachia et al., 2018; Enke & Ropers-Huilman, 2010; José Sá, 2020; Day et al. 2018). Success is inclusive, multifaceted and embrace a more holistic understanding, where attention is also paid to qualitative indicators (eg achieving goals) that speak to how students perceive their learning and progression in achieving their goals (Day et al. 2018; Sahraee et al., 2015; van Rooij et al., 2018; Zepke & Leach, 2010, Hovd-haugen et al., 2015). This list of quantitative measures can serve as a form of support for the participants.

Some researchers have looked beyond the linear view of cognitive or academic success by which success of students can be identified and presented a magnitude of non-conventional definitions that involve the holistic student (Cachia et al., 2018; Day et al. 2018). Success may be measured from an individual level in terms of personal qualities that embrace the following

unconventional indicators: satisfaction with higher education experiences (York et al., 2015; Kuh et al., 2006); developing talents (José Sá, 2020; Day et al., 2018); comfort and support in the learning environment (Mentz, 2012); development of cognitive skills: academic competence and intellectual disposition; personal development and accomplishments (Day et al. 2018; Wood & Breyer, 2017); positive peer and faculty relationships (Baxter & Magolda, 2004); academic and occupational attainment, acquisition of general education, preparation for adulthood and citizenship (Day et al. 2018); satisfaction with experiences (Jose Sa, 2020); the ability to work with people from different cultural backgrounds, developing a sense of identity (Donaldson et al., 2011); meeting new people (Jennings et al., 2013); having supportive family relationships (Reyes & Elias, 2011). Success even involves managing life which is displayed in more liberal outcomes such as: possessing financial skills and knowledge or some form of job readiness; acquiring knowledge of various issues that impact the social, economic, or political development of students (Donaldson, et al., 2011).

Although these highlighted indicators of success might also be more difficult to measure qualities (Braxton, 2006), nevertheless they speak to the way students perceive their learning and progression in achieving their goals (Zepke & Leach, 2010; José Sá, 2020). The metrics that researchers considered as formal academic success have been limited, and to a great extent inadequate, not capturing the full meaning of what constitutes success. This list shows that the ability for students to succeed does not only rely on their intellectual abilities but is also characterized by personal qualities, life management, college experiences and home communities. It is inclusive, multifaceted and embrace a more holistic understanding of what is success.

Regardless of the varied viewpoints on success what appeared germane is that success includes accomplishing a goal which may be qualitatively or quantitatively assessed. I also anticipate that there will be a continuous evolution for the definition of the success of students which will take into consideration several factors due to the background experiences and students' perceptions. These factors include and is not exhaustive to their personal development, family, socio economic backgrounds, high school experiences academic achievement and experiences or acquiring skills and competencies that can benefit the individual student as well as society (Cachia et al., 2018; Donaldson, et al., 2011; Jennings et al., 2013; Kuh et al., 2006;). It can be deduced therefore, that if students are able to achieve any of these domains of what they take to be success from the mentioned list, be it quantitative or qualitative some measure of success was attained (Baxton, 2008).

2.6 First generation students

First generation students are becoming more prevalent in higher education institutions, and institutions have prioritized strategies to increase access to these students seeking a degree. But who exactly are the first generations? While some definitions include class affiliation and family income levels, the most commonly used definition is based on parental education levels (Spiegler & Bednarek, 2013). First generation students are the first in their immediate family including siblings or parents, to attend college or university or have earned a university degree (Checkoway, 2018). An examination of Bourdieu's theories of social and cultural capital revealed that students in this cohort (first generation) lack the necessary capitals to achieve success in college. This is important in this study because the majority of the participants were first generation college students.

Characteristics of first generation students

There are several characteristics that set first generation students apart from their continuing-generation peers (Checkoway, 2018). Although these first generation students come from diverse backgrounds and social identities, they are more likely to be students of colour, or ethnic minority groups coming from low-income families and with work responsibilities (Engle et al., 2018; Garcia, 2010). Furthermore, they may have attended low-income high schools with fewer resources than high-income schools (Checkoway, 2018). They are also thought to have lower educational aspirations and are more likely to face academic difficulties and emotional challenges than their continuing-generation peers (Evans, et al., 2020; Davis, 2010; Siegel, & Davenport, 2012).

Many first generation students struggle to adjust to their family obligations as well as their college experience (Hodges-Payne, 2006). Many of them do not attend full time courses of study and instead work full time (Evans et al., 2020; Smith, 2022). Their vulnerability to attrition increases as a result of their long working hours and lack of parental support (Evans et al., 2020; Vohra-Gupta, 2007). Furthermore, a large proportion of this cohort is slightly older than their continuing-generation peers, may be underprepared for college and may require some internal guidance to get their career and academic goals started (Pulliam et al., 2017; Evans et al., 2020). In fact, they arrive at college academically unprepared for the rigors of college course work in the primary content areas of reading, writing, math, and science, (Pulliam et al., 2017; Engle et al., 2018). Although these first generation students' ability to adjust to college life will vary, the majority of them will eventually succeed (Evans et al., 2020).

Challenges

When compared to their elite peers, the path to higher education for first generation students is frequently difficult. They face significant barriers to higher education (Falcon, 2016). Furthermore, they face challenges unique to their first generation status, which leads to lower levels of college success (Stephens et al., 2012). However, while in college, they are the cohort of students who are most likely to drop out before receiving a degree. This may be attributed to a combination of factors. For starters, they lack familial support, their parents may not support them financially, academically or mentally because they themselves lack the necessary resources or knowledge. Second, they have difficulty obtaining financial assistance. Third, they are given little direction and struggle to navigate and transition once enrolled (Checkoway, 2018). In fact, some students experience cultural shock upon entering an unfamiliar world in higher education and as a result of this unfamiliarity they struggle to find their way around (Smith, 2022; Checkoway, 2018). As a first-generation student, I recall the mixed emotions I felt when first arriving on campus. I was both excited and terrified, wondering if I would be successful and if I had made the right decision. The university provided orientation which in my opinion was insufficient, as it failed to recognize the distinct and difficult transition experience by first generation students such as myself. The struggle navigating and transitioning is not the case of all working class students for some perceive their social transition as smooth due to the social capital gained through friendships, social networks, and lessons learnt from interacting with peers, social contacts and mentors during their precollege experiences (Yosso, 2005).

Strengths of first generation students

Despite the fact that these first generation students face numerous obstacles that make accessing higher education difficult, their numbers on college campuses have increased, bringing with them special strengths, talents, unique experiences and diverse perspectives (Gamson & Gardner, 2011; Checkoway, 2018; Atherton, 2014). What is significant is that they have recognized the importance of higher education certification and have worked hard to achieve it. Furthermore, their experiences with economic challenges, obstacles due to their parents' finances and racial discrimination have given them unique strengths and expertise to bring to their college environment. They also bring their talents, hopes and dreams, as well as various language and communication skills, social and human resources, and skills and abilities to help them navigate their environment (Yosso, 2005). As Yosso (2005) points out, students bring these valued background experiences and knowledge gained (forms of capital) into college, with which I agree.

Nonetheless, their elite peers, who come from families that have sent their children to college on a regular basis, lack these experiences, and their primary contact with low-income black minority students has come from what they have read in books (Atherton, 2014; Golden, 2006; Lohfink & Paulson, 2005).

2.7 Who are non-traditional students?

Non-traditional students are students who meet any of the following criteria: are enrolled in college part-time; have fulltime employment; are financially independent; have dependents other than a spouse; are a single parent or have delayed enrollment into post-secondary education (Orgnero, 2013; Pelletier, 2010). They are mostly adult learners.

For these adult students, the transition to college can present some challenges or barriers. Returning as an adult can be stressful due to the lengthy wait time after graduating from high school, a lack of educational involvement, and a lack of self-confidence (Karmelita, 2020; Hardin, 2008). However, in order to succeed, they modify their daily routines, relationships and ways of thinking in order to be better prepared for returning to college (Anderson et al., 2012). They frequently wish to set a good example for their children and other family members (McCall et al., 2020).

Although these students lack the type of cultural capital defined by Bourdieu, they do bring other forms of cultural capital to college as outlined by Yosso (2005). Yosso's conceptual framework of community cultural wealth provides a solid foundation for us to understand what non-traditional and first generation students bring to their college educational experience, and how these types of capitals can potentially enable them to enact success and have a successful experience. They bring cultural wealth in the form of resistant capital acquired through family and community experiences, as well as values and dispositions. This gives them advanced abilities to solve difficult problems and navigate their college environment, which is not part of their social makeup (Yosso, 2005). They also bring aspirational capital in the form of their talents, hopes and dreams, despite persistent education inequities or obstacles, as well as a variety of language and communication skills (linguistic capital), social and human resources, and skills and abilities that can assist them in having a fruitful educational experience (Yosso, 2005).

Yosso (2005) strengths based model, helps us understand that all students have some forms of cultural capital that they bring to their college educational experience. This is in contrast to Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital (discussed further in 1:3) which places emphasis on a very

narrow range of assets and characteristics and argues that first generation students (and also non-traditional students) may lack the necessary capitals to achieve success in college, or that the cultural capital that they do possess may not be valued within the higher education environment.

2.8 Chapter Summary

This review of the literature provided valuable insights into theoretical knowledge around widening participation agenda, students' perception and success.

The literature has shown how students' perceptions are influenced by their socioeconomic backgrounds and past experiences, and how these perceptions whether knowingly or unknowingly, influence their reality, decision making or personal dispositions and experiences of success at college. These also helped in shaping the practices and choices of students.

The success literature provides an exhaustive list of what defines success that will serve as academic support for the participants in this study. It is therefore most appropriate to say that a single measure is reductive and limits this concept to only one sphere of students' overall experience, and there are numerous versions of success that are relevant. However, I believe that a combination of multiple measures that provide a broader perspective is more appropriate if we are to determine the true meaning of success. This will all be determined by students perceptions, experiences and world views which can influence how students perceive success. Interest groups are now faced with the challenge of creating policies that consider the importance of students' experiences, if one is to focus on the success of students.

Because the majority of the participants were first generation students and non-traditional students, Yosso's concepts of social capital and community cultural wealth provide a better understanding of the kind of capital that these students from low-income backgrounds bring to higher education and can help the college plan for their success.

The Turks and Caicos Island Community colleges could achieve greater levels of success among their student population if they intentionally and strategically position themselves to promote students' success through widening participation (Kuh, et al., 2005). The activities that students participate in as a result of the programs and practices that TCICC provides for their enrichment can help alleviate some of the challenges that can have an impact on their academic success. As a result, it is time for TCICC to reexamine their relationship with individual students and begin to explore ways in which they can be committed to their experiences while also investigating external factors that may impact their success (Kuh, et. al., 2005).

2.9 Filling the Gap

The literature presented exemplifies the areas of study in widening participation agenda, students' perception of self-efficacy and success. While the majority of the research and literature focus on student perceptions and the impact of students' backgrounds on their perceptions of success, the focus of some on widening participation and success helped frame this research. Extensive research on student success and students' perception of success has been conducted in developed countries such as United Kingdom (Yorke & Longden, 2008), USA (Kuh et. al., 2008), New Zealand (Scott, 2008, 2009) and Australia (Mergner et. al, 2017), but there is still a gap in the literature.

This study went beyond the scope of previous studies and has investigated the influence of students' background on their perceptions of success, and how these perceptions influence their experiences of success in the Turks and Caicos Islands rather than just focusing on student success or success measures. This will help to fill a gap in the literature by adding to the existing knowledge and providing new insights as gaps in the literature indicate that no such study has ever been conducted in the Turks and Caicos Islands or in any other small island developing nation. This emphasis was important to me because in order to understand how students succeed, I must also consider how students' experiences influence their perceptions of success and their thinking.

The research design will be discussed in the following chapter and will explain the aim, research questions and methodology as well as the data analysis method.

Chapter 3: Research Design

The research design is outlined in this chapter. The aim, research questions and methodology are addressed, and justification is given for my choice of narrative inquiry which is underpinned by hermeneutical phenomenology. The data analysis process is also addressed, followed by a discussion on ethics, reflexivity, rigor, and trustworthiness.

3:1 Research aim and questions

The overarching aim of this research is to understand how students' perceptions of success is shaped by their background experiences and how this in turn impacts on their day-to-day experiences of success in Turks and Caicos Islands Community College (TCICC).

The study has a focus on the phenomenon of students' success through their individual experiences, and the role backgrounds and perceptions play in influencing their success while at college. It gives clearer insights of the participants psyche at present and their status prior to admission to TCICC. It provides deeper understanding into influences in their lives that have contributed to or impeded their success. Bourdieusian metatheory, with its thinking tools of habitus, capital and field, had a notable effect on the questions, which through their link with real life situations and events have influenced the approach to this research.

The central research question guiding this study is:

How do students' backgrounds influence their perceptions of success and how do these perceptions influence their experiences of success in a higher education institution in the Turks and Caicos Islands?

The sub questions to inform the main question are:

1. What are the educational experiences and context that students bring to the higher education institution?
2. How do students define success in college?
3. What are the factors students believe do/do not contribute to their success as they define it?
4. How do students' perceptions of success influence their experiences at the college?

Table 3.1: Overview of approaches

Research Question	Method	Justification
What are the educational experiences and context that students bring to the higher education institution?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews with students enrolled in the college • Demographic data collection- age range, gender, career of self, parental occupational status and parental income 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narratives of qualitative nature • Subjective stories that highlight their background and experiences, telling who they are prior to admission to TCICC and their psyche at present in college. • Provides an understanding why participants make choices and help find meaning in the phenomena.
How do students define success in college?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews with college enrolled students • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narratives of qualitative nature • Subjective stories that help identify and justify student's perceptions of success at college.
What are the factors students believe contribute/do not contribute to their success as they define it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews with college enrolled students • Students illustrate their experiences using photographic diary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narratives of qualitative nature • Subjective stories of situational knowledge as conveyed by the participants before college and now at college. • Images trigger richer conversations and generate information about experiences.
How do students' perception of success influence their experiences at the college?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews with college enrolled students • Students illustrate their experiences using photographic diary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narratives of qualitative nature • Subjective stories that help identify and justify student's experiences and perceptions of success before college and now at college. • Images trigger richer conversations and generate information about experiences.

3:2 Methodology and Method

How the participants view and interpret the world based on their experiences are of interest to me, therefore I have adopted a narrative inquiry research design that is in keeping with a social interpretive paradigm for this study.

Narrative Inquiry

Chase (2005) reminds us that this is a particular type of qualitative or interpretive research method, that aligns with the constructivist epistemology that is in keeping with a social interpretive paradigm (Gudmundsdottir, 2001). Clandinin and Connelly (1990) help us understand that narratives focus on and characterize the phenomena of human experience.

This is a desirable lens to utilize because it seeks to discover meaning in the experiences or events people encounter over time and in context (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990; van Manen, 1997; Merriam, 1998). Therefore, consideration must be given to individual contexts (fields), with the understanding that what persons experience within their context will differ, and this will impact on how they interpret their data (Creswell, 2007). This suggests the way individuals see the social world is shaped by their experiences and willfulness and as a result, their perceptions will vary. (Moses & Knutsen, 2012).

As this methodology (narrative inquiry) focuses on the experiences of individuals over a period of time and in context (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; 2000) and how they ascribe meaning to these experiences as lived and told stories, I find it very captivating. This is mainly because it allows me to explore how my participants perceive their success, the influence of prior contexts, and how perceptions influence their experiences of success, their world views. It also allows the participants to share their perceptions, and me, the researcher, to interpret, critically analyze and describe the phenomena being investigated (van Manen, 1997). Furthermore, it permits for contextualized understanding of the behaviours, human experiences/stories about the experiences and social reality of my participants before entering, and while at TCICC (Hammersley, 2000; van Manen, 1990; Marton & Pang, 2006). Vygotsky (1978) as well as Creswell (2007) remind us that the learning experiences and interactions obtained in the social and cultural contexts in which persons interact, influence who and what they become.

There are many forms of narrative research. Strong proponents of narrative inquiry like Clandinin and Connelly (2000), Caine et al. (2013), and Goodson and Sikes (2001) refer to it as a methodology and Caine et al. (2013) went on to classify their methodology as “narrative Inquiry”

distinguishing it from other forms of narrative research. I am in agreement with these scholars, hence its use as my methodology.

Chase (2005) outlines five ways researchers approach narrative inquiry. She indicates that narrative researchers: 1) treat narrative as understanding their actions as well as that of others, forming connections and seeing the consequences of actions and events over a period of time; 2) view narratives as verbal action, as a way of doing something; 3) feel enabled and constrained by a range of social resources and circumstances; 4) see it as performances which are socially situated and interactive ; 5) see themselves as narrators as they find meaning and ways in which to present the stories heard or studied. Chase (2005) five-point framework provides a foundation for me as a young researcher as well as others to explore narratives through various lenses.

A great benefit of utilizing this design is that it affords the opportunity for collaboration and dialogue between me the researcher and my participants as we arrive at a shared understanding of the stories told (Moen, 2006). This collaboration is also voiced in the re-storying of the narratives (Connelly & Clandinin, 2009). In addition, it allows for contextualized understanding of the behaviours, experiences/stories and social reality of my participants before entering, and while at TCICC (Hammersley, 2000; van Manen, 1990; Marton & Pang, 2006). Vygotsky (1978) as well as Creswell (2007) remind us that the learning experiences and interactions obtained in the social and cultural contexts in which persons interact in, influence who and what they become. Put succinctly, it is a tool to achieve an understanding of individuals and human actions (Lai, 2010; Polkinghorne, 1995).

This methodology also allows data to be collected (in the form of collecting participants' stories), analyzed, and for reporting to occur (telling participants' stories) (Lai, 2010; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). This data may be in the form of pictures, newsletters, interview transcripts, storytelling or even journal records (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

I particularly like how Creswell (2006) describes narrative research. He said it "*looks backward and forward, looks inward and outward, and situates the experiences within place*" (p. 185). Following the same line of thinking, I see this approach as a way of examining the completeness of live experiences positioned within the reality of the participants, and giving meaning to those experiences (Kramp, 2004; McAdams, 2008).

From the literature read on the narrative research approach, two basic underpinnings, or claims stood out to me. The first is that the stories told depended on the past and present

experiences of the individual, their values the context and the listeners. Secondly, individuals shape their world view, human actions and experiences into narratives.

Finally, we can deduce that narrative inquiry speaks to relational engagement where the experiences of the participants are related through their stories, within their social, cultural, familial, and institutional context (Moen, 2006).

3.3 Methods

Site

Turks and Caicos Island Community College (TCICC) offers precollege programmes in addition to degree programs and consists of a small population of about three hundred and twenty (320) students. As this study focuses on higher education, Participation Information Sheets (PIS) were only extended to 62 students enrolled in the degree program. Being cognizant that the population at the college is relatively small, I was hopeful to have at least ten volunteers. The number of overall participants was based on the willingness of students to volunteers.

Recruitment

I first secured two faculty members to act as gate keepers, distributing 62 hard copies of the Participation Information Sheets (PIS) between the two campuses on my behalf. These sheets were distributed by hand to cross-disciplinary groups of bachelor's students and a request was made to volunteer their participation in the study. So that there was no coercion, the gatekeepers only distributed the PIS forms and asked students to contact me via the email address found on the PIS form, if they were desirous of participating in the study. As part of the PIS, I provided a concise introduction about who I am.

If more than ten students volunteered to partake in the study due to my timeline, the demographic information collected would have been used as my criteria for selection targeting diversity of age range, gender, career of self, parental occupational status and parental income. However, only ten students overall expressed an interest to participate in the study, therefore there was no need to use the demographic information as a criterion for selection.

Data Collection

The data was collected in three phases: initial meeting, participatory photography and semi-structured interviews.

Phase 1-Initial Meeting

Following the distribution of the Participation Information Sheet, six students contacted me via email expressing a willingness to further engage in the study and four others spoke with

me directly, totalling the ten students willing to participate. I made telephone contact with those students who expressed an interest to further participate in the study and then followed up with an email expressing an interest of having a one-on-one meeting at a chosen location that allowed for privacy and confidentiality.

At the one-on-one meetings conducted in December 2019 and early January 2020, the interview process was outlined and schedules organized, the photographic diary was explained, and any concerns or questions the cross-disciplinary group of bachelor's students had before they proceeded were addressed. The students were advised to share the photographic diary (see below) with me in advance of the interview discussion, to afford me the opportunity to review them. To acquire basic biographical information (also captured on the consent form) about the participants before the commencement of the study, while meeting, they were asked about their age range, gender, career of self, parental occupational status, parental income, have they always lived on island etc. This information was necessary as it could be useful in informing or defining the questions for the interview.

After the students reviewed the data requested, heard in detail the process of the study, they were given the option to sign or not sign the consent form to partake in the study. The ten participants signed hardcopies of the consent forms which were then collected, scanned and filed electronically as a password protected document.

One month following the one-on-one meetings and the consent forms being signed, four of the participants withdrew from the study. As a result, I contacted one of the gate keepers who contacted four other students who willingly consented to be a part of the study. The same process was followed with these "new" participants, as done with the preceding group.

Participants

When conducting qualitative research, it is unwise to generalize when recruiting participants, as it goes against the goals of qualitative research (Cohen et al, 2006). As only 10 students agreed to take part in the study, there was no need to have an inclusion criterion other than that used for recruitment in the inviting of participants, as I utilized what was available. There were no additional requirements used for selection, so the sample was a convenience sample. The participants consisted of 10 students with a composition of 8 females and 2 males. Six of the participants were from the main campus and four from the "sister" campus. They were enrolled in five two (2) year, full time, bachelor's degree programs at the TCICC. These five degree programmes were Bachelors in Social Work, Early Childhood Education, Primary Education,

Hospitality Management and Business Administration. Eight of the participants were in their first year and two in the second year of their respective degree programme. This convenience sample is rich with information and can offer great insights into the phenomena being investigated (Patton, 2002).

Phase 2- Data Collection

In my attempt to comprehend the world in which my participants exist and develop sense that relate to their narratives and experiences (Creswell, 2013), I utilized photographic diary and semi-structured interviews with them.

Photographic diary

In the interview phase, the participants were each asked to take part in participatory photography where during a three week to a one-month period they kept photographs in their photographic diary. This allowed them to reflect and document aspects of their experiences or reality, and interpret their context (Keats, 2009; Castleden et al., 2008). The participants were instructed to take images that depict events, things, activities, institutional experience etc., that were part of their current or past experiences, that they perceive influenced or connected them to their experiences of success, and helped tell their individual narrative (Keats, 2009; Castleden et al., 2008). For those participants who did not fully grasp what was expected, it was further explained that the photographs or images taken can represent symbolic inventories of objects, artifacts and people, or even represent events, work or other institutional experiences that may link them to a time or experience in their lifetime (Lorenz, 2016; Begum et al. 2022; Slutskaya et. al., 2012), These photos can range from the personal experiences they encounter in society to the ways in which these experiences were encountered (Lorenz, 2016; Creswell, 2009; Begum et al., 2022).. It was stressed however, that there were no restrictions or expectations as to the type of photographs that they were to produce, beyond the use of them for the interview. This was done to ensure that the participants were in control of their individual responses. They were however informed that taking the photographs could be paced over the period of time so as to capture anything that might interest them later in the time allotted.

The photographs taken in this study are participant-driven this is because I wanted the participants to reflect and control which facets of their lives they want to share with me. I wanted to use the photos or images to stimulate a participant-driven conversation outside the scope of what is researcher-driven (Watson, 2014). The participants were limited to submitting 4-5 photographs

so I could have adequate time to analyze the data in my possession. These photographs served as elicitation artifacts for the interviews and provided details that could not be expressed by using words alone about the participants' experiences and prompted discussions during the interviews (Liebenberg, 2009). The photographs were another way of capturing the voices of the participants (Delgado, 2015). How these photos were used as a tool to produce data will be discussed in the following section.

The photographs also allowed me, the researcher, to hear stories about events for which I was absent and helped me to have a deeper understanding of their views, beliefs, experiences and perceptions (Olson et al., 2021; Berdanier, & Cox, 2015; Croghan et al., 2008), how their social world is experienced and understood through their lenses (Olson et al., 2021; Clark-Ibanez, 2004; Carlsson, 2001; Pole, 2004). The use of the photographs also stimulated their memory during the interview, causing them to reflect on additional experiences not seen in the photographs and were also unknown to the researcher (Flick, 2006; Clark-Ibanez, 2004; Loeffler, 2005). In this study the photographs are not my focus; I am interested in eliciting the meaning and significance each participant ascribed to their photographs (Pink, 2001).

This study utilized photo-elicitation interviews to help investigate students' perception of success and how their background influence their success.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Commencing in January 2020, semi structured interviews were conducted over a one-month period at a location that ensured privacy and confidentiality, was mutually agreed upon and convenient for all parties. A handheld audio recorder was used for the recordings. The aim of this research was to understand how students' perceptions of success is shaped by their background experiences and how this in turn impacts on their day-to-day experiences of success in Turks and Caicos Islands Community College (TCICC).

My interview questions were designed to collect data that would assist in achieving my aim. I also gave thought to how I would use them to help me to address the research questions interpretatively and explicitly through the lens of Bourdieusian metatheory with its thinking tools of habitus, capital and field. For example, Question 1 helped me arrive at a deeper understanding of who the participants are, their status prior to admission to TCICC and their psyche at present in college. The topics discussed were centered around the participants' family, the experiences they encounter within the family, the cultural rules they followed and how their backgrounds and past experiences helped frame the decisions and choices they make and how these influence their

thinking, opportunities and dispositions. These rules provided a picture about the relationship between the habitus of the students and what the students bring into the field. Question 2 helped provide insights into the socio-economic background and how the different context influenced their experience of reality, their personal dispositions or cultural capital. It provided an understanding of how their perceptions were shaped, created, and recreated throughout their life experiences and how their cultural background helped shaped their world view. Question 3 provided information about their education experiences at high school and the context that students bring to college. Question 4 was to gauge an understanding why students choose TCICC as their higher education institution of study and how their past experiences influence their decision to study there. Question 5 helped me obtain the most objective understanding I can gather of how these students perceived success and how it was achieved, how their backgrounds and past experiences helped frame the decisions and choices they make and how these influence their thinking, opportunities and dispositions. Question 6 allowed students to assign meaning and context to their real-life past and present experiences about what the photographs in their photo diaries meant to them. It also provided information that compared the experiences of their lives to the images in the photographs that could not be expressed or captured by using words exclusively.

On the main island, a vacant, secluded, spare office at the public library was used and on the “sister” island a hotel room was used. Selecting an appropriate location for the interview is critical because the choice of location can affect how participants behave and respond during the interview (van Manen, 1990). In fact, dominance can be shifted from the participant to the researcher or vice versa (Quinney et al., 2016). Therefore, I wanted to create an atmosphere where my participants felt comfortable, safe, and free to share their lived experiences (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). The extensive stories from the interviews were gathered to document how the context, and past lived experiences had influenced the experiences of success of the students in TCICC.

Utilizing semi structured interviews provided the chance for me, the researcher, to question the participants using open ended questioning. This provided them with the opportunity to freely share knowledge, express their thoughts and elaborate in detail on their answers (Creswell, 2013; Ashworth & Lucas, 2000) about their context and lived experiences, through their stories. The use of questionnaires only or structured interviews would limit the responses and will not afford the participants aperture to freely express themselves (Creswell, 2013; Seidman, 2013; Adam & Cox, 2008). Using open-ended questions further allowed me to probe, to collect as much data as I can and allowed the participants to elaborate and provide clarifications. I also engaged in meaningful

listening to gather understanding and interpretation of what was being said and put aside my concerns, judgements, and bias (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). As I allowed the participants to provide their objective and subjective views, I was able to gather an understanding of who the participants are, who they were before entering TCICC, and how their beliefs were influenced by their background experiences.

The semi-structured interviews were blended with photo-elicitation. Photo-elicitation is a process of including a single image or a set of photographs or images during the interview process (Harper, 2002; Begum et al. 2022) and allowing participants to give meaning, understanding, and share their lives experiences, stories or memories about the images in the photographs (Zenkov & Harmon, 2009) generating data. Research has shown that photo elicitation is not new, but has been applied in a wide range of studies for sociology, education, communication and anthropology (Harper, 2002; Taylor, 2002) for many years.

In this study photo elicitation went beyond just showing the participants an image and having them talk about it. It involved the combination of sharing photographs and recounting experiences (oral and visual aspects) which create conducive environments for the participants to interact, reflect and share, and me, the researcher to gain significant insight beyond what was portrayed in the photograph, discovering meaning and significance of their experiences ascribed to their photographs in a more detailed way (Olson et al., 2021; Lorenz, 2016; Pink, 2009; Begum et al. 2022; Croghan et al., 2008).

In addition, the images and photographs also stimulate deeper elements of memory than words, and caused the participants to engage in reflective thinking (especially when the images show aspects of their lives) leading to more specific recall (Rose, 2012). As the memory is stimulated the participants reflect on additional experiences allowing me, the researcher to obtain the facts or added data that were hidden in the visual representation and were also unknown to me (Berdanier, & Cox, 2015; Olson et al., 2021; Flick, 2006; Clark-Ibanez, 2004; Loeffler, 2005; Pole, 2004; Slutskaya et al., 2012), and might have also been overlooked in traditional semi structured interviews (Liebenberg et al., 2014; Glaw et al., 2017). Therefore, it can be said that using photographs in the interview not only elicits more information, but rather evokes a different kind of information creating additional data (Hatten et al., 2013; Harper, 2002).

During the photo-elicitation participants were asked questions such as: What prompted you to take this photograph? Explain what is happening in this photograph? What does this photograph mean to you? What were you feeling when you took the photograph? These questions

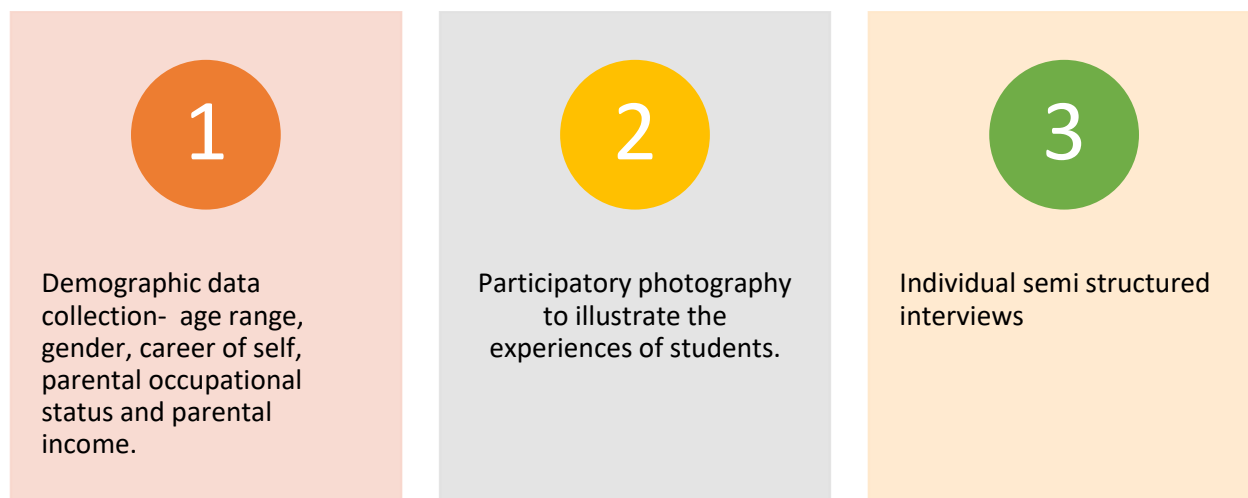
allowed the participants to further share stories about their experiences, providing greater understanding through their interpretation. Follow-up probes were used to help extend answers and further elicit meanings of specific ideas. The photographs were kept and used in the results chapter of the study.

What is evident is that the method of photo elicitation allows us to see that visible representation does not just bring the world of the participants to us, but it attaches meanings and values to who these participants are (Lorenz, 2016; Slutskeya, et al., 2012).

The anticipated time for each interview was approximately one hour and concluded with me asking the participants the final question, if there was anything more they would like to say (Morgan, 2011). The interview protocol and photo diary instructions are available as appendix 3 and 4.

In summary, the aim of this research was achieved by using the following data shown in Table 3.2 below.

Table 3:2 Data collection



Transcription

I transcribed verbatim the interviews that were recorded and wrote the text by hand. As the researcher, it was my obligation to accurately record the experiences as reported by the participants, whether I agreed with what was being said or not (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). Next, the handwritten text was typed, and the recordings replayed. As the recordings were played, I read along with the handwritten text to verify accurate documentation of the responses and to fill any missing gaps that were missing (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). This proved to be very time

consuming. As I transcribed the interviews, I became more familiar with the data and was beginning to have a clearer understanding of who my participants were before college, and who they are now at college. I realized that from my personal recollection, I had unconsciously skipped some of the information I heard in the interview and embellished some. This reinforced the point that in order to have accurate data it must be systemically gathered through a detailed transcript.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data was analyzed in two stages. The first stage was the production of the individual narrative, and the second stage examined the data for commonalities and themes.

Stage One-Individual Narratives

There are varying approaches to narrative research but what is germane is that the narratives as told by the participants are interpreted by the researcher (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2007). Narrative inquiry speaks to relational engagement where the experiences of the participants are related through their stories, within their social, cultural, familial, and institutional context (Moen, 2006). Vygotsky (1978) reaffirms this within the framework of his sociocultural theory, where he states that the learning persons acquire through their interactions and experiences within their social and cultural contexts influences what and who they are. The social context is not static, it is constantly changing and this impacts on how individuals perceive their world, learning and developmental opportunities (Moen, 2006).

As part of this study focuses on how prior contexts influence perceptions of success and how perceptions influence experiences of success in college of the participants, the interlinking between the participants and their contexts cannot be excluded (Moen, 2006). To gather a better understanding, participants attributed meaning to their real-life prior and present experiences and backgrounds, as related through their narratives (Trahar, 2008). Their stories or biographies allowed for a narrative form of representation, transmitting their reality through their photo-diaries and interviews (Warren & Webb, 2007). Narrative is useful in presenting data recorded through journal or diary entries and field notes during the data collection process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In narrative analysis two performances are involved: the researcher collects the evidence, then analyses or interprets the evidence.

Everyone has a narrative, and the individual narratives of the participants in this treatise varied due to their experiences and context of settings, (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Through their stories, their realities were communicated as they constructed or framed their experiences, conveying meaning to them, allowing me to gather rich layers of information and meaning of the

experiences of the participants and helping me gain a deeper understanding of who they are and their point of view (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). As the participants paint their stories not necessarily truths to their experiences, without any constraints being imposed on them, meaning is illuminated, contributing to their unique perspective as the patterns of their individual lives are understood and discovered (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; McAdams, 2008; van Manen, 2014). They allow us to see how they see themselves at various times in their lives and how they want us to see them (Atkinson, 2002).

Furthermore, they narrated to me, the researcher, what matters and the significance of the experiences to them, through photographs, thoughts and feelings (Kramp, 2004; Bruner, 1987). As the researcher, my interest is not on the facts presented by the participants through their stories, but of how these facts are interpreted.

The process of developing the individual stories commenced with me listening to the recordings from the interviews again, reviewing the notes that were transcribed and identifying and noting any events that appeared to be of significance, or appeared to connect with relationships, similarities and dissimilarities in each transcript. This provided me with a greater understanding of the data and placed me in a better position to write the draft stories. From the notes taken, I wrote the draft stories trying to capture the life history of each participant while incorporating their thoughts from their photo journals, which included important events and any connections between these events. Individual quotations were incorporated in the stories to add meaning to the experiences of the participants and also highlight some key points in their responses (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000).

Stage Two-Commonalities and themes

The life stories or narratives chronicled can provide a broad picture and give insight into the contexts and experiences of the participants. Although this is so, we can attain a better understanding by further interpreting the stories by discovering commonalities and comparing and contrasting these commonalities with the literature using coding (Polkinghorne, 2007). To assist with the identification, analysis and determination of various commonalities within the data and to help guide this analysis, Braun and Clarke's (2006) model of reflexive thematic analysis, (figure 3.1 below), a six-phase process for engaging data, developing codes and themes, was used. I was cognizant that these themes and commonalities can be influenced by my own bias and that they did not only appear from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To be assured that the themes addressed

the research questions, the research questions and literature guided the process (Jeong & Othman, 2016).

Therefore, the following steps as outlined in (Figure 3.1 overleaf) was observed:

1) *Familiarizing with data*: I read and re-read the participants' individual stories becoming intimately familiar with their content and overall experiences. (2) *Generating initial codes*: although the participants were voicing their individual stories, some shared understanding or interrelatedness were deduced by detecting some common understandings and experiences among them (Cousin, 2009). To identify these commonalities, I utilized an inductive open coding process reading line by line to help build concepts, categories and capture key ideas related to the research question identifying them for further analysis. In so doing I created a list consisting of emerging, recurring words and phrases from each story that reflected current as well as past facets of the lives of the participants (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). These were labeled with a particular code eg: FCI (family context and influence); PR (positive relationships); N (neighbourhood); S(success). The actual words or phrase used as codes were the actual verbiage of the participants. (3) *Searching for themes*: The categories developed for individual participants were grouped according to similarities of, or responses to, experiences. These categories were then further evaluated and key findings presented in four broad themes from the data. This is in keeping with the inductive open coding process. Inductive open coding is taking the text and using new labels to describe and categorise it (Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2011). Open coding is good for this research as it allows me to compare and contrast similar phenomena in my data with each other (Douglas, 2003). The data when coded does not fit into a pre-existing frame but builds directly from the raw data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Douglas, 2003) which allows me to compare and contrast similar phenomena in my data with each other (Douglas, 2003). This process in itself ensures the validity of the work (Douglas, 2003). 4) *Reviewing themes*: The four broad themes were checked to ensure that they told a convincing story of the data and answered the research question. (5) *Defining and naming themes*: From these four broad themes and nine sub-themes emerged that linked ideas to the phenomena being studied. The four themes were: Family context and influence act as a motivator towards students' perceptions of success in two different ways. Positive relationships are important in pursuing further education and acquiring success. The neighbourhood (socioeconomic status) students grew up in presents all kinds of challenges to success in education, but the challenges can be overcome. Success is related to wanting to have

something better than what students grew up with, and this acts as a motivator or measure of their success. (6) producing the report: synthesizing and reporting on my findings.

Figure 3.1 Six phases of reflexive thematic analysis



Phases of thematic analysis. Adapted from Braun & Clarke 2006, p 87

3.5 Ethics

The commencement of the research process caused me to look closely at ethics and the code of conduct I should engage in within the backdrop of this study. This means that as the researcher, I had to address some main ethical issues such as personal codes of practice, consent and access that could surface before the research commenced, during the research, and with the approaches used in reporting the results (Cohen et al. 2011; Creswell, 2014; Pring 2001). Therefore, to combat these ethical issues, it was therefore critical for me to engage in correct ethical behaviors and carry out my research in accordance with the research ethics policy advocated by the University of Liverpool. In the absence of a research ethics approval body, an authorisation letter was given to me from Turks and Caicos Island Community College allowing me to conduct the research there (Appendix 1). Ethical approval was sought and obtained from the University of Liverpool Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee on 10th December 2019 (Appendix 2).

In my professional capacity, I did not perform any professional roles at the institution. Furthermore, I neither worked at nor appraised the institution, taught or worked with any of the potential participants or lecturers at the institution. In my official, professional capacity I had no direct or indirect link to the potential participants or lecturers in the study. However, I am cognizant

that I might be considered as one whose position within the Department of Education has given some measure of power, authority and influence and am also known by some participants and faculty members. As Ensign (2003) indicates, if there is a known relationship between interviewer and interviewee, this can be a conflict of interest.

Being in a position of superiority to the participants, they might feel intimidated and as if they are being coerced into engaging in the interviews. Accordingly, I needed to create the necessary steps to ensure that the students did not feel that way, hence through the Participation Information Sheet, all participants were informed that I was engaging in this research as a student to fulfil the thesis requirements for the completion of my Doctor of Education degree, and not in my professional capacity. It was reiterated that their participation was voluntary and they were free to withdraw at any time during the period of data collection, with no expected consequences.

To develop the trust level between myself and the participants, assurances were given that confidentiality will not be breached (Ensign, 2003) and any shared information will be treated with the highest confidence (Beauchamp & Childress, 2001). In fact, every participant was provided with a PIS outlining the guidelines for their participation, the voluntary nature of the study and confirming anonymity and confidentiality.

Informed Consent

Research necessitates obtaining consent from the participants and the facility in which the research is being conducted (Cohen et al., 2006). Informed consent was sought at the commencement of the initial meeting as it is an essential element of ethical behavior practice and acts as a cornerstone for ethical behavior. This is where the rights and autonomy of the participants are protected (Cohen et al., 2011). Participants were informed in the Consent Form that their participation was voluntary and they were free to withdraw at any time during the period of data collection, without any explanation or consequences by making contact with me. They were further informed that they could request their data to be destroyed and no further use be made of it. However, participants were informed that once the transcription and anonymization of the data was done after the interviews, there was no avenue for withdrawal.

Risk and management

Participants were informed of any possible risks of taking part in the study and how these risks were going to be managed. There were no cases where the participants experienced any measure of discomfort reliving the past, or where the risk was severe. Therefore, there was no need

to offer the participants time out from the study or even recommend they consult with the Education Psychologist within the Department of Education.

Ensuring confidentiality

All participants' confidentiality and privacy (central tenets for researchers) should be maintained during the research process (Smith, 2003) and I ensured that the participants were informed of such. They were each informed that where direct quotations were used to make the participant identifiable by others, the identifiable data would be distorted and anonymized. In the transcribing of the data from the interviews, pseudonyms would be used. These were all efforts to protect and uphold the rights to confidentiality and privacy of the participants (Sandelowski, 1994; Smith, 2003).

Personal data was stored for no longer than was necessary for the purpose for which it was being processed. This happened during the course of the research and not just at the end. Manual files were archived for a period of 5 years. The hardcopies of the consent forms were collected, scanned, and filed electronically with a password and will not be used for further research projects in the future. The photo diaries and audio recordings were filed electronically, password protected and stored within my space on the University network drive and password protected on my personal computer and archived for a period of 5 years. Finally, no proprietary information was shared and to maintain confidentiality all data was securely stored.

3.6 Reflexivity

As I started this research journey, I understood the importance of engaging in reflexivity, which is the act of self-reflecting that requires me to be cognizant of the context of my research and my position within that context (Swartz, 1997). This required me to reflect, examine and scrutinize my behavior and thoughts, as well as the phenomena under study, with the aim of becoming a better researcher (Renganathan, 2009; Watt, 2007). It also allowed me to be more aware of, and reflective on, my own bias, so that I can maintain objectivity while conducting my research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

I know that as a researcher I bring a level of subjectivity to my research and as a result, prejudices, pre-understandings, general concerns, and biases in relation to the phenomena under study, that could have an impact on the outcomes of my research, cannot go unnoticed (Mehra, 2002; LeCompte, 1999). Therefore, by engaging in reflexivity I will in some way mitigate the risks of these biases in an effort not to influence or limit the openness of the research and at least help

others read this thesis with that understanding (LeCompte, 1999; van Manen, 2011; van Manen, 1997).

During my journey of reflexivity through the entire dissertation process, I found myself engaging in descriptive reflection, as I recorded my reflections and actions through reflective journals. This saw me recording my thoughts, responses, and reflections as they unfolded throughout the research process. My journal was a place for me to vent, celebrate, question myself, record my thoughts and feelings, or document articles I read that I deemed could help me in my study (Vagle, 2014). Reflective journaling was not limited to just utilizing my notebook where I jotted down ideas, created reading reflections, questioned myself or wrote my thoughts, but by using multiple other methods such as my iPhone, where I recorded ideas that came to me while I was away from home, or my word documents for general notes. The journal entries provided a reference point to where I could return when necessary, and where I gained deeper knowledge and understanding as I proceeded with the dissertation.

It is my view that higher education not only plays a significant role in the academic development and social mobility of a society, as well as improve social mobility and lives as well. It acts as a vehicle for academic and personal growth, as well as offers instruction and training to help develop skills and competencies necessary for a flexible, educated workforce (Dole & Griffin, 2012; Gibson, 2016; Ramaley, 2015; Hawkes, 2016; Altbach, 1998). I am aware of the inability of students to move beyond their social strata, but I am desirous to see them progress and achieve success despite their background experiences or socio-economic standings. Having a higher education should be a means of them achieving this. How I perceive my purpose can unknowingly influence my research, and can in some way, impact on, or compromise the validity or persuasiveness of my research findings. That being said, my positionality will affect the field work and will have an impact upon how ethical issues are handled. This can lead me to a bias in making ethical decisions and influence how I interpret the data. This is nothing strange because my ethical behaviors rely heavily on my ontological positions which are based on my beliefs or individual views (Smith, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). That being the case, I am likely to formulate prescriptive judgments consistent with my positionality (Cohen et al., 2011; Smith, 2003). As a result, I thought it necessary to involve the participants in reviewing their final stories due to their personal nature since I did not want my personal biases to influence the interpretation of the data in any way.

Reflexivity also allowed me, the researcher, to bring some level of credibility and trustworthiness to the research. It caused me to act honestly and with integrity, as I functioned as the main collection source of my data and analysis of that data, knowing that my positionality can affect research outcomes and interpretations (Glesne, 2011; Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2009; Temple & Young, 2004).

I also acknowledge that my own perceptions of success, as well as my prescriptive judgments consistent with my positionality, could influence my data collection, and have an impact upon how ethical issues are handled (Cohen et al., 2011; Smith, 2003). In fact, during the data collection process, I could not understand how some of the photographs included in the diaries of the participants could be linked to success, and I was tempted to ask some participants to submit replacement photos, as some images were not in alignment with my personal concept of success nor close to what the literature was signifying success to be. However, as I engaged in the process of rigorous self-reflection, participating in “self-questioning,” I had the opportunity to see how my own prejudices, biases, preferences and concerns could impact on the field, and affect the outcomes of my research (LeCompte, 1999), Here I saw how my personal biases have influenced my perceptions where I had certain expectations of what was likely to be seen and I made my own judgements (Cohen, Marion, & Morrison, 2000). This caused me to think about my practice, which allowed me to “construct, deconstruct and reconstruct” experiences that allowed change in my future actions and responses during the research process (Sherwood & Horton-Deutsch, 2012; Freshman, 2008).

I was also aware that when interviewing the participants, I needed to remain as neutral as possible. It was necessary for me to put my personal views and reactions aside and listen to the participants objectively. I must admit, it proved somewhat difficult at times, especially during my first two interviews, for me to be totally objective and not add my views to the conversation. Such moments led me to engage in reflexivity, transforming my thought processes, which in turn lead to a change in my strategy as I proceeded to conduct my research for the other eight interviews (Facione, 1990; Jenkins, 2011).

In my capacity as an Education Officer, working within the Department of Education, interacting with some tutors at the college, as well as hearing comments of some persons in the wider public I had formed some generalised views of the type of students enrolled at TCICC. As I read the interview transcripts aloud, stopping at intervals to interpret thematically, I was provided with an avenue to better understand my participants as individuals, as they openly shared their

lived experiences. I wondered about the unspoken meaning that lay behind the words of my participants, I wondered how it would feel to be in their situations and have the experiences described by them. I tried to envisage if there was anything similar in my life experiences that could be related to theirs.

I came to understand their struggles, who they were before entering TCICC, who they are now at TCICC, their resilience, and in many instances their determination to succeed. I then realized that compared to them, my path to higher education was nothing close to theirs, but a smooth sail into university. This opened my understanding and made me realize the valuable role TCICC is playing in providing opportunities for these students in its efforts to widening participation and access.

3.7 Richness and depth (validity)

As I conducted this research, I found myself reflecting and pondering on a number of questions. I asked myself; since my data collection is by way of the participants telling their lived experiences, how do I ascertain they are sharing truths? What if they have fabricated these stories? How will this impact on my research? Will my research be considered valid?

I wanted to conduct an area of research that was transparent, consistent, and connected. In so doing, I ensured that the research had verisimilitude, depth, rigor and richness. This is necessary as these characteristics are an important requirement in having an effective, valid piece of research. Cohen et al., (2007) affirm that if my research is invalid, then there is no worth in it. The validity of this research lies in the richness, depth and thick description of the data that provided nuanced accounts of the participants' lived experiences of the phenomena and contexts in which those experiences occurred. Thick description was captured in the many layers of culture and context that was seized in which the experiences presented are entrenched.

In this study, what I managed to elicit out of the photo discussions and the in-depth students' view, are the genuine insights that I am presenting. Some evidence of the student's views is presented in some cases in tables or illustrative quotes (see table 4.2).

I thought it also fitting to follow Denzin and Lincoln (2005) proposed four step guidelines to support trustworthiness and rigor in qualitative research. I ensured *credibility* was guaranteed by capturing accurate accounts of the participants' stories on my voice recorder and also by using direct quotations from the participants within the study. Furthermore, I engaged in member checks to bolster the credibility of this study. It is defined as a process whereby the researcher forwards the final report or themes to the participants, affording them the opportunity to assess the accuracy,

credibility, and validity of what is reported. This will also allow them to add context or correct any misrepresentation if deemed necessary (Creswell, 2009; Harper & Cole, 2012; Patton, 2002). The member checking process took place during the interviews when I asked the participants questions such as: “*Did I understand you correctly?*” or “*Am I quoting you correctly?*” This was to ensure that I had recorded what the participants intended to say and not what I thought they said. Again, member checking was utilized after the individual stories were written. The stories were sent to the participants via email for them to review to ensure that they were accurate and credible portrayals of the accounts of their stories. Here the emphasis was to guarantee that their stories had been captured authentically and that their words matched what they intended. The information gathered from the feedback provided by the participants is included in Chapter 5 in the analysis of the lived experiences.

Secondly, to achieve *dependability*, clear and convincing details of the research design and the underpinning rationale were presented and explained. Thirdly, *transferability* was accomplished by using purposive sampling method as I provided rich, accurate descriptions that involved their biographical data (see table 4.1), the quantity of participants and their lived experiences. Fourthly, the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim allowing me to achieve *confirmability*.

Finally, rigor and richness were also evident in my reflexivity account where I presented transparent accounts of my role as an instrument in this qualitative inquiry (Patton, 1999). My reflective commentary as shown in (section 3.6), highlighted my awareness of how my perspectives, beliefs and professional position could have an impact or effect on my data collection, analysis and interpretation. I determined to be transparent from the beginning of the study with the participants. This was critical because I did not want any of my personal or professional information to impact positively or negatively on the collection of data or its analysis, nor the interpretation of the participants’ data (Patton, 1999). In addition, my process of reflexivity served as a repository to any alterations I might want to engage in through the data collection, analysis and interpretation stage and in some way mitigate the risks of my biases in an effort not to influence or limit the openness of the research.

This research also presents a high density or depth of contextual information that can contribute to existing knowledge, with new insights potentially being generated that have meaning and relevance which can assist others in similar contexts and situations if applied.

3.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter explained the aim, research questions and summarized the methodology that was used to add to the knowledge about how students' contexts can influence their perceptions of success how these perceptions influence their experiences of success in a higher education institution. It also filled in some gaps in the current literature and provided the justification for my choice of narrative approach which is underpinned by hermeneutical phenomenology. The data analysis process was also addressed, followed by a discussion on ethics, reflexivity, rigor and trustworthiness. The following chapter will present the findings of the interviews. It lays out the stories and groups the commonalities and major themes from across the stories of the participants.

Chapter 4 Findings

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter the two-stage analysis process utilized in the study was discussed. This chapter discusses the findings from the data collected in those two stages. The first stage of this chapter gives the biographical details that are relevant to the study and then data recorded from the interviews are presented in the form of the participants' stories.

As an introduction to the participants, demographic information on each participant is presented in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1. Participants' demographics.

Participants (pseudonyms)	Age	Gender	Parental Occupation Status		Parents Education	Parents' Monthly Income	Always lived on island	Year in degree program
			Mother	Father				
Elaine	45	F	Retired-Shop assistant	Retired-construction	Both parents- did not graduate from high school	\$1001-\$2500	Yes	1st
Flo	32	F	Unemployed	Construction	Both parents- did not graduate	\$1001-\$2500	Yes	2nd
Harriet	20	F	House keeping	supervisor	Father – No degree but some tertiary level education Mother – graduated from high school	\$2501-\$3500	Yes	1st
Heather	28	F	Domestic worker		Both parents- did not graduate from high school	\$1001-\$2500	Yes	1st
June	51	F	Retired- domestic worker	Retired fisherman	Father- did not graduate from high school Mother – graduated from high school	\$1001-\$2500	No	2 nd
Mike	19	M	Teacher	Deceased	Mother–bachelor's degree	\$2501-\$3500	Yes	1st
Monica	36	F	Retired maid	Retired-fisherman	Both parents- did not graduate from high	\$2501-\$3500	Yes	2 nd
Peter	23	M	Office Administrator	construction worker	Both parents- graduated From high school	\$2501-\$3500	Yes	1st
Rose	32	F	Government Officer	chef	Both parents- graduated From high school	\$2501-\$3500	Yes	1st
Sonia	21	F	Attorney	Banking	Father - degree Mother –degree	Over \$3501	Yes	2 nd

4.2 Participants' stories

These stories are personal recollections and perceptions of experiences as told by the participants. They are diverse regarding levels of hardship related to their socio-economic status, gender, age and familial status (see table 4.1). These participants provided us with a glimpse into their world, their environments and their personal life histories, travelling back in time and places and bringing us to the present. Their stories provide a greater understanding of how their backgrounds influenced their perceptions of the phenomenon of success, and how these perceptions influence their experiences at college. They also demonstrated the individuality of each student and showed that no two students' context or journey were the same. The stories further highlighted the complexity of background influences on students' perception of success and supported the idea that a single measure cannot be used to gauge success but a combination of multiple measures. Quotes blended from their interviews and photo-elicitation are incorporated into their individual biographical sketches as they share their narrative. Each of the ten participants were given pseudonyms and their stories were arranged in alphabetical order. The stories helped in providing data /findings that helped to answer the research sub questions:

1. What are the educational experiences and context that students bring to the higher education institution?
2. How do students define success in college?
3. What are the factors students believe contribute/do not contribute to their success as they define it?
4. How do students' perception of success influence their experiences at the college?

Elaine

Elaine 45, the last of four children, is a mature student. At the age of 14 her parents separated and she grew up in a close-knit household with her mom, one sister and two brothers. Her mother is now retired, two siblings work in unskilled jobs and one is unemployed. Neither of her parents graduated from high school and to them, finding employment to gain an income was seen as more important than education. Her family could not see the connection between education and success. Elaine has now become the first generation in the family to attend college.

Elaine grew up in a poor neighborhood very close to town and enjoyed what she describes as a typical childhood. This involved playing with the other children who had similar backgrounds or visiting their homes. She talks about the difficult hardships her family faced:

“life within the family was difficult, for we encountered many hardships. Everyone in the neighborhood did not have a refrigerator, electricity, or television because we were poor. Mom worked for a very small income, and we could not afford many things. There were limited resources, eg: few books in the house ... I can recall looking through our window into our neighbour’s house to watch TV as we had no television or telephone.”

Elaine’s perception of success at home was linked to the possession of material things the other children in her neighbourhood had that she did not. Elaine’s inclusion of three pairs of Clarke’s shoes in her photo diary speaks to her view of what being successful is to her. She remarks,

“As a child I wanted my family to be successful... I wanted us to have a TV, a big house, lots of food, fancy clothes and money...then everyone will say how successful we are... I will be successful and will be able to afford those things I desired as a child... With my degree I will be able to buy any number of shoes... not any shoes, Clarks...Clarks’ shoes are a step up from the ordinary way of life ... a way of improving myself... Moving from an ordinary standard of life to being able to afford CLARKS...which are like luxury brands that only the elite or well off can afford... It is a means of walking in comfort and with confidence.”

Elaine continues about the positive experiences she encountered in her neighborhood:

“The persons in the neighborhood looked out for each other. If you did not have, everyone would share. I have been taught from the elders in the neighborhood how to share with, and respect others.”

Elaine said she never liked attending classes while at high school and “*did not want to do any work.*” She saw it as a place to “hang out” with friends and watch football. The measurement of her success was linked to the satisfaction of the experiences she was having and developing her sense of identity.

“ I was not successful in my schoolwork as I placed very little effort in that, but I felt successful because I had friends, some of which are still there for me today. I looked forward to hanging with them, watching football at lunch time and after school, that was important to me.”

Nothing extraordinary stood out for her while being at high school. She just went to school because her mother required her to go; it had nothing to do with engaging in academics. In her words,

“Education was nothing that seemed important, it was not discussed within the household, and I went to school because my mom sent me and I had to go.”

Elaine explains her high school experiences and how she felt like a misfit. She felt like her family background and socioeconomic standing impacted on how she was viewed in high school.

“... talking about high school takes me back to my family and the neighborhood in which I grew up. It is a case where I am at school and surrounded by students who are from the higher echelons of society, students who we considered to be rich, and here am I, from the ghetto. I always had the feeling that I was a misfit, I was only there because I had to be there.”

Elaine perceives many of the students at school as being successful, because *“their parents had big jobs, and they were brought to school in their big cars.”* She walked to school and if she had those things, she felt she would be seen as successful too.

It had never been Elaine’s intention to go to college due to her experiences and societal conditioning. As a child, college was never discussed in her family and she had no aspirations of going there. It was her disposition to find employment and gain an income instead of furthering her education. However, since marrying, she has been highly motivated by her husband who encouraged her to advance herself academically and professionally. As a mature student with limited finances, she could not afford to study abroad so she settled to studying at TCICC, which was more affordable and accessible. Upon her decision to study, the support to succeed was not forthcoming from all her siblings. Elaine received encouragement from her older brother who told her to *“go for it sis.”* However, she lamented that,

“my sister will mock me and say you want to be professor lala, or Inspector Gadget. It was more of a negative vibe coming from her than anything else...being the first person in the family to attend college can be very scary at times. Many times I wonder if I will succeed at all.”

Elaine indicates that she was admitted into the degree program, with lower educational attainment than her younger counterparts and felt that she was not fully prepared for college. It was difficult transitioning from work mode to study mode, but she had to do it. Her study notes photo (Elaine pic 5) represents the many nights spent studying, *“burning the midnight oil.”* She realizes that *“success does not come easily, there must be sacrifices, struggles you have to endure, to reach the point of success.”*

Many times she reached cross-roads, as reflected in her photo diary and wanted to quit.

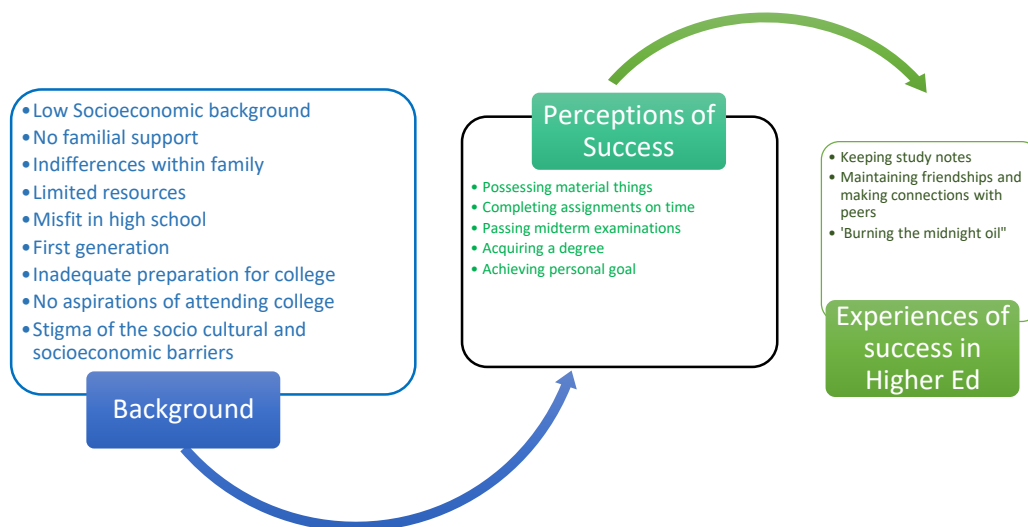
“This is a crossroad I travel on my way to college. I encounter many challenges at college that place me at these intersections... I constantly ponder: What am I doing to myself? Should I continue or divert? ...These conflicting ideas, cause me to reflect on the path I am travelling... you know what you want and when you meet the challenges you hear all the negative comments that were made to you when you started out on your journey; so you ask yourself... is this really for me?”

She also indicates that in her challenging moments in class when she feels like giving up, she gazes to the sky and says to herself. *“Elaine, the sky is the limit, aim high, if you fall you will drop to the clouds. That image just keeps me motivated; that’s why I included that picture in my diary.”* In addition, she made connection and maintained friendships with two of her peers who were more academically astute and they encouraged and helped her during some challenging periods while studying.

Elaine believes that *“being able to complete assignments on time, passing midterm examination, and being successful in them, while staying sane, is also my success and call for a celebration.”* To this end, Elaine explains that the image of glasses of drinks reflects how she celebrates her success and informs that this is of great importance to her.

However, she believes that by having a degree it will be a means of upward social mobility. It provides her with the opportunity to reach a personal goal that is to advance in her chosen career and as a result, receive a higher salary and status. *“I will be able to afford things that I could not get when I was much younger -clothes, money, travel, shoes.”*

Figure 4.1. Snapshot of Elaine’s background, perceptions of success and experiences of success in higher education



Flo

Flo reflects on her life growing up in her single-parent family home with her unemployed mother, one sister and one brother and her current college experiences. As she looks at one of her images of flamingos standing in and around a salt pond, she explains their symbolic representation:

“I pass these flamingoes some days on my way to college...the flamingos represent my family, my heritage. Seeing them standing in and around the salt pond reminds me of the physical demands of the daily lives of my family... how hard my ancestors worked in these ponds because they did not have an education... it gives me drive to work hard to have a better life than they had and still have.”

Flo explains that understanding her family history will show why being first generation to pursue higher education is significant to her success.

Flo also informs that her family financial situation was very dire and that life presented many challenges, as often they could not afford the basic necessities of life. She also relates that in her early years her mother was not involved in her academics.

“Resources that many of my peers had (books, internet, puzzles), and took for granted were nonexistent...we could barely manage food and sometimes we went without...life was hard... education was never placed as a priority in my household. Mom ensured that we went to school but it was expected that after completing high school you go to work. My family did not help me in my success and my siblings never connected about school or education. I say to myself, I am going to make a change, I will make a difference in my community. It was my personal drive to come out of poverty that pushed me to finish my studies.”

Flo, 32 years old, grew up in a poor neighbourhood with no electricity in her home but spent time at her immediate neighbours playing with the children. She laments the fact that,

“...it was difficult sometimes as I could not complete homework due to the lack of electricity... I had to be careful of the friends I kept or the places I go, as drugs and other negative behaviors were constants in my neighbourhood.”

Through it all, living in her environment has shown her the need to study hard to get out of that type of environment and the importance of choosing friends wisely; something she values now in her adult life.

In high school, Flo was constantly reminded by teachers and students of where she came from and was told she would not be successful. She was placed in the C Stream and she felt unsupported by her teachers who did not push her to succeed. She said, *“I was told I would not be successful.... I was demotivated by some teachers...I thought high school was preparing me for work, for life,*

but it did not.” Her biggest achievement was completing high school and graduating with a few CXC certificates. Flo speaks to her inclusion of an image of a long-curved road with buildings in the distance in her diary.

“Taking this road to college is like a dream. I never thought I will be taking this road and my destination will be the college...It reminds me of the times I was told I will never be successful, here I am on the road to success.”

Coming from a lower socioeconomic environment where her family never saw education as a priority, Flo did not think she was going to make it to higher education and perceived getting there as out of her reach. However, her journey to getting there was a struggle. She did not have the financial resources to study overseas so she felt that it was more convenient and cheaper to study at TCICC. Flo is currently engaged in full time employment as a health care assistant as a means of financially maintaining herself while studying.

Now at TCICC, as a first generation, mature student, she is experiencing several challenges. It is difficult to stay focused in and out of classes as she did no studies for a long time and she has problems managing her time. *“One of my major challenges is battling to balance work and studies,”* Flo remarks.

As a result, Flo uses a planner to help keep herself organized.

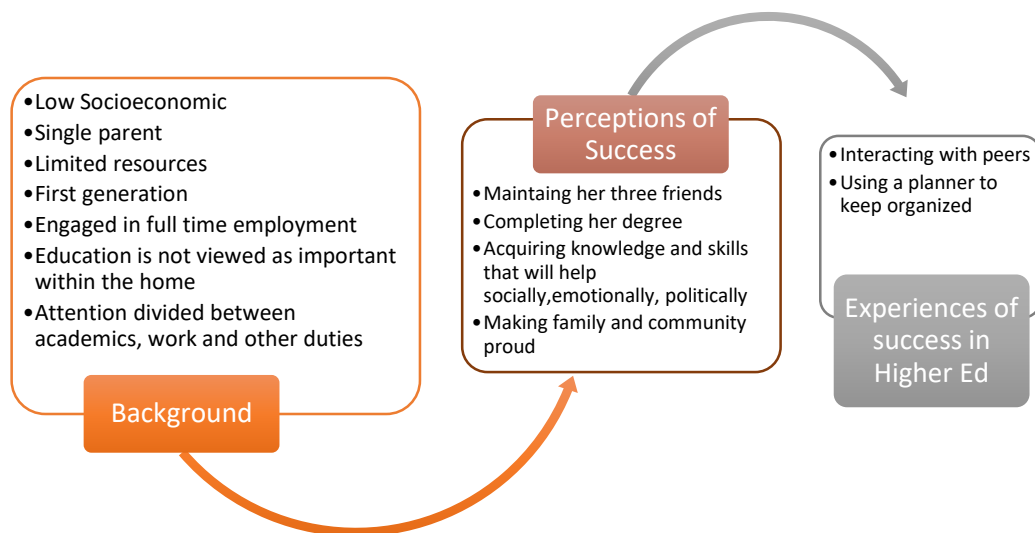
“I see the importance for me to have a clear agenda as I am juggling work and school; that’s why my planner is in my photo diary. I use my planner every single day and this helps keep me organize and focus ... as a result I can see myself getting closer to my goal.”

In addition, she explains why she maintains a peer network with three main friends. She captures this with the image of her friends having conversation. Her friends act as a second family to her and share college-related knowledge that her mother and siblings were unable to pass down to her. This provides Flo with a variety of strategies, knowledge and skills that she can use to support and propel her towards her academic and social success. Flo’s quote illustrates how her peer network supports her personal and professional growth.

“My friends give me advice and tips... Thanks to them, I have grown to become a more social person... I grew up being very shy, even in high school. My communication skills are definitely more developed. I must say I have also improved in my class assignments. I say to myself, if they can get it done, I can too.”

To Flo, success is being able to maintain her three friends, complete her Bachelor's degree and acquire knowledge and skills that will help her socially, economically or politically. She also wants to make her family and community proud.

Figure 4.2. Snapshot of Flo's background, perceptions of success and experiences of success in higher education



Harriet

Reminiscing on her past experiences and sharing her present situations at TCICC, Harriet relates her story. Harriet is a 20-year-old who grew up in a family of four and currently resides with her mother, a housekeeper; her father, employed as a supervisor; and her younger brother, a student. Neither of Harriet's parents has a college degree but her dad has some tertiary level education. Harriet has now positioned herself as first generation in her entire family to attend college. The family is quite close knit and places great value on education. Her father pushes her to do her best at all stages of her academic life and has high academic expectations of her. Although they were not blessed with great wealth, Harriet always felt a sense of belonging. Her parents fostered a home environment where she felt safe, and her efforts were valued and supported. She perceived that to be a measure of success, as many families in her neighborhood did not share in that advantage. Harriet recalls the strong values instilled in her and the knowledge and skills she gained from her family as a child which are firmly embedded in her mind.

“ I was in a supportive family environment, my efforts were being valued and I felt motivated, that was my success ... In my family I was told to be honest, work hard, set goals.... These are all with me today.”

She describes the setting of the neighborhood in which she grew up;

“We were what persons consider the lower socioeconomic class. Education was not pushed and it was unlikely for students to go on to college after high school. It was expected that you go and work and earn money to help with the family... Although there were low expectations in my neighbourhood, and no academic or social support from neighbours, I felt fortunate to have my family supporting my success.”

Harriet indicates that high school presented many challenges for her. She was in the A Stream, which meant there was a high level of competition, and a lot of work to keep up with. She noted that she liked the quality of the institution and the delivery of instruction by most of the teachers. One teacher stood out in her mind who made learning easier to remember, while having fun through her unique teaching methodologies and strategies. She stated,

“She created an interactive classroom and made learning fun. She took into consideration our diverse learning needs and this increased our chances to succeed... I was developing and improving intellectual skills and competencies...I was being successful.”

Although Harriet highlights the abovementioned domains as some areas of her success at high school, she indicated that her greatest achievements were being on the honour roll and gaining her CXC examinations.

Harriet speaks with a look of sadness on her face about her choice of studying at TCICC.

“I really wanted to study at a university overseas but due to financial constraints I had to choose TCICC. My parents would have to pay out of pocket to send me overseas and they could not afford it.”

However, she has become focused on making the best out of her college experiences and has spent lots of time visiting the library and conducting research on her various topics of study. In her words *“I want to be the best I can be in my studies.”* She further explains her inclusion of the library room in her photo diary.”

“When I visit the library, being surrounded by all the books gives me great excitement, I feel like I have the resources that can help me be successful. I am empowered.”

Harriet has surrounded herself with a friend Ann (pseudonym), whom she adds to her photo diary. Ann is a great support to Harriet, helping to build her academic resilience and success.

“We are from similar backgrounds, so we have many things in common. We always provide support for each other. We share study tips, learn from, and encourage each other when

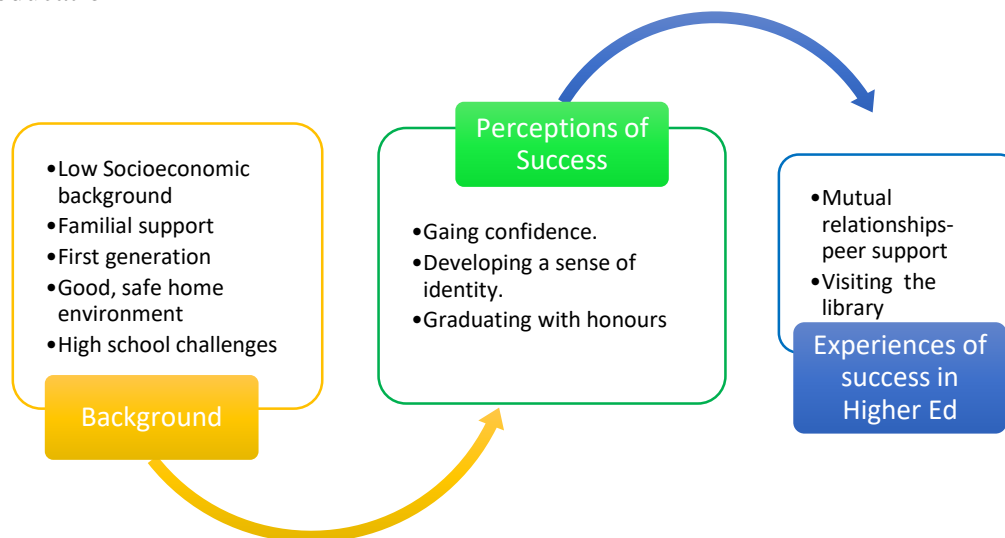
things get a bit overwhelming. We push each other to reach our desired goals, to strive for success”

In a photo elicitation example Harriet shares a book she has been reading on Self and Social Change. It is her aspiration to be successful and become a social worker when she graduates.

“My background and more so my neighbourhood has pushed me into my field of study. When I am through, I will be a great resource and able to help not only others who are the first in their families to come to college, but other struggling persons in my community especially the youth. I will be skilled to help them, guide them and help them find themselves ... the book discusses the theory around social change for life and the experiences of self... it is empowering and provides me with some knowledge to help me achieve my goal...”

Harriet describes her success in terms of gaining confidence, developing a sense of identity, and graduating with a 3.0 (honours) from TCICC.

Figure 4.3. Snapshot of Harriet’s background, perceptions of success and experiences of success in higher education



Heather

Heather 28 grew up in a low-income, single parent family, with a sister who is at high school, and her mother who works as a domestic for a small monthly salary. In her household there are limited resources in the form of books to read or the internet, and her mother does not have the financial resources to buy all her schoolbooks or have electricity in the home either. Her mother, not a native of this small island, did not complete her high school education, and most times is unable to assist Heather academically.

Heather reflects on the neighbourhood she grew up in prior to the last two years. It was crowded with many one-bedroom wooden homes, poorly constructed, and without electricity (The Yard). Although there were pockets of persons selling drugs, many of the neighbours were kind and shared with each other. *“They always thought I was smart and would encourage me to succeed and make them all proud,”* Heather remarks.

Heather adds a photo of “The Yard” in which she grew up, showing numerous small houses in a very crowded space. She indicates that every time she passes the location on her way to college her mother’s words would ring in her ears:

“it is not where you come from that defines you, it is where you are going... you will be successful... My Yard is my inspiration, it is a reminder of where I am from and it acts as a motivator for me to succeed at TCICC, not just for me, but for all those who live in the yard. I want to help with the transformation of lives of other children growing up in similar situations”

Life for Heather at high school in the early years was a challenge. Although she was born on the island, she was still seen as a “non-belonger” due to the nationality of her mother and she, as well as many others like her, were ostracized by many students and teachers. However, Heather was determined to succeed.

“My family is from a very humble background; we were considered as being in the lower socio-economic class and very little was expected academically from us. I was constantly reminded of this at high school... I was bent on proving them wrong... The conditions I was born into doesn’t define me.”

In her final three years she rose in popularity, she was in the school band, was performing top in the class and became one of the school’s student leaders. This level of responsibility equipped Heather with the important life skills, such as communication, team building and leadership, that will take her through college and beyond. Her greatest accomplishments at high school were being able to rise to be the top student leader and graduating as one of the top students. She perceived that this helped her with her social transition into TCICC setting and helped create the foundation for her success while there.

It was her dream to attend medical school, but due to financial constraints she had to settle for TCICC and pursue a degree in another field. However, Heather explains how immigration issues almost deprived her the opportunity of studying at TCICC as she posted a picture of her status card (a citizenship card).

“My mom is not from island, but my dad is, so it took me very long before I can get a status card. I am fortunate to be able to come to TCICC and be the first in my entire generation to be getting a degree...the long wait for the card caused me to start college later than expected.”

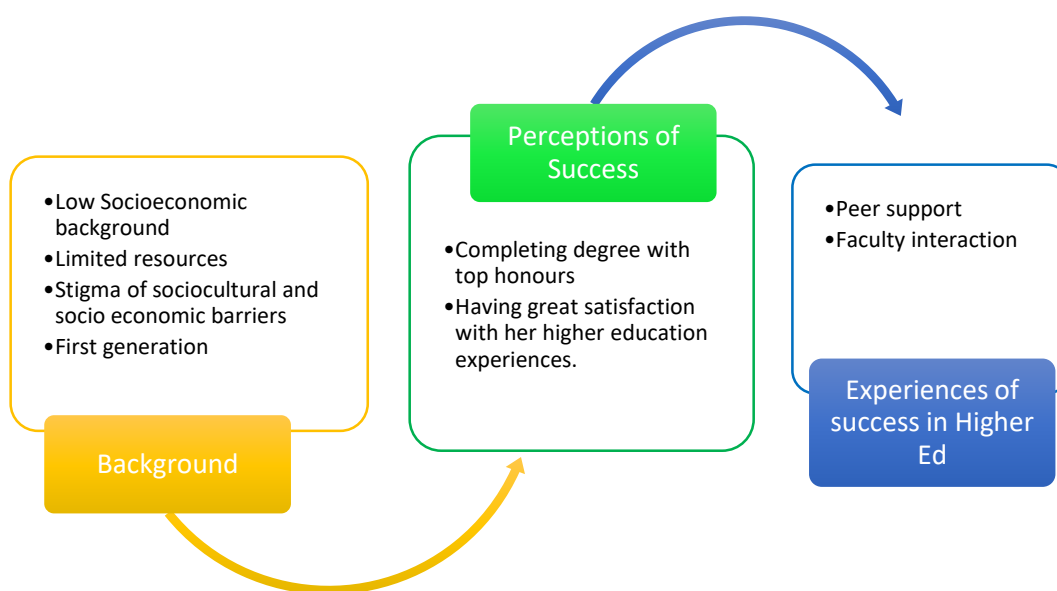
Heather is the first in her family to attend college and the first to complete high school and graduate. Heather affixes herself with a group of friends with whom she feels comfortable for they provide emotional support as well as words of advice when she is feeling down. These friends also share study and academic skills tips that help Heather in her academic work.

One of the images Heather displays is of a door to a faculty office which she says is always open for students to talk if they have any academic challenges.

“I have developed a valuable relationship with Mrs. X who has an open-door policy. I am able to visit her any time I need clarity on something I did not fully grasp in class or in my readings. Her extra help has been useful in my academic success... I know that anytime her door is open should I need help.”

She works between classes to help pay for her tuition at college and has maintained a positive attitude in her studies. Success for her will be to complete her degree with top honours as well as having great satisfaction with her higher education experiences.

Figure 4.4. Snapshot of Heather’s background, perceptions of success and experiences of success in higher education



June

June, a teacher, is the most senior participant in the study being over 50 years old and comes from a large family of eleven: 4 boys and 7 girls of which she is the 7th child. Her mom was a domestic worker who is retired, and her father is a fisherman. Her siblings are all employed.

June grew up with her grandmother in a close knit christian family. The neighborhood was quiet with little activity, so she had to find play for herself. The elders in the community had the authority to chastise any child, so the children were well disciplined. June remarks:

“Everyone in the community knew each other. We had to respect the elders... we could not lie... and the family was valued.”

Her grandmother worked as a domestic and did not have the skills to assist her with her academic work. Many times she felt alone but would find solace, encouragement and motivation in her oldest sister who was a guidance counsellor.

June’s overall impression of high school was favorable. She liked her teachers and favoured the subject Food and Nutrition. Her aim was to *“be successful by achieving a level of job readiness that affords her “the opportunity to earn money when leaving high school.”*

Her greatest achievement was being able to graduate despite the lack of support at home from her grandmother.

June speaks about the challenges of returning to studies after not having any additional formal education since leaving high school. She realized that high school did not prepare her with the knowledge and skills necessary for her higher education.

“It was difficult to get back into the mode of studying, having not done so since leaving high school. I realized I did not have most of the skills and attributes such as critical thinking and problem solving needed in college due to me experiencing this gap while in earlier in school.”

Furthermore, she could not afford the finances to pay for college abroad, so she considered the local community college.

“Studying at TCICC as a mature student was something I thought long and hard about. I could not afford to study abroad... I am there now, and it is where I go to get the success for my degree.”

June speaks to the important role the college is playing in her life and how much pride she has at being a part of it. She indicates that seeing its emblem and name brings her great satisfaction, hence their inclusion into her diary.

“... Every time I see this emblem and the name on the wall they remind me of my mission for success, why I am here at college... where I am getting the success for my degree...just seeing the name acts as a motivator for me.”

Studying at TCICC is not without its challenges for June as she is in conflict *“balancing work, family responsibilities and studies.”* June states that the image of her propping on her arm, in deep thought is of the first day in a course at TCICC, where the lecturer was giving the layout of the course. There her thoughts were wandering about why she is at TCICC, what she wants to achieve, and where she wants to be.

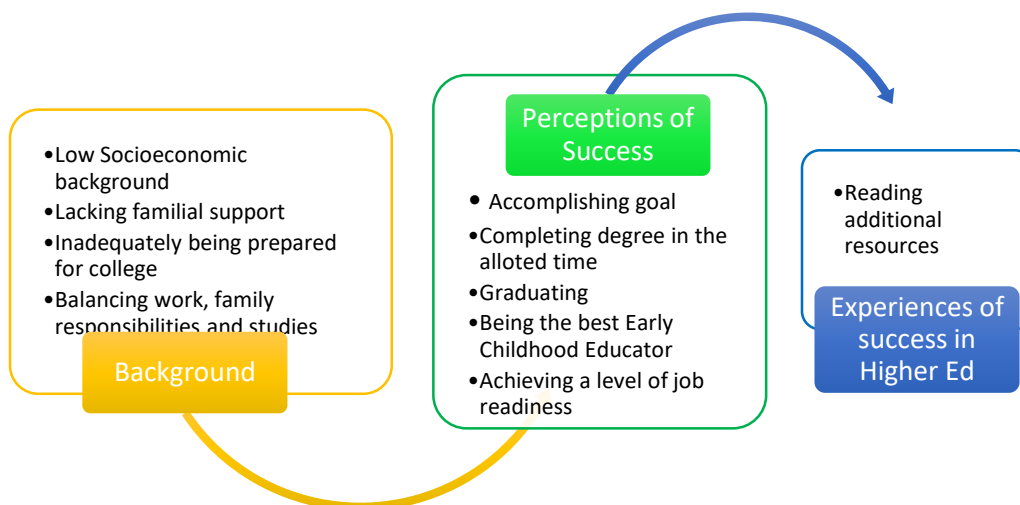
In one of her photo elicitation examples June shows the image of two resource books she is reading on the exceptional child for class.

“My studies on the exceptional child is providing me with great knowledge on how to help these children in my class... I am wondering and thinking of ways in which I can help them succeed. By having these children succeed, I too will be succeeding as it shows my capabilities as an early childhood educator... These thoughts drive me more towards my goal to be successful and get my degree.”

June explains that the image of her classroom is a constant reminder of where it all started, where her passion for early childhood lies, and her need to succeed and be the best in early childhood education. June aligns herself to the phenomenon of success and provides a personal definition of it.

“Success is being able to accomplish my goal, which is, to complete my degree in the allotted time, graduate and be the best in early childhood education.”

Figure 4.5. Snapshot of June’s background, perceptions of success and experiences of success in higher education



Mike

Mike is a 19-year-old full time student, who lives with his single mother and three out of five siblings. His family depended solely on his mother because of the untimely death of his father when Mike was just thirteen years old. His mother is a teacher and holds a bachelor's degree. His three younger brothers are at high school while his two older sisters, both holders of a bachelor's degree, work in government. As a teacher, his mom placed great value on education and the need for him to be successful. In fact, the expected norm and natural progression within Mike's family is to advance to higher education and further his studies. He perceives that was what he had to do after graduating from high school. Mike's mom wants him to reach a high level of educational attainment and is always there to support him academically while promoting his holistic development. Mike says he *"feels safe and secure within his family... my mother provides whatever I need for school, all my resources ...books etc. and as a result I see myself as successful."* He perceives that having this familial support in the form of encouragement and a positive educational culture within his home, is causing him to strive for success while at college.

Mike talks about his early experiences growing up in his neighbourhood and the security he felt.

"I grew up in a safe, middle-class neighborhood where I had friends my age to chill with. I played basketball and football with the guys and we would chill at each other's houses."

He explains that his friends were all performing well academically and their parents took education seriously. They felt that *"we all should progress to college after leaving high school."* Lessons learnt from growing up in this environment were endurance, perseverance and that *"you must never compare yourself to others; be content with what you have."*

In recalling his high school experiences, Mike says he performed average academically. His goal was to do his best and describes his success as a track star and what it felt like. *"I had a talent. I was a track star... one of the popular guys at school... the girls were attracted to me, I was famous, successful and at the top of my game."* His major accomplishment was being able to represent his country in athletics in a regional competition. To him this was another form of his success, as well as a way of making his deceased father proud of him.

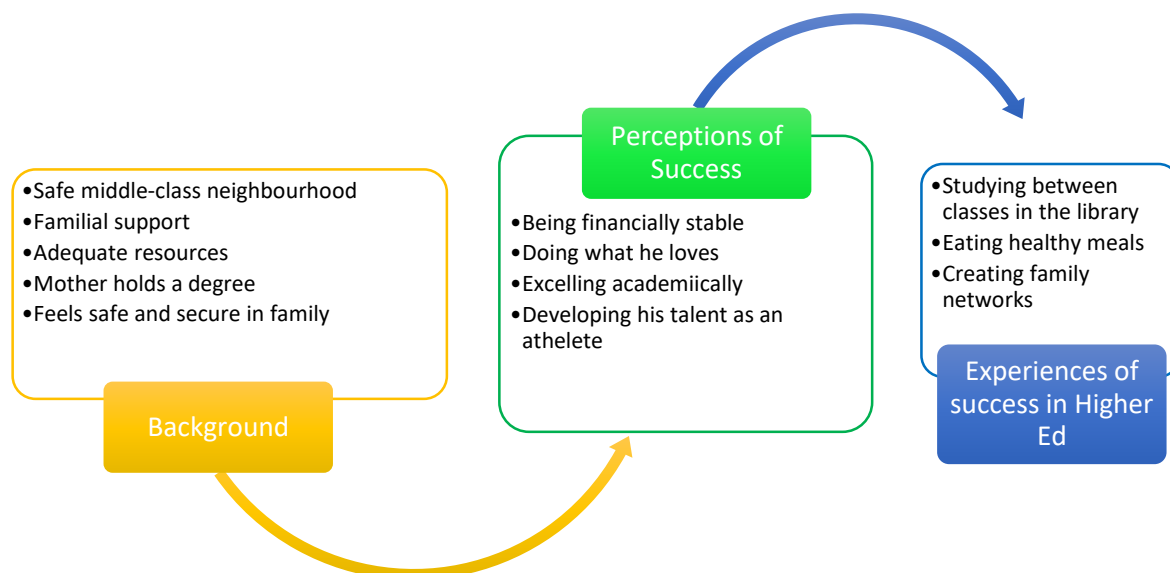
TCICC was not his first choice to study but due to the passing of his father he wanted to stay close to his family, especially his younger siblings who see him as a role model. Notwithstanding, he did not acquire a scholarship to study overseas, and it would have been a great

expense on his family if he did so. Now at TCICC, his major challenge is trying to keep up with the amount of work and staying focused. Mike acknowledges that for him to be successful in his academics he must put in the extra effort outside of the class. This requires him to study between classes in the library and at home at his computer desk and most importantly eating healthy meals. Three of the images in his photo diary showing his computer desk and table, a nutritious fibrous snack and bookshelf of encyclopedias in the college library, reflect this thought. Mike further elaborates:

“During my lengthy study periods I tend to use a healthy mixed diet as fuel to help sustain me for the rest of the day...I see studying as very important to me succeeding in my degree, so I maximize the use of the library at college, the internet and my family as important resources... I like my own quiet space to reflect and focus, so my computer table in my bedroom is my place of refuge.”

Mike’s perception of success is wide and varied. To him, being financially stable, being able to do what you love, developing his talent as an athlete, and generally excelling academically, are all indicators of his success.

Figure 4.6. Snapshot of Mike’s background, perceptions of success and experiences of success in higher education



Monica

Monica shares her lived experiences. Monica is a mature student, of 36 years, who as a child, grew up living with both parents and six sisters in a low-income neighbourhood. Her mother, now retired, was a maid and her father a fisherman. Both of her parents ended their formal education around the age of thirteen, with neither completing high school. Her siblings attended high school but none of them graduated. Although her mother was not a scholar, she insisted and encouraged Monica to study and do her homework.

This habitual study pattern lives with Monica today and she sees it as critical to her success. Monica said,

“From an early age my ambition was to attend college. I saw how hard my parents worked, the financial struggles they faced, and I wanted to have a better life so that I could assist my family... ..Now at college, I find time to go into a safe space at home and complete my assignments... This space is important to me and my success... it allows me to stay focused on my ultimate goal ... I want to be successful!”

Monica felt that understanding her family history will show why being first generation to pursue higher education is significant to her success. She wants to ensure that her journey as first-generation college graduate does not stop with her but helps with the transformation of the lives of others in her community.

On further reflection, Monica talks about growing up in her neighbourhood. Her mother was very protective of her girls and never allowed them to visit other homes. The children in the neighbourhood would all congregate at her house for playtime. Despite the poverty that was present, most of the children shared what they had and helped each other with homework. It was a safe/environment which taught her the need to be her “brother’s keeper.” She indicates that *“coming from poor families and neighbourhoods, in the eyes of many, are linked to you not being successful.”*

High school presented wonderful experiences for Monica. She was in the A Stream and performed well both academically and socially among her peers. She perceived that the social transition into TCICC would not be difficult as she was prepared with experiences and social skills necessary for her to socialize and achieve while here. Her success at high school is measured using three indicators - being able to fulfill her desire to learn, meeting two wonderful teachers, and gaining all seven CXC qualifications at Grades 1 & 2.

Due to the lack of financial resources, she perceived going to college was unobtainable. Therefore, upon completion of high school, Monica sought employment to gain some much-needed finances to help maintain herself and family. However, after having a family of her own, she decided it was time to return to studies to advance herself professionally and socially leading to her enrolment at TCICC.

“It has always been my personal goal to achieve a degree...I had to fulfill my mother’s expectations of me and go to college, but I perceived getting there was out of my financial reach... I want to be respected as a professional and one way is by achieving my degree.”

Her major challenges are balancing family life work and school. In one photo, Monica names her best friend as her tower of strength, her ‘go to’ person when things get tough. During those difficult periods when she feels like quitting due to the pressures of coping with academic challenges, as well as working to provide for herself and family, her friend provides that reassurance and comfort.

In Monica’s view she has already accomplished some measure of success by attending TCICC. In her diary, the image of the long road to the college is an everyday reminder of that.

“I travelled this road on numerous occasions before, but never in my foggiest mind did I think I would be travelling it to go to college. This brings me excitement as I am the only person in my entire family to reach this tertiary education milestone. I have accomplished some success.”

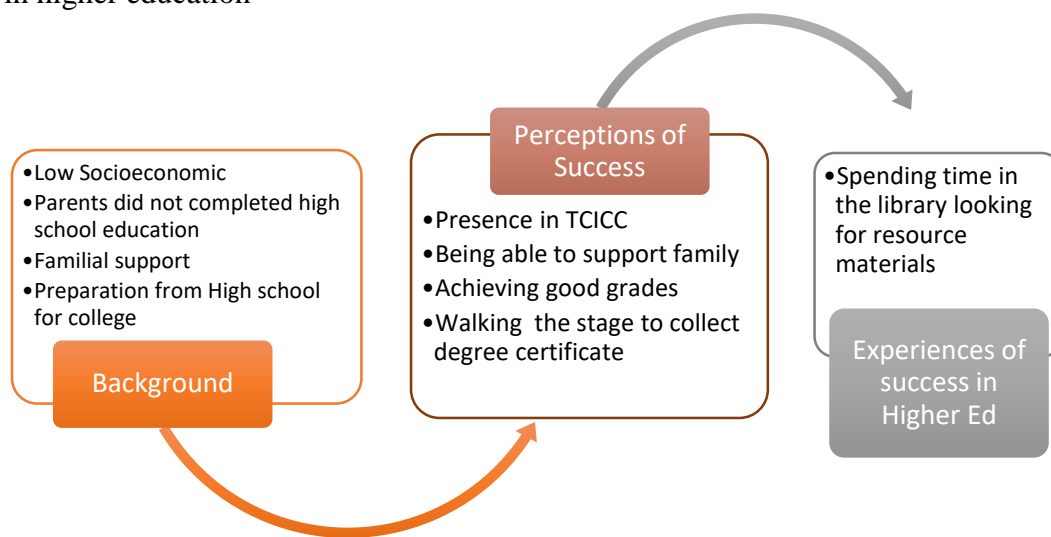
Being at TCICC requires Monica to put in time and effort if she is to succeed. Her image of shelves of books in the library reminds her of the time and effort she spends some days, in the library, looking for resource materials that would assist her in her studies. She elaborates on how that fuels her academic success.

“The library is a place where I know I can retreat for quiet moments to reflect on my day, my reason for being at college, and focus on completing research for my assignments. There are less distractions than if I was at home.”

From Monica’s perception, her success cannot be easily justified by using tangible representations such as the grades she receives or the completion of her degree alone. It should also include the progression made in achieving her goals or personal accomplishments.

“My presence in TCICC and being able to help support my family are two of my personal accomplishments that make me successful... I was setting a record, being the first person in my family to have a tertiary education... I have achieved this...” She further sees her success as “achieving good grades and being able to walk the stage” and collect her degree certificate.

Figure 4.7. Snapshot of Monica’s background, perceptions of success and experiences of success in higher education



Peter

Peter, 23-years-old, was enthusiastic to share his story. He and his two siblings live in a single parent home with their mom, an office administrator. His dad, a construction worker, does not play a significant role in his life. Peter has a close relationship with his mom who despite the hardships she faced, always remained positive and has raised her children to be like minded. Although she did not attend university, she has been very supportive in encouraging him and helping him shape the foundation he needs to succeed. He also spoke of the hardships faced due to the indifferences of his stepfather (being put out of the home). He stated that his living experiences with his stepfather were harsh and *“have taught me how to be a man by showing me how not to be one. His actions have motivated me to become successful as a family man and in my life and I see a better education as a way of getting that.”*

Peter is the first person in his immediate family to attend college and the second person in the history of his entire extended family.

Peter describes living in a poor neighbourhood, with his family, in a one-bedroom house, where *“the people struggle to make ends meet.”* He further explains that there were no safe places for children to play, explore and discover. In fact, he said,

“I never interacted with neighbours, as there were high levels of drugs and deviant behavior among young persons. One person was arrested for murder. They were not diligent students and education was a thought and not a reality.”

Peter summarizes his experience of his neighbourhood with two words; rough and hard, and said he learnt not to get involved in drugs as it can take you down the wrong path.

He recounts his high school experiences where he was in the A stream and in a very competitive environment, where everyone wanted to excel. In his eyes, high school helped him achieve a measure of success by preparing him for the world of work. It showed him *“there is competition out there and you have to be able to deal with it.”* His greatest success at high school was receiving grades 1 & 2 in all his CXC examinations.

Peter lowers his head and expresses a measure of sadness as he speaks about attending TCICC. Due to financial limitations he had to settle for TCICC, his *“fall back plan.”* He ended up not pursuing the course of study he wanted as it was not being offered at TCICC and this left him very depressed and lacking motivation.

“I was discouraged and lost interest along the way as I was pursuing something that was not my true passion, all because of poverty... When feeling overwhelmed and pressured, I resort to the beach, just to reflect, regroup, put my thoughts together...”

Peter provides a concrete example of an unsuccessful college experience and his interpretation of factors that led to it being transformed into a successful experience. In the earlier part of the interview Peter indicated having failed a course as reflected in the image of his grade slip.

“That was a reality check, a game changer for me... it was heart wrenching as I have never failed a course before. It was my worst academic performance and I did not know how to handle failure. I performed well from primary school straight to college, never failing anything... I guess this was the point where my perception of the remainder of my classes had to be restructured...in the comforts of my bedroom, I studied harder, especially for the course I failed. I drank lots of coffee to help me stay awake so that I can study and get the task at hand completed (image of cup of coffee in diary) ... I asked the lecturer questions when I did not understand ... I nailed it. I got an A (laugh)...I was super excited.”

His photo of the trophy which he received when he was valedictorian at primary school since failing the course, has been placed on the study table in his bedroom as a reminder of his final reward, his degree. To him achieving his bachelors will be the equivalent to that trophy.

Peter discusses his beach image and indicates that many times while at TCICC he lacked motivation and found the beach to be the place to bring him relaxation and allow him to engage in self-reflection.

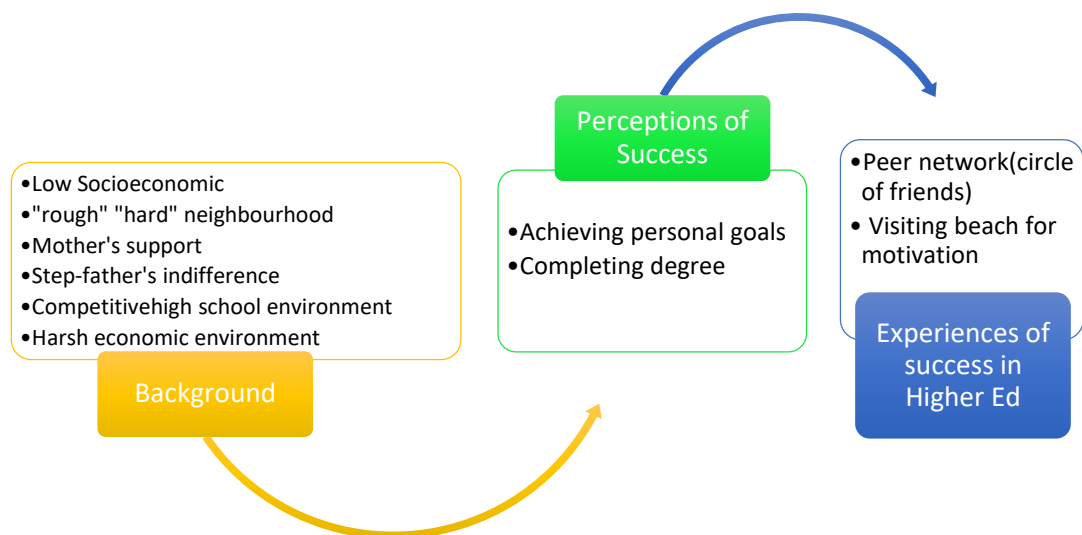
“The beach is a place of relaxation and time for me to understand myself, engage in self-reflection and self-talk, get focused...It is my safe place where I go and rethink my goals, and how to achieve these goals at college... my plans for success.”

Peter captures the image of a group of friends sitting together to show the influence they have on his success. He states that his friends have been able to motivate him towards achieving his goals.

“Sometimes my friends keep me going when things get rough academically or I lose my motivation... They provide me with coping skills that help me to build resilience. Sometimes I see them as a second family. They help show me that my goals are reachable.”

Peter says he cannot wait to complete his degree and move on from TCICC where he can pursue his true passion. He declares, *“success is completing my degree so I can progress to what I am passionate about. It is about me achieving my personal goals.”*

Figure 4.8. Snapshot of Peter’s background, perceptions of success and experiences of success in higher education



Rose

Rose, who is 32, grew up in a single parent home with her mother, a younger sister and older sister who has a university degree. Although her father was not resident in her home, he supported and inspired her to the point where she aspired to be a good cook like he is. Her mom, despite not having a tertiary education, had high expectations of Rose’s academic success. She

insisted that Rose work hard so that she could go on to university. She felt that by having a university degree she Rose would be able to afford a better life. Her parents supported her as much as they could and taught her how to be independent and work hard for what she wanted. They reinforced that she should value what she has achieved and on reflection, that has made her into whom she is today. Rose is currently working as a cook to help pay for her studies. In her photo elicitation, Rose proudly displays an image of a buffet of foods.

“My talent is cooking, so I work doing what I love. I have achieved one of my goals, that is, developing my talent and enhancing my cooking skills... that makes me successful.”

Rose describes having grown immensely because of the treatment she received from her sister. She discussed how this has influenced her entire life.

“My older sister is an inspiration to me because when I was growing up she spoke to me sternly... she was always so rough... it made me understand that not everyone in the world is going to sugar coat things. As a result of her treatment, I was able to reach a personal goal, which was to develop a strong self-esteem. She has helped shape the way I look at the world, knowing everyone is not going to make life easy for you.”

As a child, Rose’s family was constantly moving and never settled in one neighbourhood for more than two years at a time. Some of the neighbourhoods were “rough”; some of the neighbours were malicious and did not have good intentions. She notes that gambling and drugs were prevalent, and school was not taken seriously by many children. This constant moving helped her appreciate different cultures and diversity in persons, something she has had to deal with at work and in college.

Rose left high school with a mixture of good and bad memories. She recounts some of her high school experiences.

“I had some bad experiences in high school. While in first and second form I was verbally bullied and teased by students. I felt really depressed at that point and did not know what to do... I appreciated it because it taught me how to respond to adversity and I said to myself I had to be strong if I am to move forward.”

Rose believes high school has prepared her for college.

“Certain things that I learnt at high school were the basic building blocks for me at college. I worked hard at high school and I received grade 1 in Mathematics and English; as a result, I did not have to do any foundation courses at college. If I did not do my best before I reached college, I would not have been able to cope with the challenges.”

One of her greatest accomplishments to date, is completing and graduating from high school, as it was a place that held bitter - sweet memories and she was moving on as a young woman.

Going on to study at TCICC was in her mind from a child. The words of her mother that she must attain a degree resonated with her and she felt she had no choice but to attend college. She learnt from an early age that the only way out of poverty was through an education.

“I decided to study at TCICC because after receiving my CXC’s and my Associates Degree, I told myself I wanted to advance with my Bachelor’s degree... my family is not rich ... and I wanted to bring myself out of the generation curse of poverty that my family found themselves in, and the only way out is to be well educated and be successful... I decided to find a job and put myself through college...”

Rose feels that to be successful there must be an alignment with her spirituality, fitness and academics. She shares an image portraying a lady carrying dumbbells and states that she manages stress by going to the gym and elaborates on how this helps her to remain academically focused.

“When I feel stressed, I go to the gym. It helps keep my mind off things that bother me. When I am through with a good work out, I feel relaxed, refreshed and I can really focus on my road to success.”

In another photo example Rose shares a book, “Second Chance” which she is currently reading and explains:

“The book reminds me that God has given me a fresh start to put my life on track, I have a second chance at success. Regardless of what might have happened in the past that caused me to fall, stumble, or fail I am able to pick back up with God at the forefront, and he will lead me to success. God at the center of my life, I will be successful.”

Success for Rose consists of a combination of measures which include life management, academic achievement and developing skills.

“Success is related to your desires, your goals. Once you have accomplished your desires you have achieved success. My desires are a combination of things, I want to grow more in Christ, I want to be fit and well educated. When I get the three of these in line; put God first in my life, get my education, and stay fit and healthy, I will be well on my way to success. My academic success would have to be achieving a first-class honour’s degree and nothing else.”

Rose points out that key to her success is her relationship with God. She sees that as first and foremost to every facet of her life. Rose captures an image of Isaiah chapter 29:13-16 to explain.

“This verse is constantly in my mind, it serves as a reminder as how I should conduct myself- actions, deeds, what I say, wear, watch etc. Christ is a major part of my life and a part of my success, and I want to honour Him and worship Him. People will look at my life and see that I am a woman of God by all of my actions, words and deeds. Once I keep this verse in my mind, and live by it, I will achieve success.”

Figure 4.9. Snapshot of Rose’s background, perceptions of success and experiences of success in higher education



Sonia

Sonia is 21, and the oldest of four children. She has two younger sisters at high school and one brother at primary school. Her parents hold professional jobs that pay well. Sonia’s parents created a positive educational culture within the household. They consistently emphasized the importance of education and were very much involved in her education, imparting knowledge and skills that have become entrenched in her mind and have helped to shape her personality and value system. They invested a lot of time with her, exposing her to, and providing her with, educational and social tools that have influenced her perceptions of success, and by extension her experiences of success. There were many cultural goods in the form of resources such as books, internet and even artwork that help broaden Sonia’s perspective. Sonia’s parents insisted that she must advance to university or college to acquire a degree upon completion of high school.

“Having family support and living in a home environment where values are enforced and skills developed has helped me see myself as successful...My parents insist that we set goals for ourselves and go after these goals... there is no question that we all must go to university; it is a given... they also insist that we must show appreciation for little things and against all odds, we can get things done.”

In her early years, Sonia grew up in a neighbourhood where many of the families were not economically sound. However, at about the age of nine, her family moved to a better neighbourhood after her mother became professionally qualified. For Sonia, the environment was quiet, felt safe and persons kept to themselves, but showed respect for one another.

Sonia enjoyed the high school she attended. She has positive memories of her school experiences. She was a track star, in the A Stream, and performed well academically. She remarks,

“High school was amazing. While there, I acquired many skills that are so important to me now that I am studying at college. I am able to think critically, solve problems, work with a team and communicate effectively...By socializing with my peers, it helps me better understand how life works.”

Sonia’s greatest achievements while at high school were being one of the top athletes and not failing any of her CXC examinations.

On completing high school Sonia enrolled in TCICC and completed her Associate degree and is now in the bachelor’s program. She received a government scholarship to complete her degree and this alleviated her from depending on her parents financially. Sonia observes that studying at TCICC is different from her high school experiences. She comments,

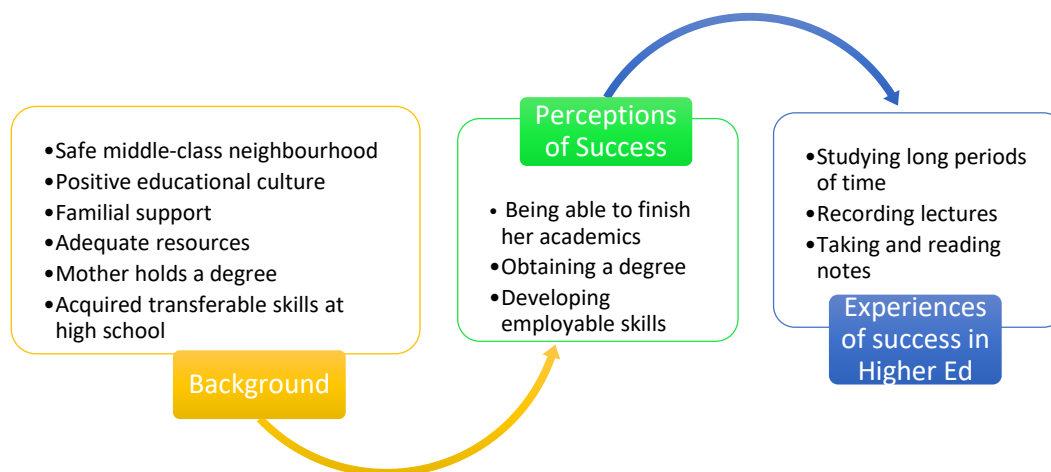
“Students must take charge of their learning... I have my family supporting me and cheering me on, but generally college can be a lonely place... You do not get a great level of support from some tutors.”

Her major challenges are that the workload is heavy at times and the limited practical experiences that are available. Due to the heavy workload Sonia finds that she must study longer periods of time to keep on top of her academics. She shares some images of her deck at home, textbooks, notes and her cellular phone. She explains how these assisted her with achieving academic success.

“I take lots of notes and colour code them to help reinforce certain points.... I record some of my lectures on my phone and while at my deck at night or in bed, I play the recordings over and over while I take notes. This helps me with my success, as it cements in my mind the work that I covered during the day and helps me to get a deeper understanding of what is being said... My books are my great resources. If I am not trying to improve myself by reading my notes, I am reading my textbooks.”

Finally, Sonia believes that possessing skills that will make her employable when leaving college and being able to finish her academics and obtain her degree will demonstrate her success.

Figure 4.10. Snapshot of Sonia's background, perceptions of success and experiences of success in higher education



4.3 Comments on stories

The stories highlight what I consider to be the different backgrounds experiences, cultural upbringings, demographics and educational journeys of the participants. They report how personal factors, life experiences, early learning encounters and socialization within their families, helped create their predispositions or perceptions of success and these perceptions influence their experiences of success. They all identified some factors which shaped their perceptions of success. Table 4.2 below highlights those factors and present a description of them.

Table 4:2 Factors which shape students' perceptions and their description

	Factors which shape students' perceptions	Descriptions of Factors
Micro and macro systems	Socio economic Features - Social class - Quality of neighbourhood - Family income - Parent education levels, their qualifications - Occupation	Negative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family context and influence -Difficult family life students encountered various hardships: poor living conditions-no electricity, food. limited house space. The stigmas of the sociocultural and socioeconomic barriers Negative community influences-negative attitudes; drugs Limited access to resources that support and promote the development of academic preparedness- no internet, limited books.

		<p>Positive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having cultural goods in the form of resources such as books, internet and even artwork • Supportive neighborhood who looked out for each other.
	Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early learning encounters within families or educational experiences and socialization within their family, help create and shape their educational culture. • Positive support /indifference within families • High expectations and support as well as the level of involvement families displayed towards education, • The educational cultures exhibited within respective families provide educational and social tools which influenced their perceptions of success.
	Networks of support or interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parental/ peer and faculty interaction and support in and out of college. • Mutual relationships- sharing of college-related knowledge among friends that families were unable to pass down.
	High school Influences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not being fully prepared for college
	Student personal characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-study behaviours- the overall student approach to studying. • Goal setting and time management • Motivation to achieve success • Ability to successfully complete task/goals
	Harsh economic environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students' attention is divided between the academic work, employment and other demands. • Lack of government's sponsorship has put pressure on students to fund their education.

All participants grew up in TCI, where no two experiences although similar, were the same. Their educational journey differs in that, some of the participants went straight to college directly from high school to complete an Associate degree before entering the bachelors programme (Sonia, Mike, Harriett) while others went straight into the world of work (Elaine, June, Flo). Other commonalities and differences observed among the participants will be discussed as I explore the themes in Chapter 5.

4.4 Chapter Summary

In this chapter the research findings from the data collected were discussed. The data recorded from the interviews were presented in the form of the participants' stories which allowed the participants to express themselves in a meaningful way.

All participants articulated in their stories see themselves as successful in different ways at different points along their journey. Therefore, the stories highlight the complexities of influences on success and provide supporting evidence that success should embrace a wide spectrum not just the completion of a degree in a particular time frame (Quinn et al., 2005) that underpins college funding in the context of the study.

Chapter 5 Findings-Themes and commonalities

5.1 Introduction

In the last chapter the participants' stories highlighting their different educational journeys were set out. This chapter examines and discusses the commonalities and themes that resulted from the data collected. It will also be providing supporting evidence through photo-elicitation images.

5.2 Themes and commonalities

Although the stories show the individuality of the participants, there were some commonalities that evolved. From these commonalities, four themes and five sub themes were further generated. The data indicated most of the participants were first generation students who did not have prior higher education participation in their families. However, they were not blank slates entering the college but brought to their new environment rich personal resources from their past experiences. From the themes Yosso's conceptualizations of various forms of familial, aspirational, resistant, social and navigational capital also emerged.

The themes and commonalities identified between stories are briefly described and are shown in Table 5.1 below. Within the table, direct quotations and photographs were drawn from the data to support the themes. In some instances, it was not always possible to neatly demarcate the themes because they were found to have "fuzzy boundaries," which caused them to overlap (Figure 5.1). It is worth stressing that the lives of the participants cannot be seen as a linear process because all facets of a life are intertwined, mutually influencing each other.

Figure 5.1 overleaf demonstrates the interrelatedness of the different themes that formed part of the results highlighted above. The broken lines represent its "fuzzy boundaries" that allow you to see that the lives of the participants cannot be interpreted into distinct categories. The arrows show that each facet is interrelated, and mutually influences each other, therefore the description of one theme will make reference to the contents of other themes.

Figure 5.1 Overlapping themes

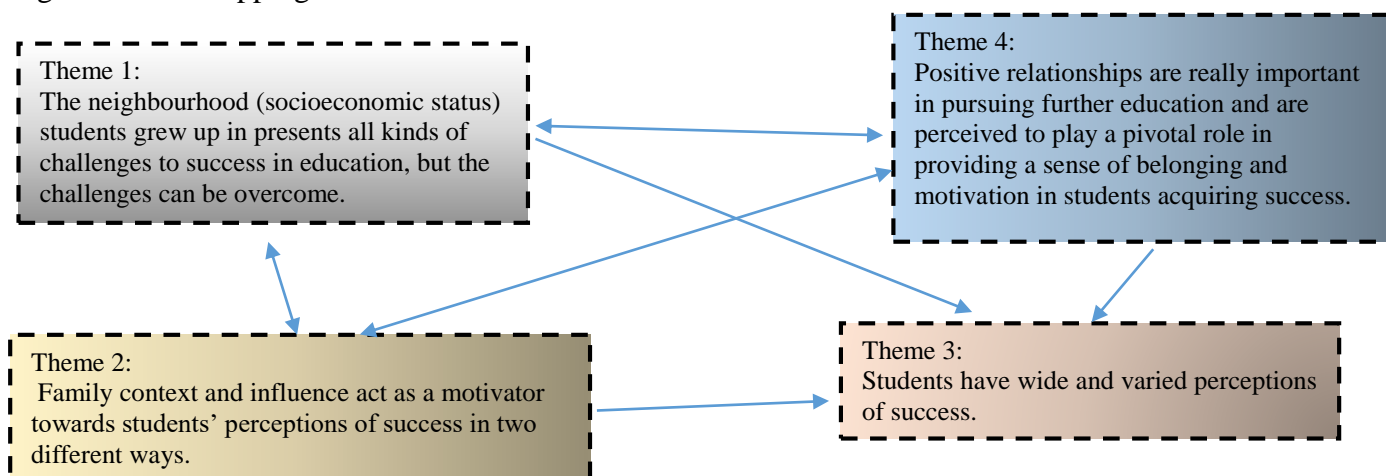












Table 5.1 Themes, commonalities, quotes and photographs identified between stories

THEMES	SUB THEMES	QUOTATIONS	PHOTOGRAPHS
<p>Theme I</p> <p>The neighbourhood (socioeconomic status) students grew up in presents all kinds of challenges to success in education, but the challenges can be overcome.</p>	<p>1.I: Students can overcome their adverse economic background and the stigma attached, by striving for, and acquiring success.</p> <p>1.II: Having inadequate access to resources can limit the academic preparedness and path to success of students.</p>	<p>Heather: "...many times I heard that I am Haitian, many times I was told NO, many times I was reminded about my yard...You have to be strong and not defeated when you hear No. You have to work hard, even if you have to put in extra work. You cannot become disappointed to the point that you want to give up. It just means you need to find a different way of doing things and keep moving forward".</p> <p>Flo: "I was told I would not be successful... I guess it was because of where I came from... I was demotivated by some teachers. In my mind I was thinking that high school was preparing me for work, for life, but it did not... When I looked around and saw how much my peers had that I did not have, I could not wait to be in a position where I could change my situation for the better.... Being at TCICC has provided me with that opportunity.</p> <p>Flo: "...it was difficult sometimes to complete homework due to not having electricity...Resources that many of my peers had (books, internet, puzzles), and took for granted were nonexistent...we could barely manage food and sometimes we went without...life was hard... education was never placed as a priority in my household, but I knew I wanted to get out from under my situation...When I finish high school I knew I had to work to help look after myself and family. Many times I asked myself if my life would be better if only I had the things growing up that my peers had."</p> <p>Sonia: High school was amazing. While there, I acquired many skills that are so important to me now that I am studying at college. I am able to think critically, solve problems, work with a team and communicate effectively...By socializing with my peers, it helps me better understand. I see TCICC as helping me to further develop</p>	 <p>Heather's yard</p>  <p>Flo's road of reflection</p>

	<p>I.III: High School experiences are important antecedents and can positively or negatively influence students' perceptions of success</p>	<p><i>these skills so that I can thrive personally, socially and in all other way.</i></p> <p>Elaine: <i>All that seems to be of importance was getting CXC's. The main focus was on academics. Success was all about how many certificates you can have. It was a turn off at times, as it appeared like the skills and talents of students were not taken into consideration. This was the same way in primary school too... I thought that going to TCICC would be the same and I was NOT motivated to go, but went and found a job.</i></p>	
<p>Theme II</p> <p>Family context and influence act as a motivator towards students' perceptions of success in two different ways.</p>	<p>II.I: Positive family support in education helps promote students' views for success and pushes them to strive for success.</p> <p>II.II: Family indifference helps motivate students, and as a reaction to that indifference, it pushes them forward or motivates them to strive for success.</p>	<p>Mike: <i>"It feels safe and secure within my family, I feel like I am loved, cared for, respected and I have a mom that I can lean on for support and encouragement. My mother provides whatever I need for school, all my resources, books etc. and as a result I see myself as successful. I work very hard because I know how important me succeeding at TCICC is to my family, I do not want to disappoint."</i></p> <p>Peter: <i>"... This does not relate to success within financial and academics prospects, but success within the household...Just before starting TCICC my mom and I were put out of my stepfather's house...Having him within my circle is an example of what I don't want to be. He has taught me how to be a man by showing me how not to be one... His actions have motivated me to become successful as a family man and in my life and I see a better education as a way of getting that"</i></p>	 <p>Mike's resource study book</p>  <p>Peter's image of his circle</p>
<p>Theme III</p> <p>Students have wide and varied perceptions of success</p>		<p>Elaine: <i>"I was from the ghetto and poor, I could not afford many things. I wanted fancy shoes, I wanted to have my hair straightened and look pretty like other girls. I wanted to travel, but could not afford it. Here I am at TCICC completing my degree and soon will be in a better financial position to afford myself and children all those things my mom could not afford to give me as a child."</i></p> <p>Heather: <i>"My family is from a very humbled background. We were considered to be in the lower socio-economic class and very little was expected academically from us... I was bent on proving them wrong...I guess I was correct, for TCICC has given me the opportunity to be the first person in my family to get a degree. Having my degree changes so many things for me. I am able to change the quality of life of my family for the better and break out of poverty."</i></p> <p>Rose: <i>"God has given me a fresh start to put my life on track, I have a second chance at success. Regardless of what might have happened in the past that caused me to fall, stumble, or fail I am able to pick back up with God at the forefront, and he will lead me to success. God at the center of my life, I will be successful."</i></p>	 <p>Elaine's three pair of Clarks' shoes</p>  <p>Heather's backyard</p>  <p>Rose's book she is reading- Second Chance</p>

<p>Theme IV</p> <p>Positive relationships are really important in pursuing further education and are perceived to play a pivotal role in providing a sense of belonging and motivation in students acquiring success</p>		<p>Sonia: <i>“Having family support and living in a home environment where values are enforced and skills developed has helped me see myself as successful. ... By socializing with my peers it helped me better understand how life works.”</i></p> <p>Flo: <i>“My friends are a great source of support and inspiration. We share information and notes. If they find a book they think can help me they will share it. When I say they are a great support, I mean it. They give me that academic support I cannot get at home and this pushes me to want to achieve more. We are like a family. In fact, they are my family away from home... My friends also offer me the support that I do not get from my partner at home. He does not have a degree so he does not understand the value in what I am doing. They give me the push to go on some times. They keep me afloat at times.”</i></p> <p>Heather: <i>I have developed a valuable relationship with Mrs. X, my lecturer, who has an open door policy. I am able to visit her any time I need clarity on something I did not fully grasp in class or in my readings. Her extra help has been useful in my academic success... I know that her door is open anytime should I need help.”</i></p>	 <p>Sonia's friend</p>  <p>One of Flo's friend Ann</p>  <p>Lecturer Mrs. X door</p>
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Theme I: The neighbourhood (socioeconomic status) students grew up in presents all kinds of challenges to success in education, but the challenges can be overcome.

The theme revealed that the neighbourhood (socioeconomic status) in which students grew up presents all kinds of challenges to success in education but the challenges can be overcome. Students in this study were from different contexts and different socioeconomic classes, which influenced their reality, perceptions, personal dispositions and their experiences of success. As a result of their life and past experiences, students perceived that becoming successfully college educated will be a way of being successful and a means of having a better life than that of their families. As such, they acquired aspirational capital which provided the foundation for them to dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances (Yosso, 2005). They felt that regardless of the challenges they encountered, they can be overcome and they will be in a position to provide for their children what their parents could not provide for them. It is a challenge keeping this theme discrete, for there is some fuzziness that allows it to intertwine with themes 2, 3 and 4, mutually influencing each other.

1.1: Students can overcome their adverse socio- economic background and the stigma attached, by striving for and acquiring success.

It was observed that some students encountered life's obstacles and seemingly insurmountable socioeconomic class related hardships (Monica, Heather, Elaine, Flo). There were challenges of them not being able to afford the basic necessities of life: having no electricity to do homework and poor living conditions (Monica, Flo), insufficient food (Heather, Flo) or not being able to buy material things (Elaine, Heather). The image Heather shared of her "yard" in Figure 5.2 below, provides a visual representation of her home environment, like Flo's and shows a cluster of small, detached houses without electricity in a poor deprived environment.

These students developed resistance capital, conceptualized as a form of resistance to the status quo. This resistance to adversities was very strong in motivating them to be engage, persevere to college and strive to succeed while there.

Figure 5.2 Photo-elicitation -Adverse socio-economic background



In some instances, students were made to feel embarrassed about their home environments while in high school. Flo, Heather, and Monica disclosed how they were constantly reminded by teachers and students of their social status and how very little was expected from them academically while being there. Despite these hardships, Monica, Elaine, Flo and Heather overcame their adverse economic background and the stigma attached, by striving for, and acquiring success in different ways. These students developed resistance capital, conceptualized

as a form of resistance to the status quo. This resistance to adversities was very strong in motivating them to be engaged, persevere to college and strive to succeed while there.

One thing Monica, Flo, Heather and Harriet shared in common is their commitment to ensuring that their journey as first-generation college graduates do not stop with them but helps with the transformation of large-scale situations that they encountered while growing up, such as poverty. This gives them the impetus to persist when challenges arise, knowing that they will be able to initiate a ripple effect that will make a societal impact, and change the course in the quality of the lives of others within their families and the community.

One distinctive piece of data that was evident from the stories for all students revolved around them wanting to have something better than they grew up with, even if it meant changing their path or having a better education than their parents (see theme 3). This has been a driving force for them to succeed. As a result, they were motivated to do what it took to succeed. Monica, Rose and June felt that in order to overcome adversity and achieve success it was necessary to change the course of their career paths. While working they returned to college as mature, non-traditional students to further their education. This change of course will aid in their aspirations to advance in their careers and afford them a better life, as well as bring significant amounts of returns financially, socially and personally. They brought to college significant experiential capital in the form of skills and knowledge they had acquired in their pre-student lives which they drew upon while there.

While students faced challenges in and outside of TCICC, some students felt that those challenges were trifling in comparison to what their past and current family members experienced and sacrificed. Students from the lower economic backgrounds in the study stated in numerous ways that observing their families' history and the work they did allowed them to put their education into perspective and see beyond themselves. Most of the students highlighted the struggles they experienced within their families and spoke about the parallels between their family's difficult work experiences and personal struggles, to their own academic struggles (Elaine, Flo). The experiences encountered caused these students to be resilient and develop aspirational capital. They dreamt of possibilities beyond their present circumstances. They also developed resistant capital in the form of resistance to the status quo and these provided the impetus for them to strive for success. It propelled them to success, in that, they wanted to have a better life than that of their parents and afford material things they did not have as a child, as well as to provide their own children with such (Elaine, Flo, Heather) as they aspired to become a

college graduate. Flo shared an image of a salt pond and flamingoes (Figure 5.3 below) and its symbolism to her family, heritage and her personal drive to have a better life than they had.

Figure 5.3 Photo-elicitation- Lack of cultural capital



Flo explained how the image of the salt pond is a reminder every time she passed there on her way to college of the work of her grandparents, and the hard, physical, labour they endured. Elaine, Monica and Heather, like Flo, spoke about the arduous demands placed on their parents' lives, due to the lack of an education and little cultural capital. They further explained that understanding their family's history showed why being first generation to pursue higher education is significant to their success, to overcome their adverse socioeconomic background.

1.II: Having adequate/inadequate access to resources can promote/limit the academic preparedness and path to success of students

This sub-theme shows that students having/ not having access *to* resources in the form of books, internet, art etc. will help or limit their acquisition of academic preparedness and expose/not expose them to broader perspectives that are valued by higher education institutions and help them to succeed. For example, the families of Sonia, Harriett, and Mike afforded them the resources

necessary for them to grasp knowledge needed and help in their success (see Sub-theme 2.1). In essence, Mike and Sonia were at an advantage to excel because they had better access to resources that allowed them to explore their future more frequently and realistically while at TCICC. They carried into the field, more readily available resources in the form of capital (Jager, 2009, Carolan & Wasserman, 2015; Cheadle & Amato, 2011). They had the capacity to aspire due to the navigational capacity they acquired. Mike's image of resource books (Figure 5.4 below) not only speaks to the resources provided by his family to help in his success, but this also holds true for that of Sonia.

Figure 5.4 Photo-elicitation- Cultural capital-resources



On the other hand, students such as Elaine, Flo, Peter, Monica and Heather who experienced generational poverty due to inherited cultural capital, were socially disadvantaged and did not have the same learning experiences, resources, opportunities, necessities and socializations as their peers who were more privileged. They operated without the basic tools (internet, electricity, books to read and stationery). Due to the nonexistence of these requisite instruments, their academic preparedness, ability to adequately complete class assignments and path to success were all limited. This was because these students resided in different social fields or lower social class, which shaped their habitus.

Inadequate finance was also a major hindrance for Elaine, Flo, and Monica advancing to higher education earlier and as a result they went into fulltime employment, putting their education on hold. In other instances, Peter and Harriett indicated that the lack of financial resources resulted in them being unable to pursue their passion at colleges overseas and instead they settled for a program at TCICC. To them, in some ways this limited their academic preparedness and path to success.

1.III: High School experiences are important antecedents and can positively or negatively influence students' perceptions of success

The high school experiences were thought to be important antecedents that can positively or negatively influence students' perceptions of success. Some students indicated that although high school equipped them with the skills to make them workplace ready (June), it did not prepare them with the knowledge and skills necessary to make them higher education ready (Peter, Mike, Harriett). Sonia on the other hand indicated that during her high school experiences she acquired many skills. She can think critically, solve problems, work with a team and communicate effectively. She saw TCICC as helping her further develop these skills so that she can thrive personally, socially and in all other ways.

While Sonia and Monica felt that the experiences they had while in high school were instrumental in the success they experienced and are experiencing in TCICC, Elaine perceived that the focus was on academics and not the development of skills and talents of the students. This in turn impacted on her wanting to further her education and caused her to seek employment first.

Theme II: Family context and influence act as a motivator towards students' perceptions of success in two different ways.

The different contexts and socioeconomic classes of the students influenced their perceived reality, or personal dispositions, shaping their education trajectories and views of success in different ways. Throughout the narratives, high value was placed on participants' family influence and support or lack thereof. It was clear that the families of the students transmitted to them the type of knowledge, behaviors, and skill that aligned with their social class, and these influenced their world view, how they socialized and how they view success. All the students articulated at some point in their story the role, negative or positive, that family support played in their success. It was demonstrated that students were able to use the negative or positive influences they

experienced to their advantage, by way of allowing them to act as motivators to push them forward or strive for success.

II.1: Positive family support in education helps promote students' views for success and pushes them to strive for success.

Having positive family support in education helped promote students' views for success and pushed them to strive for success (Table 5.2, Theme 2, Sub-theme 1). Again students displayed aspirational capital in the form of their dream of attending university and being successful. This aspirational capital was displayed to a certain extent by Mike, Monica, Rose, Sonia and Harriett whose families played a key role in pushing and promoting them towards success. It caused them to view education as important and considered university as a viable option.. The educational cultures fostered within these students' families and homes were ones that provided them with the tools necessary to succeed in college. These cultures also influenced their perceptions of success and by extension their experiences of success. Mike, Monica, Rose, Sonia and Harriett's parents articulated and enforced that it was expected for them to advance to college and gain a degree. Their families also emphasized the importance of being college educated to have a career and advance in it. As a result of that exposure, and the messages received about the importance of education, these students (Rose, Harriett) have internalized dispositions which Byrom and Lightfoot (2013) reasoned, allowed them to view themselves as successful academically. Through the eyes of their parents, success was having them attend college and receiving a degree as well as reaching education attainment. Coleman (1988) contends that the family and home environment are greater determinants of the future of children more so than schools, and as such, the family is seen as initial providers and motors or the bedrocks of social capital (Coleman 1988; Winter, 2000).

Peter, Rose, Harriett, Monica, Sonia, and Mike resolutely described themselves as committed, determined to succeed, hardworking and zealous, all characteristics inspired by and attributed to their families and in some instances their community. The familial capital they acquired through family and community complemented their personal agenda (Yosso, 2005). These students (Peter, Rose, Harriett, Monica, Sonia, Mike) were constantly reminded by their parents that through hard work and commitment they will be successful and have a better life. This was echoed from the students throughout their stories in various ways and used as a mantra for them to work hard and succeed. Flo, Monica, Elaine, and Peter perceived that being a first-generation student is a motivator that pushes them towards success.

II.II: Family indifference helps motivate students, and as a reaction to that indifference, it pushes them forward or motivates them to strive for success.

In the cases of Elaine, Flo, and Peter they experienced different forms of indifference and resistance from family members. The articulated view of the importance of education was not clearly expressed by family. In fact, education was not seen as something of great importance.

In the cases of Elaine and Flo whose parents, did not have a tertiary level education, academics was not seen as a priority within their family unit and the rightful progression after leaving high school was to find a job to earn an income (see Theme 1). Peter's family situation was difficult. Although his stepfather wanted him to earn an income to help support his family, his mother wanted him to further his education and obtain a degree. Peter included him in his family circle image (Figure 5.5 below) and highlighted his stepfather's indifferences in his narrative. Peter reflected on how resistance to his step-father provided the means to persevere to college. this resistance was a powerful motivator which caused him to become a better man and to aspire for success. . It helped him develop resistant capital and also showed him how to be a man, by showing him how not to be one. His actions and indifferences have motivated Peter to become successful as a family man and in life. Peter declared that to him having a better education is a way of accomplishing success.

Figure 5.5 Photo-elicitation –Family indifference helps motivate students



Finally, Elaine expressed the insults she endured by her sister; how she was jeered about going to college and called insulting names. The negativity and the resistance shown by the sister

of Elaine was a powerful motivator that helped influence her perceptions of success and pushed her to persevere and strive for success to have a better standard of living. To Peter and Elaine attending college was regarded as an opportunity for them to resist constraints around what was perceived as possible. They displayed aspirational capital in a form of resilience.

Theme III: Students have wide and varied perceptions of success

As a result of the skills and dispositions that are socially ingrained in the students, their perception of success varied, and this was articulated in their stories. All the students shared experiences that have positively or negatively influenced their perceptions of success and in some cases pushed them to strive for success. This was to have a better standard of living than that of their parents and so that they can give their children what their parents could not provide for them. In some cases, students changed their direction, which included changing their way of thinking about life and progression, work, education all to achieve success.

As a result of their life and past experiences students perceived that having a degree will be a way of being successful. This has been a driving force for them to succeed. As a result, they were motivated to do what it takes to succeed. This involved taking a variety of approaches to their studies that they believed would help them in becoming successful at TCICC. These approaches included putting in extra study time after classes (Peter, Rose), visiting the library, (Harriet), studying late at night (Elaine, Sonia, Peter) or creating a network of family, friends or faculty that provided support, encouragement, or motivation (Harriet, Peter, Mike, Rose, Sonia, Elaine, Flo, Heather) (see Theme II).

All the participants displayed aspirational capital in some way. This manifested in them having the dream of becoming successfully college educated, and having a better life are of paramount importance. Most of the students, mainly those from low socioeconomic backgrounds identified the acquisition of material things that their parents could not afford them while growing up such as a “nice” house, car, expensive shoes, as a measure of their success. Elaine’s image shown in Figure 5.6 below of Clark shoes, is a representation of her view of success. Some students indicated that their success was linked to outcomes such as developing their talents (Mike, Sonia, Rose) and maintaining friendships (Elaine, Flo, Heather).

Figure 5.6 Photo-elicitation- Acquiring material things



June and Mike wanted to be able to achieve a level of job readiness that afforded earning potential, while on their success agenda, Flo, Monica, Rose and Elaine wanted to achieve their goals, personal accomplishments and maintaining friendships. June, Harriet, Peter and Sonia acknowledged that being successful and becoming a college graduate could generate financial, social and personal returns to them. The general thinking for Rose and Harriet was that they have possessed or accumulated cultural capital as knowledge, values, beliefs, behaviors and skills acquired mainly within their home that could help them succeed (Bourdieu, 2011).

Although there were varied approaches and perspectives taken by students on what constitutes their success at college, what was evident is that all students achieved some measure of success along their life's journey and considered themselves to be successful in some form or other. Regardless to the various perspectives what was of special note is that all students saw success as related to wanting to have something better than they grew up with, and this acts as a measure of their success. The fact that these successes formed part of their stories suggest that the students saw them as having an influence on their experience at TCICC.

Theme IV: Positive relationships are really important in pursuing further education and are perceived to play a pivotal role in providing a sense of belonging and motivation in students acquiring success

One of the strongest themes to emerge from the data was the importance of positive relationships in students pursuing further education and acquiring success. The relationships and

interactions with family, friends and faculty were perceived by all students as pivotal in the development of their success in some way. It was further shown that all of the participants had some form of social capital they bring to the college in the form of networks of individuals and community resources. Most of the participants agreed that family relations played a role in their success but expressed differing viewpoints in relation to that role (see sub theme II.1). In fact, Harriett, Peter, Mike, Rose and Sonia indicated that having a strong, supportive family was important for them furthering their education and attending TCICC. They felt that the support provided by their parents was in alignment with their learning dispositions and was very helpful in the development and motivation for them to strive for success. For others like Elaine, Flo and Heather who did not have that parental or familial support, creating positive faculty relationships or having friend networks was of particular significance (Figure 5.7) as they provide both instrumental and emotional support.

In some instances, these informal social networks acted as a second family, providing guidance and support that helped to build and develop their resilience and also helped them navigate through the institution (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Additionally, they provided educational and social interactions and support for the participants to succeed. In many cases they helped bridge the educational gap providing knowledge, college information and skills that could not be conveyed by their parents.

Figure 5.7. Photo-elicitation - Social Capital Connection.



All the students believed that due to their relationships, be it with family, friends or faculty, they were at some point able to experience a true sense of belonging and were motivated to succeed.

Finally, having family responsibilities while still having to study were viewed as stressful for those participants who had children. However, they saw having these responsibilities as a motivating force that propelled them to see the urgency to complete their degree.

Some participants shared that they appreciated the interactions with faculty members and the influence this had on their academic success. One image shared (Figure 5.8) displayed an opened faculty door. Students indicated that most faculty members had an opened door policy that encouraged communication and a level of openness.

Figure 5.8 Photo-elicitation - Faculty influence



Some students (Heather, Sonia, Peter, Harriet, June) felt the support provided by faculty in the way of offering guidance, encouragement, and assistance acted as precursors to their overall success. They further indicated that they appreciated having the opportunity to share their experiences in and out of TCICC with faculty. This made them feel that their perspectives and contributions were valued, and this motivated them to strive for success. They also stated that

being provided with feedback in these informal as well as formal settings, caused them to be more engaging in class as they felt their input is valued (Heather, Sonia, Peter, Harriet, June).

5.3 Chapter Summary

In this chapter the commonalities and themes from the stories in Chapter 4 were discussed. Photographs were drawn from the data to support the themes. In some instances, it was not always possible to neatly demarcate the themes because they overlapped. As a result, the description of one theme occasionally referred to the content of another theme. This was highlighted in Figure 5.1 above.

What was clear from the findings is that although most of the participants were first generation or non-traditional students who did not have prior higher education participation in their families, they were not blank slates when they entered TCICC. Each brought existing capital resources from their past experiences which they utilized to support their transition while there.

The following chapter discusses the findings through the lens of Bourdieusian metatheory, where his set of thinking tools (habitus, field and capital) provide a practical and theoretical window to interpret the data and better answer my research questions, through the aim of creating social change.

Chapter 6 Discussion and Implications

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the commonalities and themes that resulted from the data collected in the two stages of analysis. This chapter seeks to address the research questions more interpretatively and explicitly through the lens of Bourdieusian metatheory with its thinking tools of habitus, capital and field. This provides a practical and theoretical window to interpret and examine the data and bring a better understanding to answering these questions by exploring and resulting social change. It also presents the limitations to the study and set out some implications for knowledge, policy, high school, personal development and practice and future research.

The focus of this study was to understand how students' perception of success is shaped by their background experiences and how this in turn impacts on their day-to-day experiences of success in TCICC. The shared stories and photo elicitation images not only assisted me in acquiring a clearer personal insight of the participants psyche at present but alerted me of their status prior to admission to TCICC. The main research question to be discussed is: How do students' backgrounds influence their perceptions of success and how do these perceptions influence their experiences of success in a higher education institution in Turks and Caicos Islands?

The sub questions to inform the main question are: What are the educational experiences and context that students bring to the higher education institution? How do students define success in college? What are the factors students believe contribute/do not contribute to their success as they define it? How do students' perception of success influence their experiences at the college?

In answering these research questions, it is not easy to demarcate the content of each as I found they have "fuzzy boundaries" which caused some of the content to overlap because the lives of the participants cannot be interpreted as a linear process. Since all facets are interrelated, mutually influencing each other, the description provided in answering one question can make reference to the contents of another.

6.2 Research question # 1 What are the educational experiences and context that students bring to the higher education institution?

The students in my study were from different contexts and different socioeconomic classes, which influenced their reality, or personal dispositions (Lareau, 2003; Gachathi,1976; Rubie-Davies, 2006). These personal dispositions they possessed or accumulated emerged from their

socioeconomic class experiences and interactions in the form of knowledge, values, beliefs, behaviors, education credentials, skills, and cultural goods. Individual students were socialized differently, therefore each student brought their unique experiences to TCICC. These subjective experiences of life and success at TCICC can be positively or negatively influenced due to the educational experiences and context they bring.

Socio-economic background

The socio-economic background of students in this study as well as other identity dimensions played an integral role in the unique experiences on entering TCICC and how it contributed to the success of students as defined by them. It is not easy to demarcate this factor in this section as it overlaps and mutually influences the content in answering research question 4.

Social class is linked with the level of knowledge, values, beliefs, behaviors, education credentials and skills (cultural capital) students acquired through their initial learning experiences within their families and is unconsciously influenced by their environment. Due to the individual differences, each student had intensely different educational experiences, opportunities, and outcomes which had a direct/indirect impact on their success (Bourdieu, 2011; Flere et al., 2010; Jaeger, 2011) when they advanced to TCICC.

Those students from deprived backgrounds (Elaine, Flo, Monica, Heather) lacked critical social, educational and economic resources. They were provided with limited learning opportunities, academic aspirations and proficiencies not commensurate with their more affluent peers. These disparities in the educational experiences (Rubie-Davies, 2006), accessibility to and distribution of resources (Flere et al., 2010; Jaeger, 2011), were deemed to influence their perception of success (Vargas, 2004) and impact on their level of success (Coleman et al., 1966) when they entered TCICC. Although they lacked the type of social and cultural capital Bourdieu perpetuates, these students were not blank slates entering TCICC. They brought value social capital to their college experience in the form of aspirational (hopes and dreams), linguistic (various language and communication skills), familial, social (social and human resources) navigational (skills and abilities to navigate) and resistance (experiences of communities) (Yosso, 2005). This valued social capital was depicted in Heather's words:

"I have learnt so much from the people in My Yard...My Yard is my inspiration, it is a reminder of where I am from and it acts as a motivator for me to succeed at TCICC, not just for me, but for all those who live in there."

Although Elaine, Flo, Monica, Heather came from disadvantage or low socioeconomic backgrounds and endure struggles, they were still able to develop knowledge referred to Yosso as

resistant capital from their parents and communities (Yosso, 2005). This leaves them well positioned to solve challenging problems and motivate them to pursue professional careers in an effort to give back to their communities as well as families. Drawing on a study from the literature conducted by Reay et al. (2005) on higher education choices and decision-making of students, reminds us that the choices made by students are mainly shaped by their social class and the experiences provided and as a result, can negatively and in some cases positively impact on the educational experiences.

Furthermore, within the middle-class households of Sonia and Mike, an educational culture existed where attending college and achieving a degree were seen as a must. This was influenced by the fact that their parents had the tertiary level education experiences, worked for a “good” income and provided resources, educational and social tools to enable their success. These resources and tools exposed them to broader perspectives that are valued (Bourdieu 1986) by TCICC and led to a continuity or congruence of cultures between their home and TCICC. Notably, this aligns with Bourdieu’s assertion that parents play a critical role in students acquiring objectified state of capital as cultural goods, by supporting them through access to resources. It is expected as Bourdieu indicates that students from what he penned as “the dominant class” like Mike and Sonia, to be at an advantage over those from the lower classes (Monica, Elaine, Flo, Rose). This is because they entered TCICC, adequately prepared to be successful while there, due to their socialization and upbringing (Byrom & Lightfoot, 2013). *“The expected norm and natural progression within my family was to advance to college and further our studies. My mom and sisters all have degrees... I always had resources available to me ... going to college was a given after graduating from high school” declares Mike.*

Nevertheless, these findings support Bourdieu’s argument that the socio-economic background of students is related to their level of access to cultural capital. As I focus on the work of Bourdieu I found little in his formulation of social and cultural capital to reflect the lives of most of my participants, taking into consideration that eighty percent of the participants were first generation or non-traditional students. However, Mike and Sonia who were from middle class families support Bourdieu claims that families having access to institutional and material resources can use them to strengthen their advantage, and transfer the gains to their children. This can also influence how children perceive the importance of college and as a result, they have a strong belief about what they can achieve while at college and they thrive for success (Maton, 2012). Evidently, cultural capital is not equally accessible or distributed to all among the social classes as is evident

with students like, Elaine, Harriet, Rose, Flo and Monica. What is observed is that it can act as a masked tool that passes on family advantages. This reinforces Bourdieu's perspective of cultural and social capital which act to enable social and cultural reproduction within middle class families, perpetuating social inequalities and offering a route to success for these families whose cultural and social capital align with the capital of the school system (Bourdieu, 1977). He sees quality relationships within the family as cultural capital. This is in contrast with Coleman who believes social capital includes the quality of relationship within and beyond the family. It depicts groups working in harmony, having shared values and bonds that benefit the individual and society as a whole as seen with communities of June and Monica. Furthermore, for Bourdieu, social capital includes the totality of resources that comes from belonging to groups beyond the family, enabling all members to use the collective capital. Nevertheless, all the students in the study have forms of capital, but the fields within which these forms of capital enact, is a determinant factor of the value which is assigned to them. In fact, the lower-income, first-generation students in this study and their families are not lacking social capital in comparison to their elite cohorts as Bourdieu might have us believe, instead they possess community cultural wealth that brings valued capital that is not recognized within the upper echelons of society or the elite traditional higher education institutions (Mobley & Brawner, 2018; O'Shea, 2016b; Yosso, 2005).

Coming from a low socio-class and a harsh economic environment have caused some students (Flo, June) to find employment as a means of financing their studies and themselves. It was perceived by Flo and June that the natural progression after high school was to find employment and gain an income (Maton, 2012). In their view, the choice not to attend college was considered as expected social norms of their families as there was little or no emphasis or value placed on education within their households (Maton, 2012). Flo lamented,

"In my house education was never a priority, I did not think I was going to make it to college, getting there was out of my reach... The only thing I knew was to find a job and earn some money after leaving high school that was the norm in my family."

Lack of government's sponsorship has also put pressure on these students to fund their education and this has caused their attention to be divided between academic work, employment and other demands. June and Rose informed that being in the working class became a driver for them to pursue studies at TCICC. They did not see the need to try to be like the middle class while at TCICC but were striving to reach their personal goals. These goals are to acquire the levels of financial, professional and social security the middle class enjoyed. Additionally, it was a

challenge balancing work and studies. However, Rose acquired excellent work ethics in terms of developing effective communication skills, professionalism, mutual respect and time management skills as a result, and these skills helped her with her studies at TCICC. Here, one sees Rose acquiring linguistic and navigational capital in the forms of various language and communication skills, and abilities to navigate her environment all critical forms of social capital argued by Yosso (2005).

I must add my voice and agree with Bryrom and Lightfoot (2013) that the socioeconomic status of students and cultural standings of families, provide the type of socialization and educational experiences they bring to college, and these can negatively or positively influence their perceptions, impacting on their experiences and expectations. In fact, these perceptions can influence their reality, help shape the practices and choices they make, have an impact on their possibilities, personal dispositions, and experiences of success whether knowingly or unknowingly, when they enter TCICC. These background experiences also influence the way the students organize, interpret and evaluate their life stories and experiences, as well as the beliefs or confidence they have in their ability to succeed when they entered TCICC (Haman et al., 2012; Winkle-Wagner; 2010; Ma, & Shea, 2021; Siegle, 2000). My position is that regardless to which socio-economic status one belongs, once families promote a perception that tertiary education is important and a priority, it can reinforce the need in children that the natural progression after leaving high school is to acquire a tertiary education and strive for success while there (Maton, 2012, Fraser & Killen, 2005).

Generally, the recollections from students of their families' experiences through their narratives with a few exceptions (Sonia, Mike, Peter), suggested there was limited social capital in the form of parental involvement where parents were helpful in developing them to strive for success. This is interrelated to research question 3 and highlights a factor which these students believe did not contribute to their success as they define it. This could be one of the contributing factors why some of them (Elaine, Flo) choose to take a less linear path and choose a career before entering Turks and Caicos Island Community College.

Although delivery of instruction in the home was different from the formal, professional knowledge acquired at any educational institutions the students attend, the early learning or educational experiences and socialization within their family, helped to create and shape their educational culture and individual *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1984; Moore, 2012). The students had

various experiences and encounters in different fields outside their families, causing their habitus to continually be restructured (Reay, 2004).

Many students in this study were from the working class (defined by their lack of economic and cultural capital), where their habitus was created by a field that was very different from that at TCICC. This also forms links to the research question 3. TCICC was a new social field for them and was being misaligned with their original field or the working-class environment (Elaine, Flo, Heather, Mike, Rose, Harriet).

Earlier schooling

It was argued by Bourdieu (1984) that after family, the experiences students received in their early years of schooling were critical and highly influential in them acquiring capital and habitus. This is because early school experiences students received help create their predispositions or perception (Bourdieu, 1984) and influence their perceptions of success (Winkle-Wagner, 2010; Jager, 2009, Carolan & Wasserman, 2015; Cheadle & Amato, 2011).

The narrative of the students showed that they had varied experiences of their earlier schooling before entering TCICC which negatively for some, and positively for others, influenced their perceptions of success while there. These experiences varied from having a smooth passage while there (Sonia, Mike, June), to enjoyment at school (Rose, Sonia, Harriett, Monica) which suggested their habitus were in sync with the school educational system. These students felt that the quality of high school preparation and the experiences received were in alignment with the expectations at TCICC and were important precursors to their success there. Therefore, it stands to reason those students who are provided with a solid foundation and are adequately prepared to matriculate into college are most likely to be successful while there, regardless to their socio-economic standings, who they are or their financial situation (Kuh et al., 2006; Mentz, 2012).

Rose, Sonia, Harriett, Monica and Mike all had positive associations with their earlier high school experiences which, when married with the parental support that articulated and stressed the importance for academic success, propelled them towards success. Elaine and Flo who experienced bullying, stigma and discrimination were not motivated to succeed while in high school.

This section answered research question 1 by highlighting as articulated through their narratives, some of the educational experiences and context students bring to TCICC.

6.3 Research question # 2 How do students define success in college?

Students had wide and varied perceptions of success which were influenced by several factors. All students participating in this research articulated their view of success according to their individual perceptions. They further described their experiences in and out of TCICC that influenced their perceptions of success and in some cases led them to success.

They voiced their opinions about what they considered as markers of them being successful (factors highlighted in 2:2). From the narratives, success was linked in some ways to students gaining cultural capital (Diagram 6.1 below), advancing personally and professionally, and to having a better standard of living than what they grew up with. This was manifested in different ways where some felt that achieving good grades (Monica, Sonia, Rose, Mike, Peter, Elaine), acquiring knowledge and skills (Harriet, Mike, Rose, Sonia, Heather), achieving specific academic and personal goal (Monica, Rose, Elaine) or having a level of job readiness that affords earning potential (June, Mike) were key indicators of success for them and will allow them to have a better standard of living. Therefore, students attained cultural capital was added to Diagram 6.1 (lower left box) with a blue arrow leading to students' success.

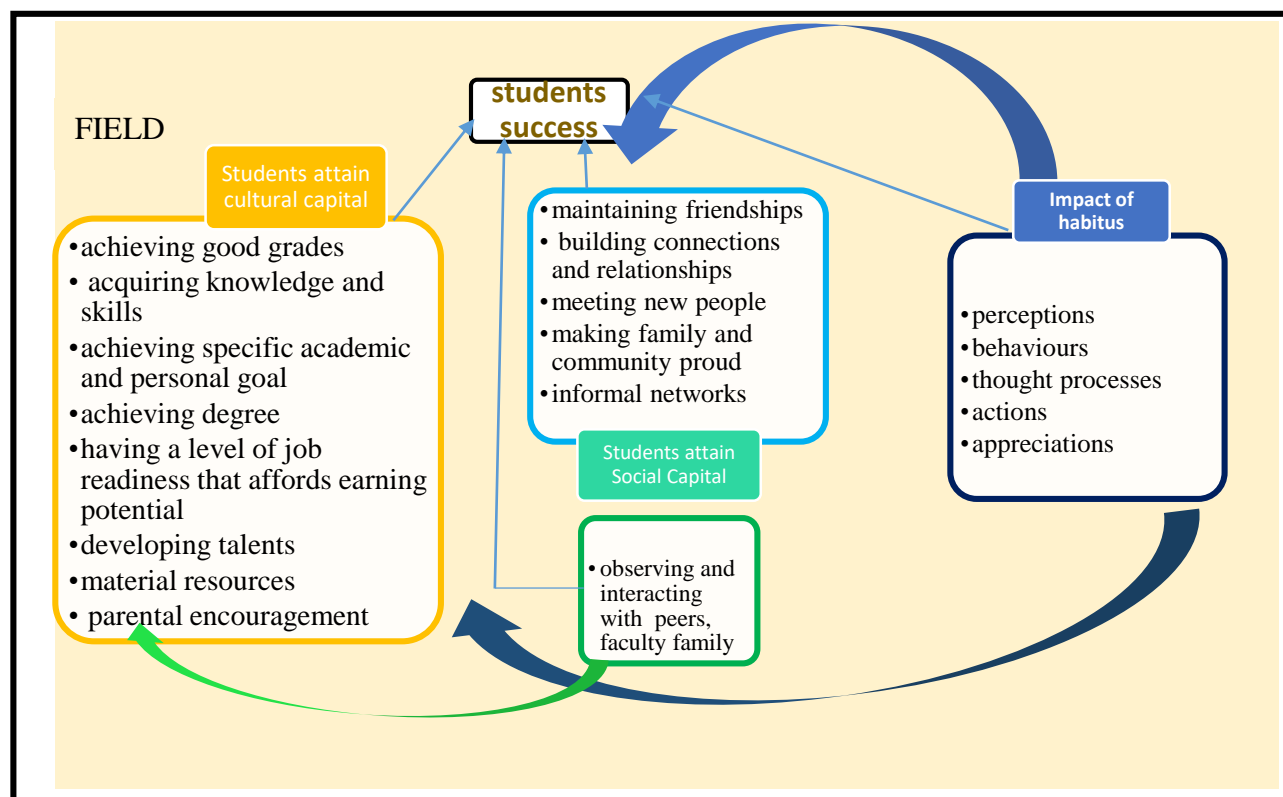
The consensus of the students was that success is having improved their grade or achieve their degree within a set time frame (Bloomer & Hodkinson, 2001; Zepke & Leach, 2010). This supports Woodrow (2006) and Tinto and Pusser (2006) evaluation of what constitute success. In their views success equates with graduation and is defined in terms of grades and timely completion of studies. The responses of the students also speak to them developing an educated habitus. This is important, for Nash (2002) argues, that the possession of an educated habitus for high school students is critical and involves them recognizing the significance of what is to be learnt so they can use it in the future or to gain a qualification. I have deduced from Nash's views of high school students that the same might apply to the higher education context, as it encompasses those dispositions, preferences, perceptions, behaviours, thought processes, actions that contribute to the success of students (Pinxten & Lievens, 2014). Furthermore, high school have been positioned as one of those fields where the foundation for higher education is laid (Senechal, 2010).

To Elaine, Flo and Heather success was linked to building social capital (Figure 6.1 below) in terms of maintaining friendships, connections, and relationships with others as well as meeting

new people. Therefore, the second, top box that addresses how students attain social capital, leading with an arrow to student success was added to Figure 6.1.

This corresponds with Bourdieu's concept of *social capital*, which he explains as the benefits students gain from networks of support or interactions, and mutual relationships developed among members within the institution (Bourdieu, 1986, Field, 2003). Here Bourdieu's supports how members of various groups influence and support each other. He maintains that social reproduction is impacted on by the educational system since its structures and expectations are core influences that determine what constitute success (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Therefore, the interactions or experiences that happen between students and the academic and social systems of the college are fundamental influences that can determine if they will be successful while there (Tinto, 1975).

Figure 6.1 Students' views of success



Furthermore, some students felt that their success was not only about their own accolades; they wanted to succeed because of the lessons learnt from the struggles seen within their own families and by extension their communities (Monica, Rose, Flo). In fact, Monica and Rose saw

their success as making their families and communities proud while others, linked success to developing their talents (Mike, Sonia, Rose) (Figure 6.1).

In summation, from the discussion, success was seen to be multifaceted and a complex construct. This was evident in the wide and varied responses received due to the perceptions of students. It also embraced more liberal, unconventional indicators such as the feelings students have regarding their achievements, how well students accomplish their personal, academic, and professional goals, the criteria they use to self-assess their degree of success (José Sá, 2020; Day et al., 2018; Enke & Ropers-Huilman, 2010) and not just test scores, aggregate grades, examination results, retention rates and successfully finishing of degrees within identified periods (José Sá, 2020; Nyström et al., 2019), used by TCICC, the United Kingdom and other countries. It can therefore be inferred that from the responses of the students to the questions about success that they have each experienced some form of success.

6.4 Research question # 3 What are the factors students believe do/do not contribute to their success as they define it?

The ability for students to succeed as defined by them, rely not only on their intellectual abilities, but also on several other personal factors, life experiences, early learning encounters and socialization within their families. These helped create and shape their predispositions or perceptions of success (Lotkowski et al., 2004; Alfaifi et al., 2020). All students have different demographics, backgrounds experiences, cultural upbringing as well as educational journeys that helped influence their perceptions of success. The value of identifying and examining some of these factors as outlined in their narratives helps us understand what they believe do or do not contribute to their concept of success. In this section it will be realized that it is not easy to demarcate these factors from the discussion in all the research questions because the lives of the participants cannot be interpreted as a linear process since all facets are interrelated and mutually influencing the responses.

Socio-economic features

From the findings it was clear that students were from different designated contexts and different socioeconomic classes and this was defined by their access to capital and as a result this influenced their experiences of reality or personal dispositions (Lareau, 2003; Rubie-Davies, 2006). One of the core facets highlighted is that the neighbourhood (socioeconomic status) students grew up in presented all kinds of challenges to their success in education, but the students

showed that these challenges can be overcome by striving for and acquiring success. Coming from a low socio-economic background where students encountered difficult family life experiences and various hardships (had limited access to resources that support and promote the development of their academic preparedness) played a key role in some students striving for success as they define it (figure 4:1). Regardless of these adversities, students were able to overcome and advance to TCICC, and this helped fuel their motivation to strive to succeed to *“have a better standard of living than what they grew up with.”* As a result of their life and past experiences, students perceived that becoming successfully college educated, will be a way of being successful and a means of having a better life than their families had.

Stereotyped

As a result of the stereotyped (coming from a low working class) and the stigmas of the sociocultural and socioeconomic barriers experienced earlier in life, Elaine, Monica, Flo and Heather perceived they could experience some obstacles to progression when they enter TCICC. This was mainly due to their habitus being shaped by a field that was very different from that at TCICC. TCICC has become for them, a new field and, as Bourdieu explains, when students come into the new field, they experience a feeling he coins “dialectical confrontation” (Bourdieu, 2002, p. 31); this causes a “cleft habitus” (Bourdieu, 1999) to be created, where they are self-torn by the division. This cleavage in habitus caused students to experience internal conflict and as a result they develop a chameleon habitus which allows them to adapt to their new habitus (Bourdieu, 2002). Elaine developed a chameleon habitus absorbing the influence of her peers from the middle class. The students did not want to experience negative stereotypical behaviour due to their social class (Crozier & Millet, 2012), or the feeling of social isolation that Rubin (2012) and Mentz (2012) indicate might impact on their educational experiences. As a result, they opted to enact or learn the “rules of the game” as Bourdieu (1992) puts it, by observation or through their interactions with their peers to be academically successful. This was achieved by altering and transforming their attitudes, perceptions and behaviors towards their studies which empowered them toward their academic and social success (McNay, 2000). Elaine informs, *“When I entered TCICC I felt like a misfit initially, I started to hang with students who were in a better financial position than myself, learning from them... I was influenced by them in a positive way.”*

Similarly, Elaine, coming from a working-class background perceived her background as being disadvantaged relative to that of most of her peers in college and due to her internalized dispositions (Byrom & Lightfoot, 2013). Elaine worried extensively about negative social treatment she might receive and the obstacles which can have an impact on her educational experiences (Strathdee & Engler, 2012). This is not strange, for in a study conducted by Rheinschmidt and Mendoza-Denton (2014) across three USA universities they found that students from lower income backgrounds, worry about negative social treatment they may receive at college due to their social class background, which is seen as an obstacle that can have an impact on the educational experiences (Strathdee & Engler, 2012). Additionally, Elaine expressed that due to her socio-economic standings she lacked valued cultural capital (Carter, 2003) and feared having low academic success (Merritt & Buboltz, 2015; Carlton, 2015) as she was admitted into the degree program, with lower educational attainment than her younger counterparts.

Family

Family context and influence seem to act as a motivator towards all the students' perceptions of success and this is engendered in two different ways. Firstly, having positive family support as well as an educational culture that provides educational and social tools within their families, helped promote their views for success and pushed them to strive for success (Thomson, 2018; Miller, 2007; Maton, 2012). Bourdieu like Coleman (1989), views families as motors of social capital but later we will discuss how these two theorists differ.

The findings further demonstrated that the positive attitudes exhibited by the various students' families (Sonia, Mike, Peter's mother, Monica, Rose)-their high expectations, support and the level of involvement they displayed towards education, were important starting points in helping them develop an educated *habitus* along with their education trajectories and views of success (Bourdieu, 1984; Moore, 2012). However, the indifference displayed by some families also helped inspire students (Peter, Flo, Elaine), and as a reaction to that indifference, it pushed them forward or encouraged them to strive for success. In cases of Peter, Flo and Elaine they lacked what Bourdieu also refers to as the institutional agents, that is, family members who could transfer and allocate resources and opportunities to help guide them towards their success. Although Peter, Flo and Elaine lacked the learnt behaviours, perceptions, and attitudes, those traits that are acquired within the familial and cultural context (Bourdieu, 1984), they were still motivated to succeed. These students had no reference points in their families in relation to higher education, and saw higher education as an alien space, and a place not suitable for "*people like*

me.” They lacked significant levels of the various forms of Bourdieusian social, economic and cultural capital, did not receive much family support, and as a means of financially maintaining themselves, engaged in full-time employment while studying, (Pike & Kuh, 2005). However, they gained social capital through their extended familial and community networks that Coleman (1988) talks about which afforded them familial capital in the form of knowledge, and helped shape and foster their aspirations and hope for the future, somethings they bring with them into college (Yosso, 2005). There is a difference between the conceptualization of social capital of Coleman and that of Bourdieu. Coleman incorporates the relationships and associations found within and beyond the family, whereas Bourdieu views those relationships within the family as cultural capital. To Bourdieu, social capital encompasses all of the resources that come from belonging to groups beyond the family that allow all members to use the collective capital (Bourdieu, 1988).

To gain cultural capital, Flo, Elaine and Heather felt the need to break what was considered to be the expected norm, values, and lifestyle choices in their families, by advancing to college, in an effort to be successful and gain a better standard of living. In this regard, Bourdieu’s position, is contradicted by these findings, as in his world, such students are alienated from the educational system and not given opportunities to succeed. This is antithesis to Bourdieu’s reproduction theory which suggests that students from disadvantage backgrounds cannot succeed in school. Bourdieu maintains that academic success and social mobility are reproduced through social and cultural capital, and in his view, disadvantaged students cannot attain success, as they are not in possession of the social or cultural capital due to their habitus. Yosso (2005) refutes Bourdieu’s line of thought, for as it appears he is insinuating that students from working class backgrounds or first generation students are “blank slates” coming into college. Yosso argues that these students bring to their new environment rich personal resources from their past experiences in the forms of familial, aspirational, resistant, social and navigational capital which they can use to their advantage,

I must further add that contrary to Bourdieusian’s theory, there has been an increased number of students, in Turks and Caicos Islands and the wider Caribbean (Barbados for example), from working class backgrounds attaining higher education. My position is that educational expansion, or upward educational mobility of students to higher education like what is happening in the Caribbean context, is helping in reducing class discrepancies in academic attainment and providing encouragement for persons within these cultures to advance their social status and that

of their families, through social mobility. The upward educational mobility seen in this modern society of persons from the lower socio-economic class, has left us to reason that the family as the main catalyst of transferring cultural capital cannot be sustained.

Monica, Harriet and Rose families in this case, defeated the notion that pervades what defines first generation students (those children whose parents did not attain higher education), in that, although they were not higher education educated, they were influential in encouraging them to succeed. These findings show a gap in Bourdieu's concept of capital, for as I closely examined Bourdieu's concept of capital and its relations to parental involvement, it was observed that the base was founded on the practices of the middle class in France which places dominance on educational success. I further observed that it was first used to describe the use of evaluative measures on students in the French educational system, thus infiltrating social reproduction within that society. This might go well in that context, for in the French society there might be a distinctive link "between educational norms and status practices" (Lareau & Weininger, 2004, p. 117). In fact, in the French context there is a distinct correlation between high positions in government and the *grandes ecoles* (elite education institutes). However, this may not be applicable in non-French contexts such as the Caribbean or other societies (Lareau & Weininger, 2004).

The encouragement shown by parents was also evident with those students with high socio-economic status (Mike, Sonia). This support and encouragement as seen in their stories, pushed them to strive for success. This suggests that the educational privileges which parents from the higher echelons of society pass down to their children may not only be because of economic factors but also through other mechanisms such as material resources and parental encouragement as outline in diagram 6.1. These findings lead me to suggest the need to reexamine the notion of cultural capital.

What was evident from the stories is the important role family background play in shaping the education trajectories and views of success of students. The families of these students transmit to them the type of cultural capital that aligns with their social class, which they bring into the *field*. Therefore, I have encapsulated all of Figure 6.1 in a larger box labelled field.

All the students identified some type of behaviour which they felt positively influenced or impacted on their success while in the field (TCICC). These included studying in the off periods, having positive friends, maintaining, and associating with peers who were focused about schoolwork and attending classes. The students thought that these behaviours supported their success, and some further stated that they also drew from what they have learnt from past

experiences. This linked to their notion of success as a means of building social capital. Peter, Harriett, June, and Monica referred to their high school experiences, where their success came through hard work and studying long and hard. Sonia and Mike learnt the value of studying and its success from their parents. Here the students formed connections between their past experiences and the success they are experiencing while at TCICC.

As discussed earlier in Section 6.2 perceptions impact behaviours which helped shape our environments and beliefs of these environments. Therefore, how the students perceive their success will influence their experiences in and out of college. From the stories it was observed that the predispositions or perceptions of students' success were shaped, created, and recreated throughout their life experiences which helped form their view of the world (Bourdieu, 1977; Thomas, 2002) and influence their experiences at the TCICC.

Social Interactions

The relationships and interactions with family, friends and faculty were perceived by all students as important in them achieving success in some way. It also became apparent that some of the students (those who did not have that parental or familial support) acquired cultural capital through their observations, socialization and interactions with their middle-class peers and some faculty members (Elaine, Flo, Heather). Furthermore, these students also learnt the “rules of the game” and in so doing, acquired the social capital of their middle-class peers which could permit possibilities of upward social mobility for them and success. I maintain that for these students, creating positive faculty relationships or having friend networks were of particular significance and played a key role in their perception of success. They provided guidance and support that helped to build and develop their resilience as well as educational and social interactions and support for the students to succeed. In many cases they helped bridge the educational gap providing knowledge, college information and skills that could not be conveyed by their parents and this helped contribute to how they defined success (Elaine, Flo and Heather). Therefore, the second box at the bottom leading with an arrow to attaining cultural capital was added to diagram 6.1. In fact, they had a direct and indirect impact on their success (Bourdieu, 1986; Field, 2003; Tinto, 1975). This contact relationship between faculty and student is one of the keyways that facilitates learning and there is no surprise that these interactions are associated with factors such as the intellectual development of students, persistence, and their success (Reed, 2015; Strydom et.al, 2012).

Additionally, students felt that through interacting and forming collaborative peer networks, as well as observing how their peers maneuvered around TCICC, helped them to gain social capital of the dominant culture. Some students were provided with new learning experiences that helped create or rather reshaped their habitus and helped them achieve some of their personal goals (Cooper & Liou, 2007). Their new learning experiences as Jones (1997) supports, related to the configurations formed out of past experiences and this create their perceptions that informs their behaviours and how they view the world. In fact, it caused the students to learn “the rules of the game,” (a phrase coined by Bourdieu), that were misunderstood within their social class setting, and this resulted further change of their habitus. I surmise that Elaine, Flo and Heather were able to adopt the cultural capital of their peers and accept agency by altering their habitus. Although being first generation, non-traditional or coming from a low socio-economic backgrounds these participants became well networked and clearly demonstrated the features associated with the understanding of Coleman’s social capital, which includes setting goals, having expectations and norms.

All the students identified some type of behaviour which they felt positively influenced or impacted on their success while in the field (TCICC). These included studying in the off periods, having positive friends, associating with peers who were focused about schoolwork and attending classes. Actually, the students thought that these behaviours supported their success, and some further stated that they also drew from what they have learnt from past experiences. Peter, Harriet, June, and Monica referred to their high school experiences, where their success came through hard work and studying long and hard. Sonia and Mike learnt the value of studying and its success from their parents. Here the students formed connections between their past experiences and the success they are experiencing while at TCICC.

Resources

The findings also show that students having access to resources and not having access to, educational and social tools were some factors that further contribute or did not contribute to them experiencing success (see also Section 6.2). The ability for students to engage in some activities at college and their learning require them to have a certain level of financial resources and access to resources. It was found that because of parents providing access to resources some students were exposed to broader perspectives that influenced their success, in that, they were able to achieve good grades which in turn impacted or influenced how well they will complete their

degrees. Conversely, some student mainly those from low socioeconomic backgrounds reveal that lack of resources was a major factor in them not achieving success as they view it.

In many cases students revealed that having to work part-time (Harriet, Monica, June) as well as full time (Elaine, Flo, Rose, Heather) while studying had the potential to detract from their academic activity, which led to a negative impact on their success. These findings resemble the views of Tinto (1993), Grabowski et al. (2016) and Mentz (2012) in their research about students engaging in part time work while studying.

Furthermore, students (Monica, Flo) highlight how the responsibilities of family life can negatively impact their academic success, but also indicate how it is a driving force for them to progress and obtain their degree. This is to meet their family demands more effectively and allow them to provide for themselves what their parents did not give them while growing up. Jeffreys (2012) and Alami (2016) reinforce that the responsibilities of family can have negative effects on students while studying and hinder their progress.

Clearly, students' background, early learning encounters and socialization within the family, help create their predispositions or perceptions which are recreated throughout their interactions and life experiences (Winkle-Wagner, 2010) and can present barriers to higher education or impede on their progression while there (Gorard et al, 2006; Fbarriersuller et al, 2007). The study found that many of the participants negotiated various stages of their lives and found to have high educational aspirations, maintaining hope and dreams of their future despite persistent education inequities and real and perceived barriers. This resiliency is evident in situations where they dream of possibilities and outcomes that might be perceived out of their reach or present circumstances or without the objective means of reaching these goals (Yosso, 2005).

From the study what was reinforced is that prior experience and context can inform us about why the participants were succeeding at TCICC. While the activities in and out of the classroom at TCICC are relevant to whether these students succeed, of equal importance are the experiences they encounter prior to entering and outside the college. These prior experiences and background influences support the development of the habitus and capital they bring to their college experience.

6.5 Research question # 4 How do students' perceptions of success influence their experiences at the college?

As discussed earlier in Section 6.2 perceptions impact behaviours which helped shape our environments and beliefs of these environments. Therefore, how the students perceive their success will influence their experiences in and out of college. From the stories it was observed that the predispositions or perceptions of students' success were shaped, created, and recreated throughout their life experiences which helped form their view of the world (Bourdieu, 1977; Thomas, 2002) and influence their experiences at the TCICC. How students' perception of success influences their experiences at college would be discussed broadly through two lenses: The acquisition of cultural capital and social capital.

Some students perceived success as achieving cultural capital (see section 6.3) such as achieving good grades or acquiring knowledge and skills as discussed in figure 6.1 and as a result, they embraced the educational opportunities and experiences their learning environment at TCICC presented. Many of the students (Sonia, Mike, Rose, Harriet, Flo) choose consciously or unconsciously to adopt positive behaviours towards their studies. They became opened to accepting knowledge which allowed them to gain broader perspectives, create a new set of priorities, and develop new values, something that was not prevalent with many of their neighbourhood friends or family members. This resulted in them having a different perspective on how they view life and their education. In short it reshaped their world's view.

Secondly, as a result of perceiving success as a means of gaining social capital students formed new social connections through informal and formal networks. They interacted with faculty members and peers from the dominant culture who were ambitious and motivated to learn. This provided new learning experiences and caused some of them to change their habitus as they restructured how they interact with others (Rose, Harriet, Flo). This implied that with habitus there is a relationship between the past, present and future experiences of students. Furthermore, they became more opened to building trusted relationships with other students and worked collaboratively rather than continued with the notion of individualism that they had engaged in while in High school (Peter, June). This allowed them to gain academic and social support from their peers which helped contribute positively to their academic success. I can therefore postulate that students gain social capital from the dominant culture as they interact with institutional agents such as faculty members and peers from the dominant culture.

A key point that was illustrated by this study is that although there were similarities in some of the experiences of the participants, the complex combination of backgrounds and experiences indicate that each participant story was unique and different. This is important to note because I acknowledge that in an effort to create effective policy and practice in the college students must be treated as a collective, however, the participants' stories indicate that they are not a homogeneous group and although they might be from similar socio economic backgrounds their experiences can be different. We also acquired clearer insights from the individual students' unique experiences of how they perceive and achieve success. We gauged a better understanding of those past experiences in their lives that influence or help shape their behaviours and choices and affect their thinking and disposition.

6.6 Boudieusian tools at work in TCI

This section briefly discusses the application of Boudieusian tools at work in the Turks and Caicos Island Society and applying Bourdiesian's concept of capital, habitus and field to the Turk and Caicos Islands society and how it may shape the pathway and perceptions of students.

Social inequalities and power structures are central to Boudieusian thinking (Bourdieu, 1977) and this is very applicable to the socio-economic structures within the Turks and Caicos Islands. Boudieusian tools of habitus and capital can be applied to the role and influence of families in Turk and Caicos Islands in the reproduction of inequalities. The cultural capital through Bourdieu's lens is institutionalized to favor those from the higher socio-economic class and is transmissible within families and individuals through conversations or directly. In many cases, cultural capital of families is closely related to their education level, as well as their income. Those families who have the benefits or may I say the profits of cultural capital, tend to have higher professional and corporate jobs and high incomes. Conversely, those families from low socio-economic backgrounds lack higher education qualifications and engage in low paying jobs. The disparities in levels of income or lack of direct economic inheritance have created unequal distribution of cultural capital among families throughout the island and students have inherited this, creating unequal capital among them. As a result, it remains the central tenet in shaping the pathway and perceptions of students, and impacts on how they view their success and differentiate their educational outcomes. This validates Bourdieu's position that the cultural capital families possess can infiltrate disadvantages found within families. The families transmit to their children

the type of cultural capital that aligns with their social class, which their children then bring into the various *fields*. Furthermore, it can be said that students living in the upper social class in Turks and Caicos Islands have familial and community support and are pressured from their community as well as within their families in pursuing higher education (Thomson, 2018; Miller, 2007; Maton, 2012). However, the message and expectations for those students in the low socio-economic neighbourhoods is not the same, the need to persevere higher education comes from a thirst of trying to overcome the many challenges their families encountered, and most of those students who pursue higher education are self-driven to do so.

Furthermore, although the government has provided opportunities for students to have access to TCICC by providing scholarships it reduces but does not eliminate the overall effects of capital on academic achievement. Some students who do not qualify for scholarships cannot afford to attend college. Therefore, the differences found between students from higher social classes and working classes are not eradicated. Again, it suggests that the possession and the volume of cultural capital may shape the pathway and perceptions of students, and impacts on their success.

By applying Bourdiesian's concept of capital, habitus and field to the Turk and Caicos Islands society, this study demonstrates how the possession and volume cultural capital may shape the pathway and perceptions of students.

6.7 Research limitations and implications

Limitations

The most obvious limitation in my research was the small number of students who participated in the study. I relied on a small convenient sample of students who expressed an interest to be participants in the study and availed themselves. These students had a passion for what they were doing at TCICC. While their experiences provided great insights and allowed me to gather a better understanding of how past experiences in their lives influence or help shape how they perceive success and how these perceptions impact on their experiences of success it would have been helpful to learn more from a larger sample which might offer different perceptions to provide depth and breadth of students' success and background experiences. There was also gender imbalanced among the participants (2 males, 8 females). A greater representation of males could have provided different representation in experiences. However, despite this imbalance of participants, there were many commonalities existing in their experiences.

Another area of limitation is that this study investigated undergraduate students' perception of success in a small island developing nation. The experiences of the participants in this research were only captured from one small college. Replicating this study in another island, in a different size higher education institution, or with graduate students would provide different experiences of the students.

Using the narrative approach afforded the participants the opportunity to recount their live experiences, allowing them to include or omit any aspect they wanted. This shows that their narratives were interpretations of their experiences as they had remembered them and how they want us to see them (Atkinson, 2002), and were conditional or mediated by the present (Merrill & West, 2009). As the participants painted their stories there was no way to prove if the experiences were true (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). In addition, I am also aware that how I see reality which is from a social and psychological perspective, my thoughts, values, experiences, and my own predispositions are all founded on my beliefs as a researcher and as a result would have brought some bias to my research; bringing my own interpretation to the data (Wallace, 1999; Soini, et.al., 2011). This is evident in narrative research or hermeneutics or what Polkinghorne, (1988) considered to be part of the sense-making process. As a result, I allowed myself to be guided by Gewirtz and Cribb (2006) who cautioned that engaging in reflexive research requires researchers to be cautious of value judgments where they avoid sourcing evidence that might conflict with their own beliefs and value system.

My final limitation is that I was cognizant that my data was interpreted from a Caribbean viewpoint which might be unique to this context and not like other the cultural perspectives.

Implications-Contribution to knowledge

Firstly, a thorough analysis of the literature, revealed there is no documentation that explores the phenomenon of students' success through their individual experiences, and the role backgrounds and perceptions play in influencing their success while at college in small island developing states, the context in which this study is being conducted. The likelihood of this research being the first of its kind in a developing small island, and particularly Turks and Caicos Islands, it will generate new knowledge and can also assist higher education institutions in other regions in preparing for students' success.

As mentioned in Chapter 1 this study was conducted at sole Government provider of higher education in a small developing state, Turks and Caicos Islands. It has a varied population of about thirty-five thousand persons (Education Sector Plan, 2013-2017). Its indigenous people are in the

minority, with the remainder of persons coming from other countries primarily Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Students who enter the degree programs at the college are from diverse backgrounds and are at varying levels of academic attainment and tertiary education readiness. The total enrollment at TCICC is about three hundred and twenty students (Education Sector Plan, 2013-2017). This makes it unique in size in comparison to other higher education institutions found globally. Additionally, the national context is not only different to other countries, but the country is unique in size, location and population composition. These were some of the factors that helped shape how I framed my research questions for this study.

The first sub-question (*What are the educational experiences and context that students bring to the higher education institution?*) was framed to help provide subjective stories of the context and experiences of who the students are, their status prior to admission to TCICC and their psyche at present in college. It further provided an understanding of why the participants made their choices and helped find meaning in the phenomena.

The second question (*How do students define success in college?*) allowed their subjective stories to help identify and justify their perceptions of success at college. The third question (*What are the factors students believe do/do not contribute to their success as they define it?*) allowed for participants to convey their subjective stories of situational knowledge about experiences before college and now while at college. The use of photo diaries images triggered richer conversations and generated information about their experiences. The final question (*How do students' perceptions of success influence their experiences at the college?*) helped identify and justify student's experiences and perceptions of success before college and now at college. Like the third question the photos images triggered richer conversations and generated information about their experiences. The way my research questions are framed and how they are posed is a contribution to knowledge.

Secondly, as this thesis will be a publishable document, it will further contribute to existing knowledge on the topic of students' success and perceptions of success. In this study I was able to utilize a two- stage analysis process where narratives were created and then reanalyzed using a theoretical analysis of Bourdieusian lens of capital, habitus, and field. Theory was used to add to our understanding on how background experiences can influence students' perception of success and how these perceptions can impact their experiences at college. This study also adds insights into how some students at TCICC view their success and the underlying dispositions that can impact on how success is perceived.

Thirdly, Bourdieu's thinking tools, is being used in the higher education context of the small, developing island of Turks and Caicos Islands, and this a different context from which they were developed, thereby providing an alternative understanding of how background experiences can influence students' perception of success and how these perceptions can impact their experiences at college.

In addition, as my research and findings are presented at different conferences and seminars, it is my hope that my colleagues, students etc. will benefit from the knowledge and it can also motivate or assist others who are interested in researching similar topics.

Policy and practice implications

Although this research will contribute to knowledge, it also has some policy implications that may assist with influencing government's role in promoting and developing a number of policy initiatives aimed at promoting and fostering students' success.

This study only had a small sample of ten participants (majority being first generation and non-traditional students), however, it provided some valuable insights regarding students' success and perceptions that influence that success. It further provided an opportunity to gain an understanding of how policy interacts with practice and assisted me in my own practice, as well as assist similar colleges in small island developing nations.

Policy makers may design interventions for first generation and non-traditional students around cultural wealth. Rather than focusing on what these students lack in college preparedness, policy makers can capitalize on their strengths and assets. Interventions that leverage family and community capital, for example, may strengthen the perception of student- family integration and by extension student's success.

Government can improve its funding and finance policies, focusing on students with limited financial resources. Special grants can be offered to first generation students or to students from disadvantaged backgrounds who may not be considered gifted but have the prerequisites to advance to college but are unable to do so due to financial constraints. This will serve as an incentive for prospective students in this social class to pursue college.

The experiences of the students as depicted in their narratives highlighted how their backgrounds influenced their perceptions of success and how these perceptions influenced their experiences of success at college. By highlighting the factors that influenced students' success before entering college that can impact them in higher education, the findings have implication for Government to advance widening participation by removing existing social and cultural barriers.

The Ministry of Education can create a policy framework with equality, equity and inclusion as its main drivers and ensure that its strategic imperatives are articulated to all. This can be achieved through the implementation of community outreach programs. The local radio station and town hall meetings can be used to disseminate this information to the public, with an aim to promote diversity and inclusion as positive aspects to education in Turks and Caicos Islands and in so doing, deconstruct socio-cultural ideas on equity and inclusion. The Ministry can also empower first-generation students to understand how their positionality affects their college experience and encouraging them to reflect on the elements that determine their perspective of success.

The study can help the Department of Education assist high schools in the preparation of its students for the smooth transition into their higher education experience. The findings also showed that some students did not have the familial support to help or provide guidance nor did they have the social or cultural capital to advance to TCICC. I therefore recommend that Government ensure that all high schools engage in career education where students are provided with adequate information about career choices that would help prepare them for higher education and broadens their horizon of choice. This will help bridge the gap for students in homes like Elaine and Flo, where there is little, or no family support and education is not seen as important.

Implications for TCICC

This study has some practical implications for TCICC. It can help the college understand the role and impact that previous experiences and backgrounds have on their students' success. They can use this information to create institutional mechanisms to support first generation as well as non-traditional students to succeed. TCICC can create student support networks that take into account the students' prior experiences, build on them, and provide opportunities that will help them succeed. Exposing first-generation students to other first-generation students' lived experiences may also be an effective one-on-one intervention for increasing perceived self-authorship. It can also raise student success awareness in other higher education institutions in the region and assist them in creating supportive environments and prepare students for success.

Students were able to articulate what success means to them and how previous experiences influenced their perceptions and behaviours. This suggest that as part of the transition process, some in-class discussions about success with freshmen entering TCICC would be beneficial. This can cause them to reflect on what behaviours, perceptions and attitudes have contributed to their success and, as a result, consider how they can improve this while at college. Furthermore, the

findings of this study can help foster a culture among faculty that recognizes a broader definition of success. As a result, academic failure will be viewed as a learning experience, rather than as students failing to achieve some form of success or being incompetent or unsuitable for college, knowing that while they may have failed in their academic work, some would have achieved some measure of success, and others, with the proper support, disposition and guidance would go on to reap other forms of success.

Transition as development

The college can engage in transition as a tool for development. There is a need for transitional and ongoing support to be available for all students. The findings highlighted the impact of social support or networks on students' success. This reinforced the importance of TCICC engaging in transition as development, ensuring that opportunities are provided for socialization where students interact with each other, and faculty and students collaborate through events and activities. Furthermore, mentoring programs (big brother, big sister) can be implemented that can help promote academic integration and foster a sense of belonging (Gale & Parker, 2014; Thomas 2012). It can further develop the confidence of students as learners, improve their motivation to study and succeed, and assist them with a smooth transition into the college. In addition, it can build capacity for student engagement through a staff–student partnership approach (Gale & Parker, 2014). Additionally, first generation learning communities that promote consciousness raising at TCICC may boost social-emotional well-being among these students as well as harness first generation cultural wealth, which promotes their academic success both directly and indirectly.

Transition as becoming

As is, TCICC does not capture the diversity of student lives, their past experiences or present experiences of college. The findings show that past experiences of the participants influenced their perception of success while at TCICC. Gale and Parker (2014) remind us that higher education failure to prioritize the actual views, experiences, interests and perspectives of students as seen through their lens, particularly the lived reality of disadvantaged students will be counterproductive (Gale & Parker, 2014). Therefore, TCICC can embrace a curriculum that is broad and balanced, that provides room for different ways of thinking about, and different ways of engaging with knowledge. It can develop flexible pathways for students to study that will allow them to enter, leave and return to study at any stage of their life (Gale & Parker, 2014). TCICC can create a “Center of Excellence” that has its core principles as access, diversity, and student

centeredness. The aim will be to provide opportunities to help students on their way to excellence in various facets of life and examine obstacles students may encounter that may hinder them from achieving or striving for excellence while enrolled in TCICC. The “Center of Excellence” could be tasked to look for ways to support early intervention if students have issues relating to their academic progress. At present when students fail a course, letters are presented to them and another opportunity is provided so they can retake the course. This study supports my view that if students fail a course there should be immediate intervention to see what support can be given. Furthermore, the college can create a faculty-student partnership approach in an effort to build capacity for student engagement.

Transition as induction

The TCICC and its programs are not actively promoted within the island's high schools. Given its contribution to widening participation, TCICC could be aggressively promoted in high schools so that students are aware of its value and see it as a viable first choice for furthering their education. It may also open the eyes of students whose families do not prioritize education to the fact that TCICC, and thus higher education, is open to all, regardless of social status. The college can engage in transition as induction where it conducts first year seminars and pre-entry webinars for all prospective students to help build student engagement and create a sense of belonging (Gale & Parker, 2014). Students will have the chance to voice any questions or concerns and receive prompt attention. Also, high school students, their parents, and prospective first-year students can have firsthand experiences by visiting the campus and getting to know the faculty and facilities. Developing early relationships with faculty open the pathway that allows students to approach them when the need arises (Thomas, 2012). Students will be able to socialize and form friendship groups which provide a support network and promote social integration (Thomas 2012). Parents and their children will be encouraged to value education more as a result, especially those students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds whose families do not prioritize it. In addition, TCICC can offer chances for parents to spend a day living the experience of a student at TCICC. By doing this, parents will gain a greater grasp of what their kids encounter and what is anticipated of them while they are there. Parents may increase or start offering their children more emotional support as a result of this.

Finally, the college can adopt a whole institution approach and commitment to widening participation and student success. Staff from all departments, services, and entities from across the

college become involved, in order to further widen participation and provide increased access for some underrepresented groups. Expected outcomes and the categories to be targeted will be specified. It might encourage a culture that values diversity and accepts all pupils, regardless of their socioeconomic standing, race, or level of physical ability. By larger and more accessible access, it can generate experiences that prevent social inequity.

Furthermore, its policies and practices may be geared towards providing students-centered learning experiences that will promote students' success while taking into account background experiences that may influence students' perceptions of success and impact their experiences of success at TCICC. The TCICC can grow to create distance education degree courses that may be less expensive than face to face courses, increase access.

Implications for high school

High schools have traditionally been positioned as places where students can be prepared to study in higher education. This research can provide teacher with the theoretical and practical knowledge they need to prepare students for the transition to college.

The students' stories presented in Chapter 4 provide the path for me to present some of my findings to the high school teaching staff. This may result in a better understanding of who the students are, as well as the path they take and experiences they encounter on their way to higher education.

In high school a school culture is established in which students believe that teachers have their "best interest at heart," that they view all students as individuals, and that assumptions about them should not be made based on their demographic profile.

Personal development and implications for personal practice

As I commenced this study, it was my personal desire to ascertain greater knowledge of the part prior experiences play in influencing the perceptions of the success of students, how various environments and other factors influence or impact on that success, and how my role as practitioner could contribute to this agenda. As the research unfolded, my knowledge base was expanding as I gain greater insights from the participants' stories about their reality and wide dimensions of students' experiences or elements that hinder or influence their success at college. I was able to gain a more concrete understanding of how various factors including their classroom experiences, socioeconomic background, relationship with family, friends, faculty, or the wider community social class background affect their experiences at college.

Armed with this knowledge I am in a more informed position as an educational consultant to help Ministries, colleges and by extension teachers within the Caribbean and Africa better understand what approaches or strategies students would respond to, with the goal of averting or curtailing the likelihood of failure, or less than satisfactory performances while at college. I can further show how various factors can impact upon students' perception of success and help these Ministries develop holistic student-centered strategies that will assist in creating institutional designs that fosters the success of students.

Widening participation and inclusion have always been a passion of mine. I am very conscious about the lack of social mobility and social class inequalities of students, and I am desirous to see them succeed regardless of their environment, perceptions, experiences, and socio-economic backgrounds. As a result of this study, I am more knowledgeable about the broader issues of widening participation, and it has invigorated in me the impetus and passion for seeing students accomplish their goals. I will be a further advocate on providing solutions to effect change through my teacher training and representation on various committees.

While I could not abandon my thoughts, values, experiences, and my own predispositions on students' success, perceptions, prior experiences and widening participation, hearing the diverse experiences and successes shared through the richness of the narratives from the perspective of the participants, as they interact with their environment (*habitus*) in realistic settings, gave me a greater appreciation and understanding of their opinions, thoughts, perceptions, and feelings. The findings in this study have caused me to reflect, deconstruct and reconstruct my view and definition of success. As a result, my thought processes, knowledge, and views of success were expanded. I moved from being in alignment with what is implicit in definitions of models of success found in higher education institutions and the linear view of government where I embraced completion rates and test scores to a non-linear pathway. My horizon has broadened, and my knowledge expanded as I embraced a more student-centered, wider, holistic view to success. This was mainly because of the depth and richness of the students' stories which highlighted their diverse experiences, challenges, and success. With student centeredness as my focus, I am encouraged to help different Ministries find ways to create and coordinate monitoring tools to monitor the quality of students' experiences at college.

Finally, after using Bourdieusian metatheory and his thinking tools of capital, *habitus*, and field it has given me the impetus to apply his work in my day-to-day professional functioning, as I assist various Caribbean education ministries in their teacher training and development. In so

doing, I will show how they can use Bourdieu's work as an analytical tool to understand how various factors can impact upon students. With this knowledge, Ministries will be in a better position to create the necessary frameworks to assist students in striving and achieving success.

6.8 Concluding remarks

The findings revealed that several background factors involving the micro and macro systems helped influence students' perception of success. These perceptions influence the practices and choices of the students and impacted their reality, thinking, actions, possibilities, personal dispositions and experiences of success at Turks and Caicos Islands Community College.

The diverse narratives shared by the participants were illuminating as they provided clearer personal insights into their psyche at present and alerted me of their status prior to admission into TCICC. Understanding the various factors in the lives of students that have contributed to or did not contribute to their success have shown me how resilient they are. It has transformed my perceptions, attitudes and beliefs and my future intentions.

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Appendix 1 –University of Liverpool Ethics Approval



Dear Rhonda Blackman-Smith,		
I am pleased to inform you that the EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC) has approved your application for ethical approval for your study. Details and conditions of the approval can be found below.		
Sub-Committee:	EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC)	
Review type:	Expedited	
PI:		
School:	School of Histories, Languages and Cultures	
Title:	The influence of students' background on their perceptions of success, and how these perceptions influence their experiences of success, in a higher education institution of a small island developing nation.	
First Reviewer:	Dr. Marco Ferreira	
Second Reviewer:	Dr. Ming Cheng	
Other members of the Committee	Dr. Lucilla Crosta, Dr. Rachel Maunder, Dr. José Reis Jorge.	
Date of Approval:	10 th December 2019	
The application was APPROVED subject to the following conditions:		
Conditions		

1	Mandatory	M: All serious adverse events must be reported to the VPREC within 24 hours of their occurrence, via the EdD Thesis Primary Supervisor.	
<p>This approval applies for the duration of the research. If it is proposed to extend the duration of the study as specified in the application form, the Sub-Committee should be notified. If it is proposed to make an amendment to the research, you should notify the Sub-Committee by following the Notice of Amendment procedure outlined at http://www.liv.ac.uk/media/livacuk/researchethics/notice%20of%20amendment.doc.</p> <p>Where your research includes elements that are not conducted in the UK, approval to proceed is further conditional upon a thorough risk assessment of the site and local permission to carry out the research, including, where such a body exists, local research ethics committee approval. No documentation of local permission is required (a) if the researcher will simply be asking organizations to distribute research invitations on the researcher's behalf, or (b) if the researcher is using only public means to identify/contact participants. When medical, educational, or business records are analysed or used to identify potential research participants, the site needs to explicitly approve access to data for research purposes (even if the researcher normally has access to that data to perform his or her job).</p>			
<p>Please note that the approval to proceed depends also on research proposal approval.</p>			

Kind regards,

Lucilla Crosta

Chair, EdD. VPREC

Appendix 2 – Turks and Caicos Islands Community College Ethics Approval

TURKS AND CAICOS ISLANDS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

TELEPHONE NO: (649)946-1163
ROAD
236
CAICOS ISLANDS
INDIES



Lighthouse
P.O. Box
Grand Turk
Turks &
British West

November 7, 2019

Mrs. Rhonda Blackman-Smith
 Curriculum Development Officer
 Department of Education
 Ministry of Education
 Grand Turk
 Turks and Caicos Islands

Dear Mrs. Blackman-Smith:

RE: INTERVIEWS WITH STUDENTS OF THE TURKS AND CAICOS ISLANDS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

I have been directed by the Board of Governors of the Turks and Caicos Islands Community College (TCICC) to respond to your letters requesting permission to interview students at the TCICC as part of the fulfilments of the requirement to complete your doctoral dissertation. The Board gives its acceptance to your request and deems it necessary to advise that the protocols of ethical mindfulness must be adhered to in the conduct of the interviews.

Kindly be advised that the permission granted you is from the highest authority of the College, the Board of Governors. Currently, there is not an Ethics Committee established at TCICC; however, TCICC subscribes to the Normative Principles in Applied Ethics which include the principles of personal and social benefits as they affect individuals or

society as a whole, as well as principles that are duty-based, and uphold moral rights and responsibilities.

Finally, as is required of all countries and institutions from which a research is conducted, a copy of your finished dissertation is to be provided for the Public Library and the Library at the TCICC.

I wish, on behalf of the Board of Governors of the TCICC, to congratulate you and to wish you every success in this undertaking.

Respectfully



Dr. Hubert Fulford
President
Turks and Caicos Islands Community College

Cc: Mr. Keno Forbes (Chairman)
Mr. Samuel Forbes (Vice President, TCICC)

Appendix 3

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**NAME:**

1 Tell a little about your family.

- How will you describe these?
- What do you think you have learnt from being in that neighbourhood?

3. What were your experiences like at high school?

- What have you learnt?
- What are your memories?
- What are your greatest achievements?
- What do your siblings, parents do?
- How would you describe your experiences with your family?
- How has your family helped you in your success?

2. What are your memories about growing up in neighbourhood?

4 Why did you decided to study at Turks and Caicos Islands Community College?

- What has your experiences been like?
- Have you encountered any challenges and if so what?

5 How will you describe success?

6 How will you describe your story about what the photographs mean to you?

Photo1:

Photo 2:

Photo3:

Photo 4:

Photo 5: