

DISSERTATION

INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS: EXPLORING THE FORMATIVE
EXPERIENCES OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS ENROLLED IN REMEDIAL
COURSES

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ABSTRACT

INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS: EXPLORING THE FORMATIVE EXPERIENCES OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS ENROLLED IN REMEDIAL COURSES

Remedial Education has been a polarizing topic in education for many years, as there is often debate about who is responsible for the large number of students that require remedial services as well as the best manner in which to support these students. Despite the continuing interest in the topic, few studies have focused specifically on the students and their experiences in these programs. In order to gain a better understanding of these experiences, a qualitative phenomenological study, using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, was conducted in order to answer the following research question and three sub-questions: What are the lived experiences of students enrolled in remedial education at community college? 1) How do students who are enrolled in remedial education at the community college describe their educational journey? 2) How were students prepared for post-secondary education prior to enrollment in remedial education? 3) How do students see themselves as succeeding in post-secondary education?

Four participants took part in the study by partaking in semi-structured interviews to explore their lived experiences in remedial education at the community college. An in depth analysis of the data, utilizing IPA, revealed issues of marginalization through labeling, manipulation of the education system, and a desire to belong. The results of the study suggest that remedial education students often deal with issues that are far more complex than skill

acquisition alone, and supports literature that highlights the importance of accountability measures for K-12 education, as well as the value of non-cognitive skills, and how labels can affect students. This study offers a unique student perspective into remedial education, presents the opportunity for future research that continues to explore remedial experiences, and supports research that includes student perspectives and validates student experiences.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

In its 2012–2013 academic year report, the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE) noted that 64.6% of students enrolled in two-year colleges are in need of remediation. This large percentage of underprepared students presents a unique challenge to colleges as they work to find a balance between maintaining high levels of rigor while simultaneously maintaining their commitment to an egalitarian model and open access for all students (Hadden, 2010). While colleges struggle to find a balance between commitment to their mission and maintaining high academic standards, these underprepared students must learn to balance the challenges of meeting the rigors and expectations of college while simultaneously working to attain the college level skills needed to succeed in this new environment.

The decision to attend a community college may be the result of many factors (Morrow, 2007; Lang, 2009). For some, community college is the most appealing choice as it tends to be close to home and allows a student to maintain their current lifestyle (as influenced by work, school, family, etc.) while simultaneously attending school. For others, the low cost of community college is the greatest appeal, as here, they can gain a quality education for a fraction of the cost of most universities. For many others, the community college is enticing because of the seemingly open door policy and broad acceptance of all students regardless of educational background or socio-economic status. Community college has often been viewed as a “safe-haven” for students; a place that will enable students to work towards a degree while being provided the structures, supports, and sense of community that can often be lost on a large university campus (Hadden, 2010). The community college must not only uphold this egalitarian

vision, but it must also clearly articulate this mission to its students (Shaw, 1997; Abelman & Dalessandro, 2008).

Statement of the Problem

As noted by Merisotis and Phipps (2000), Bettinger and Long (2005), and Mellow and Heelan (2008), the community college has long upheld the belief that its mission is to serve all students and that the open door policy of community colleges welcomes students regardless of their educational standing. Community colleges' role in strengthening student shortcomings has been an important part of its history, and yet, debate continues about how community colleges should handle students with skill deficits, and whether or not community colleges possess the resources and the responsibility to teach those skills (Breneman, 1998; Esch, 2009), or whether, as according to many (Hoyt & Sorenson, 2001; Maeroff, 1982; Rockefeller Foundation Report, 2008; Roderick, Nagaoka, & Coca, 2009), such skills should have already been mastered by incoming students.

The large number of students in need of remediation seems to support the view that the educational system is broken, and those who say that, despite the millions of dollars being poured into the system each year, students remain unprepared for college-level studies (Hoyt & Sorensen, 2001; Maeroff, 1982; Rockefeller Foundation Report, 2008; Roderick, Nagaoka, & Coca, 2009). Given the high numbers of students graduating from high school and yet lacking basic skills (37 % of high school graduates; CDHE, 2014); it is no surprise that higher education systems and educators continue to struggle with how to best serve underprepared students and help them to fulfill their remedial needs, while simultaneously upholding the level of rigor and learning expected in academia. This struggle is often further complicated by the staggering costs of such programs (approximately \$56.1 million in 2012–13, according to the CDHE; CDHE,

2014), which makes it even more imperative that community colleges have a clear understanding of which programs and courses will have the greatest impact on their students.

In addition to understanding which courses best serve populations in need of remedial assistance, it is evident that institutions' theoretical beliefs about remediation, as well as their missions and visions for their colleges, can greatly influence the success or failure of remedial programs (Bettinger & Long, 2005; Mellow & Heelan, 2008; Merisotis & Phipps, 2000).

Colleges may feel that their role is to educate all students, regardless of ability, or just those that are adequately prepared, and such views can have a major impact on remedial programs for students. Research has shown that these core beliefs held by institutions will help to shape the environment in which these students learn and is a critical component of remedial education (Abelman & Dalessandro, 2008; Mellow & Heelan, 2008; Shaw, 1997). These core beliefs not only affect programmatic structures, but also influence how students see themselves in the programs in which they are enrolled and how they view themselves as learners (Abelman & Dalessandro, 2008; Mellow & Heelan, 2008; Shaw, 1997; Steele, 1997).

A great deal of research addresses the state of current remedial programs, their implementation, their structures, and their successes and failures (Barbatis, 2010; Bettinger & Long, 2005a; Levin & Calcagno, 2008; Soliday, 1996); however, despite the abundance of relevant data, a clear vision about which programs are most effective, which are most cost efficient, and which enable students to make the greatest gains is lacking. This lack of clarity and understanding around remedial student needs not only influences programmatic structures and course offerings, but most frequently affects the students themselves, as they are often met with the conflicting ideology that although they are ready for college, they are not yet ready for college level work. Additionally, remedial students are expected to assimilate and apply a

multitude of skills, yet they often receive no credit for this work. This ambiguity can have a major impact on their academic success, and on their understanding of who they are and how they see themselves as learners.

Research Purpose and Questions

Much of the past and current research on remedial education at the postsecondary level has centered on program implementation, structures, and successes and failures of current remedial education programs (Barbatis, 2010; Bettinger & Long, 2005; Levin & Calcagno, 2008; Soliday, 1996). Additionally, a great deal of research has been focused on perceived deficiencies in K–12 education, citing them as a cause of inadequacies in upcoming students (Hoyt & Sorensen, 2001; Maeroff, 1982; Richey, Mathern, O’Shea, & Pierce, 1997; Roderick, Nagaoka, & Coca, 2009; Rosenbaum, 2004), and suggesting that the K–12 educational system is broken. Despite this extensive research on remedial programs, structures, and ideologies at the postsecondary level, a need still exists for a more comprehensive understanding and exploration of those most intimately involved in the remediation process, the students themselves. This in depth understanding of students’ needs and experiences in remediation has yet to be fully explored in the current literature, and can only truly be gained by exploring students’ lived experiences in remedial education at community colleges.

The past and current research on remedial education, which is discussed in Chapter 2, provides the foundation for understanding the complexity of remedial education programs and their potential impact on student experiences. However, the actual impact of such programs and a thorough understanding of a student experience (from the student perspective) cannot be gathered through program analysis or an examination of course offerings, mission statements,

etc., but instead must be solicited from the students themselves, by truly exploring the students' lived experiences in remedial education programs at community colleges.

To gain this understanding of students' lived experiences, the following research question and three sub-questions have been explored:

What are the lived experiences of students enrolled in remedial education at community college?

1. How do students who are enrolled in remedial education at the community college describe their educational journey?
2. How were students prepared for post-secondary education prior to enrollment in remedial education?
3. How do students see themselves as succeeding in post-secondary education?

Significance of the Study

An interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) that focuses specifically on personal student accounts served as the vehicle to intimately explore the questions of students' lived experiences and to begin to understand how students themselves perceive the impact of remedial education. This type of understanding is crucial, as students' perceptions of their experiences offer unique perspectives that have often been neglected in remedial education research. Thus, the findings of this study aim to enable educators to better understand the needs of remedial students, to inform colleges about how best to properly structure and implement remedial education programs, as well as to provide ideological underpinnings that will assist colleges to better prepare, support, and retain the multitude of students who are in need of these programs. Most importantly, the current research offers unique perspectives into the actual experiences of an often misunderstood and marginalized student

population, giving a voice to those who are often voiceless, and highlighting the value of student perspectives in informing issues related to the success of students as well as the structure and design of remedial education.

Definition of Terms

The CDHE offers the following definition of remedial education:

Remedial education, also called developmental education, refers to classes intended to bolster the basic skills of new college students so they're adequately prepared for college-level work. These classes are non-credit courses so they are not usually covered by a student's financial aid (CDHE, 2013).

During this study, there may also be reference to the educational *gap* which is defined by the researcher as the disparity between those who possess and those who lack knowledge and prerequisite skills required to engage and succeed in college-level studies.

Use of the term "preparation" shifts throughout the study, dependent upon the context in which is applied. Although this term is not specifically identified in the research purpose or question, it is a term that emerged during the course of the study, and a variety of definitions should be considered. Merriam and Webster (www.merriam-webster.com, 2014) defines preparation as:

1. The activity or process of making something ready or of becoming ready for something
2. The action or process of making something ready for use or service or of getting ready for some occasion, test, or duty.

These basic definitions can be easily related back to educational purposes, but the purpose of this study is to examine preparation from a student perspective, so the definition shifts depending on an individuals' interpretation of the word.

The same interpretive cautions are necessary when considering the term “success.” Once again, Merriam and Webster (2014) was used to establish an initial definition, “1) the fact of getting or achieving wealth, respect, or fame or 2) the correct or desired result of an attempt;” however, success becomes exceedingly complicated when used in terms of educational success, and can vary by state, school district, institution, and most importantly, by each individual.

The terms *preparation* and *success* seem simple enough to define, but take on different meanings from the perspective of the student, depending on the nature of their lived experience in remediation. Baseline definitions have been offered here in an effort to provide context to how the terms are typically used, with the knowledge that meaning and interpretation of the words shifts throughout analysis.

Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

The study was delimited to a small number of participants (approximately 3–5) that were at least 18 years old and were currently or were formerly enrolled in at least one remedial education course at a community college. The small number of participants is recommended by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) and is specifically related to the qualitative method of IPA. Recruitment was conducted at local community colleges; therefore, the sample is limited to students in the Colorado community college system.

Limitations of the study are related to sampling, as participation was voluntary, and snowball sampling was used to gather additional participants for the study. This choice of sampling technique limited the number of institutions involved in the study; however, a relatively homogenous sample was included, as is recommended by Smith and Osborn (2008) for studies of this type.

The Significance of Students' Lived Experiences

While most of the studies included in the literature review have focused on program evaluation, financial costs and expenditures, and underlying ideologies about remedial education, few have examined the students themselves, who are most affected by these programs. This study, which uses IPA, presents an opportunity for research that is focused specifically on remedial students and how placement in remedial educational might influence how students view themselves as learners. This research will contribute to assessments of the remedial learning environment in community colleges, as it will facilitate an understanding of the multiplicity of issues facing remedial students, beyond basic skill acquisition, as well as provide students an opportunity to express their understanding of their experiences, which may in turn provide insights into how to better support these students and the programs that are designed to serve them.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Every year students enrolling in college are expecting to take the first steps of their higher education journey. Unfortunately, far too many students are in need of remedial coursework, which delays them from their final destination (Bettinger & Long, 2005a). According to 2007–2008 statistics, about 42% of first-year undergraduates at public two-year colleges reported having taken a remedial course (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). The literature presented in this review will highlight the complex and multifaceted problem of remedial education. The widening disparity (or gap) between those who possess and those who lack the knowledge and prerequisite skills required to engage and succeed in college-level studies continues to create an unprecedented need for student remediation in both two-year and four-year colleges. It is causing a multitude of problems related to the role of remediation in the college curriculum, how remedial offerings are staffed, and the impact of remedial coursework on students' overall academic performance, as well their long-term productivity in society and the workplace (Mellow & Heelan, 2008).

While discussions continue about who is responsible for the under-preparation of enrolling college students, the critical problem lies in not who is at fault, but in how the problem is addressed. Unfortunately, the problem is often exasperated because many perceive that inadequate preparation of students is a “them” problem—colleges blame high schools, high schools blame middle schools, and middle schools blame elementary schools (Hoyt & Sorenson, 2001; Merisotis & Phipps, 2000; Rockefeller Foundation Report, 2008; Roderick, Nagaoka, & Coca, 2009). This notion that the problem is caused by preceding educators and institutions is not only flawed logically, but contributes to the perpetuation of the problem and a continuation

of the pattern of failure, without providing adequate and effective solutions (Maeroff, 1982; Merisotis & Phipps, 2000).

In an effort to better understand this increasing need for remedial education, this literature review begins by exploring the history of missions and visions of community colleges and for remedial education programs, what populations are served, and the ideological beliefs surrounding remedial education. The review then examines remedial education programs as they currently exist, including examples of effective and ineffective implementation, varieties of teaching practices in remedial education, and variations in program requirements, as well as themes related to assessment and funding of such programs. The academic preparation required for a college education will also be addressed and examined. This review of the literature sets the stage for an exploration of how students actually experience remedial programs, which is the main subject of the research. Little research has been conducted on remedial education from a student perspective, thus the last section of the chapter illuminates the need for research that speaks directly to the experiences and perceptions of students involved in the remedial process.

History, Mission, and Vision

History

To gain an understanding of remedial education, one must first explore the history of remedial education programs and their complex relationships within community college systems. Historically, community colleges were designed to serve communities; programs were structured to meet the needs of the communities that they served and to act as springboards for students on their educational journeys (Mellow & Heelan, 2008). The community college has been viewed as a distinctively American form of higher education, uniquely American in its ideals and approach. Unlike four-year colleges, community colleges welcome anyone with a high school diploma or a

high school equivalency certificate (such as a GED credential) (Mellow & Heelan, 2008). Thus, community colleges aim to foster success for a wide variety of students who enter their doors by implementing systems of developmental education appropriate for students who have a high school diploma, but who do not necessarily have achieved high school-level skills (Mellow & Heelan, 2008).

Community colleges offer a haven for the development and support of specific skill sets, but at the same time present a set of problems and challenges that are unique to community college institutions. One of the most prominent problems for institutions is the need to develop an understanding of the remedial programs themselves and whom they are designed to serve (Abelman & Dalessandro, 2008; Merisotis & Phipps, 2000). First, institutions must come to terms with the fact that the need for remedial education is not a new phenomenon. There is a tendency to blame lazy students or ineffectual educators as the source of remediation problems; however, the large numbers of underprepared students who need tutoring and various forms of supplemental support have been around since the inception of schools (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000). Despite remedial education's historic roots, many institutions still struggle to understand whom they serve, how they should provide it, and how they will fund it. Merisotis and Phipps (2000) contend that "those halcyon days when all students who enrolled in college were adequately prepared, all courses offered at higher education institutions were 'college level,' and students smoothly made the transition from high school and college simply never existed" (p. 69). Not only did these idyllic days never exist, they stand in stark contrast to the very mission and purpose of community colleges.

Mellow and Heelan (2008) bolstered the argument that remediation has always been part of the missions of schools, and that the need to provide remedial support to students is an

essential part of the community college mission. As far back as the 18th century, colleges were providing support for students, and the need only increased with the introduction of land grant colleges, and as college became accessible to more and more students (Mellow & Heelan, 2008). Remedial programs continued to grow after WWII and the GI Bill, and through open admission and government funding policies which enabled more and more students to enroll in colleges and universities (Mellow & Heelan, 2008). As the under-prepared student population grew, the number of community colleges grew as well, and the colleges were required to adjust their programming and curriculum to meet the needs of this unique and challenging student population.

Over the years, community colleges have been challenged not only to adjust their programming, but also to ensure that they are continuing to uphold the philosophical and ideological beliefs that have helped shape the community college landscape (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000). Colleges must ensure that they are providing quality education for all students, regardless of their level of preparation, as these programs act as the “backbone” of the community college and help to ensure focused support and learning that not only benefit the individual, but the “public good” as well (Mellow & Heelan, 2008).

Mellow and Heelan (2008) viewed developmental (and remedial) studies as the lynchpin that allows all students access to their dreams. Developmental and remedial studies are not only a way for individuals to enrich themselves, but they act as a building block for an educated society, as education “leads to multiple benefits: increased tax revenue, greater productivity, increased consumption, greater workforce flexibility, reduced crime rates, increased community service, and better quality of civic life” (as cited in IHEP, 1998, p. 180). Essentially, the time, money, and effort spent on supporting the vision and mission of community colleges, which is to serve

all students, despite perceived deficiencies, acts in the public good in so far as the impacts of such programs extend far beyond students' individual success. Thus, to ensure both individual and collective success, a strong ideology and vision is essential for addressing the needs of remedial students, and for the effective and ongoing growth and development of remedial programs (Mellow & Heelan, 2008).

Mission and Vision

Mission and vision development is a challenging process, and despite the inclusion of mission and vision statements on most institutions' websites and recruiting materials, Abelman and Dalessandro's (2008) research demonstrated that many institutions lack clarity regarding their missions and visions. Additionally, they suggest that such statements need to be infused with compelling and poignant language that will work to inspire students. Their assessment was based on "comparative base-line measurement(s) of the inspirational and pragmatic rhetoric in declarations of institutional vision" at public community colleges, traditional four-year colleges and universities, and proprietary institutions (Abelman & Dalessandro, 2008, p. 312). The study, which included 240 institutions and utilized web-based vision statements, used DICTION (version 5.0) to analyze the vision statements of each institution in order to establish the effectiveness of each institution's vision statement. The analysis was based on an assessment of the following parameters (as determined by previous researchers, Pekarsky, 1998; Rogers, 2004): shared, clear, and compelling, as well as relative advantage, observability, and complexity (p. 315).

Abelman and Dalessandro (2008) concluded that an institution's mission and vision statement is a "philosophical template" that "reflects the nature of the learning community within the college or university and defines the institution's perceived purpose, priorities, and promises"

(p. 320). Community college visions were widely shared and supportive of “open door” philosophy (p.321) as well as included elements of complexity in regard to concrete outcomes for students. Although flaws in the vision statements of institutions were identified at every level (school through university), the researchers found that community colleges, in particular, lacked incentives that “encourage students to stretch their expectations and aspirations” and that their vision statements lacked “compelling” language and clarity. (p. 321–322). As a result, Abelman and Dalessandro (2008) demonstrated that institutions need to not only create vibrant, meaningful mission and vision statements, but more importantly, they must move beyond simple rhetoric and ensure that they are able to adequately generate the results that their statements describe. Not only do they need to produce results, but they also must ensure that students, faculty, and the larger community actually engage in and understand the goals outlined in their vision and mission statements.

As previously mentioned, remedial education is not a new problem; it is one that colleges have struggled to deal with on many levels, for many years. The complexities involved in addressing program structures, implementation, and needs of students has been complicated by a lack of clarity around who the programs should serve, as well as how those services will be communicated and dynamically acted upon in a way that benefits the institution, the students, and the community which the institution serves.

Ideological Foundations of Remedial Education

To assure that mission and vision statements are compelling and attainable for all students, colleges must identify their institutional ideological beliefs about the remediation process and carefully evaluate how such practices fit into their missions and visions. In her examination of the influence of ideological beliefs on remediation programs, Shaw (1997)

maintained that development of a sound ideology about remediation is paramount for a remedial program's success or failure, as ideology "acts as a lens through which specific policies and procedures are developed and enacted" (p. 285). Principally, a college must determine if its goal is to act as a "gate-keeper" institution, one that is meant for those who are "prepared" for college-level work, or if it will welcome any student who is willing to engage, but who might require remedial attention to succeed (Shaw, 1997). Once this ideological stance has been clarified, the institution must embrace the decision at all levels and amongst all constituencies, and determine how this philosophy will influence coursework, teaching strategies, and the overall structure of the curriculum.

Shaw (1997) examined three different ideological views using three (fictitiously named) colleges, in order to present a range of ideological belief systems. At "Bootstrapper Community College," students were expected to "pull themselves up by their bootstraps," and to accordingly "sink or swim" depending on their ability to negotiate what was regarded as a rigorous community college curriculum. Bootstrapper was characterized by strict admission policies, demanding coursework, and a no-nonsense teaching style. Students were expected to use the tools provided by the school to succeed. If a student did not "make the grade," he or she was the one who suffered the consequences of the situation. Students were considered as "individuals in charge of their fate" (p. 291) and they were not permitted to enroll in credit-bearing courses until all remedial coursework has been completed. In addition, students endured a "sit out period" if they did not meet requirements in four attempts. In addition to earning passing grades in their classes, students were also required to pass an exit exam to earn their diploma; failure to pass the exit exam would cancel an otherwise passing grade in the course.

In sharp contrast to Bootstrapper, at “Nurturer Community College,” the institution adopted a student-centered approach, and took full responsibility for a student’s failure or success. Nurturer provided a variety of counseling and support services and was particularly sensitive to students’ cultural beliefs and values; the institution promoted student empowerment as opposed to punishment as a means to engender success. Nurturer allowed students to take remedial courses simultaneously with credit-bearing courses, and allowed students to contest their remedial status; Nurturer did not “force” students to remain in a class if they did not feel they belonged there. Like Bootstrapper, Nurturer did not grant credit for remedial coursework; however, the school did not penalize students for failure, and believed whole-heartedly in the success of its students.

Finally, at “Service Provider Community College,” the institution maintained a balance between the hard-lined approach of Bootstrapper and the soft and cuddly environment of Nurturer; the institution provided “a broad array of both vocational and academic curricula, along with an equally broad array of student support services and activities” (p. 293). Service Provider represented an ideal balance between the standard-driven Bootstrapper and the student-centered Nurturer colleges. However, the “middle road” approach may have generated ambiguity, and the approach appeared to create confusion among its staff and students with regard to their academic goals and beliefs, as represented by faculty members’ conflicting ideologies regarding remedial students (Shaw, 1997). These ideologies varied from being welcoming to dismissive and being supportive to punitive. These inconsistencies also led to programming problems, as some students were required to take remedial courses before enrolling in for-credit courses, while others were able to “work the system” and enroll in remedial and credit courses simultaneously, or skip remedial coursework altogether.

The key point to be gleaned from Shaw's (1997) analysis was that, regardless of which belief system a college embraces, Bootstrapper or Nurturer or some combination of the two, a college must develop an underlying ideological structure as a basis or framework for its remedial programs and services. In addition to identifying its philosophy on the student-centered vs. standard-centered curriculum, colleges must also consider the benefits and disadvantages of mainstreaming remedial programs, how these program designs directly affect the students involved, and how understanding their experiences in these programs can help to inform program design and implementation.

Perceptions About Remedial Education

The Naming of Remedial Education Programs

Institutions have often struggled to identify just how to classify remedial students and the programs that are designed to serve them. Arendale (2005) noted that as far back as the 1800s, colleges began offering courses to help students who were "less prepared" for academic work. Over the years, schools have offered everything from "Academic Preparatory Programs," which essentially provide a high school education in core subjects such as math and English, to "Remedial Education" which was based on the premise that students have "weaknesses" and that "treatments" should be provided to bring students up to the appropriate level (Arendale, 2005, p. 69). As time went on, the services offered to underprepared students began to reflect modern civil rights legislation and worked to create educational opportunities that, according Arendale's reading of Frost and Rowland, were designed to "make up for the debilitating consequences of discrimination and poverty" (1971, p. vii). These "Compensatory Education Programs" were designed to "level the playing field" (Arendale, 2005, p.69) for those students that had

educational deficits that could have been the result of disadvantageous educational or economic environments.

In an effort to alleviate some of the stigma associated with the previously described programs, “Learning Assistance” was introduced as a way to assist all students, not just those who needed intensive support, and was designed to help all students reach their academic goals. The final and most recent redefinition of these types of programs takes the form of “Developmental Education.” (Arendale, 2005) This model once again focuses on student deficits, but works on the premise that all students have “skills or knowledge that can be developed”; the model thus promotes a holistic view of the student and his or her perceived deficits and current skills (Arendale, 2005, p. 72). With all of the shifting definitions of programs designed to help underprepared students, it is no wonder that institutions continue to struggle with which types of programs to implement, e.g., those that treat deficits or the whole student, and they are often left in a definitional limbo that can leave students equally confused as to how to progress through the system.

Negativity and Self-Identity

To complicate the situation even further, students who lack basic skills are often thrust into situations in which the label of ‘remedial student’ is new, and despite the frequent shifts in philosophy that have accompanied each name change, the negative stigma associated with remedial education programs remains as strong as ever before (Arendale, 2005). For many students, the new label of remedial, or developmental, and their subsequent assignment to those courses, tends not only to derail their college plans, but also to deeply shake their confidence in their own academic abilities; the labels can thus work to dismantle a student’s core identity. Erikson (cited in Tatum, 2010, p. 5) asserted that the disconnect between new labels and self-

identity can create an “identity crisis” of sorts, that causes students to not only judge themselves in terms of the newly labeled identity, but can also cause them to struggle with how others might perceive them as a result of the new label.

The identity struggle is further complicated, as according to Steele (1997), in order to “sustain school success one must be identified with school achievement in the sense of it being a part of one’s self-definition; a personal identity to which one is self-evaluatively accountable” (p. 613); implying that in order for students to be successful, regardless of the “label” or “domain” in which they find themselves, they must self-identify within that domain. To extend the point further, Steele contends that students must see themselves not only within the identified domain, but must also see “good prospects” within that domain, and truly believe that they belong within that population. If negative associations or stereotypes are connected with the grouping that a student finds themselves in, as is the case with remedial education, the newly labeled remedial student may adopt a variety of coping strategies in attempt to disassociate from those stereotypes or internalize the negative traits associated with it (Holland, 2015; Oyserman & Swim, 2001). This disassociation or internalization of negative traits leads to a struggle to either accept the new identity or reclaim their former identity, creating yet another level of complexity to the challenges facing remedial students.

Current Status of Remedial Education Programs

Soliday (1996) addressed the structural complexities of remedial education through an examination of the two main challenges facing the reconception of remedial programs: “Reconceiving remediation involves both the significant challenges of curriculum development and those of negotiating the political conflicts that fundamental institutional change will provoke” (p. 87). The mainstreaming suggested by Soliday calls for college level instruction that

includes granting credit for said courses rather than the piecemeal, lower level curriculum that tends to comprise most remedial programs (p. 97).

Soliday (1996) presented a case study of a remedial writing program that stepped outside of the traditional approach to remediation. She utilized a three-year mainstreaming project, titled the Enrichment Approach, to address the weaknesses in remedial education, while simultaneously strengthening an institution's commitment to open admissions. Soliday ignored placement scores and placed students in a two-semester composition course that focused on basic skills in grammar, writing, and structure, thus offering a progressive and responsive approach to writing instruction. The program focused on writing as a process, and demonstrated how a responsive curriculum that highlights the personal experiences and histories of students can allow for an easier transition for remedial students into traditional college courses (Soliday, 1996, p. 95). Soliday highlighted one student's experience as an exemplar for the research, and noted evidence of increased academic discourse as well as an increase in reflection, which supports a reexamination of current remedial programs.

The focus of the program was on developing portfolios and a strong support system for students both inside and outside of the classroom. The mainstreaming approach relied heavily on embracing students and their academic challenges, and providing high quality programming and educators to teach such courses, rather than placing students in segregated class settings that offered minimal classroom instruction. The model was also based on the importance of providing high-quality faculty, rather than employing adjunct faculty as is typical of more traditional remedial programs. Ideally, a mainstreamed remediation program would restructure writing across the college curriculum, and would benefit all students regardless of their remedial status.

Research by Bettinger and Long (2005a) also stressed the importance of a more mainstreamed approach to implementing remedial education programs and they suggested an examination of student backgrounds as a key to effective remediation. They contended that, “because students placed in remediation are not as well prepared to begin with and have lower achievement scores than others; it is not clear whether such results reflect the effect of remediation or pre-existing differences between students” (p.18). To understand this phenomenon, the researchers used longitudinal data that tracked approximately 13,000 students over five years to explore course participation and to gain an understanding of how remediation influences student decision making and outcomes (Bettinger & Long, 2005a). The authors pointed out that a simple comparison of remedial and nonremedial students, in terms of academic success, paints remedial education in a negative light, and is thus an unsatisfactory method for establishing the true effects of remediation. In addition, decisions about whether to mainstream or segregate students can amplify feelings of isolation or negativity that some remedial students may feel as a result of their placement into these programs (Arendale, 2005; Steele, 1997; Oyserman & Swim, 2001). Even given the potential negative aspects of placement, Bettinger and Long (2005a) ultimately conclude that placement can be beneficial, especially for students in need of math supports, and that remedial programs can have an overall positive effect for students that need additional support.

Program Assessment and Pedagogical Approaches

The assessment of remedial education programs presents a unique set of challenges that may not be present in evaluations of other programs. Datasets are often unreliable; for example numbers of students involved, the costs of programs, and information regarding student progression and retention in these programs are often unknown (Bettinger & Long, 2005a;

Breneman, Abraham, & Hoxby, 1998; Esch, 2009; Merisotis & Phipps, 2000) Thus, given that these challenges exist, an examination of currently existing programs, while keeping in mind that “success” is often a subjective measure, is helpful in framing the assessment of, and approaches to, programs and structures that are of most benefit to students.

Measuring Program Success

To gain a more thorough understanding of the true effects of remediation, Bettinger and Long (2005a) used regression analysis to “compare students with similar backgrounds and levels of academic preparedness at colleges with different remedial placement policies” (p. 23). The study showed that the performance of students placed in remedial education courses was not worse than that of students with similar backgrounds who did not enroll in remedial education courses. They demonstrated that simple comparisons between remedial and nonremedial students did not accurately reflect the success of remedial programs, and that instead, such comparisons produced inaccurate data that skewed results and demonstrated program ineffectiveness.

In another attempt to understand current remedial programs, Levin and Calcagno (2008) provided a conceptual framework for the evaluation of remedial education programs that identified three key components of successful remediation programs. They presented several approaches to utilizing and implementing these key components, as well as suggesting a variety of alternatives for evaluating program success, including specific and detailed requirements for evaluation assessment. According to Levin and Calcagno, the main problems with remedial programs lie not only in the ways in which they are structured, but also in the ways that their successes and failures are measured.

While many have argued the financial benefits of delegating remedial coursework to community colleges, Levin and Calcagno pointed out that community colleges are “ill-equipped

and inadequately funded to deal with the least well prepared students” (p. 184); moreover, they suggested that delegating remedial coursework to two-years colleges would “reduce the educational opportunities of minority, immigrant, and low-income students who are disproportionately less well prepared for postsecondary education” (p. 184). While financial burdens are something that community colleges will always need to navigate, the latter part of the statement presents a far more disturbing trend in education. Not only are students underprepared, but there seems to be a built-in bias that keeps those already at a socio-economic or cultural disadvantage, at an educational disadvantage as well.

One of the most pressing problems presented by Levin and Calcagno (2008) is the manner in which remedial courses are taught. It appeared, based on casual observations by the researchers, that the “drill-and-skill” approach remains the dominant form of pedagogical practice in remedial classrooms. This approach presents the basic skill sets and knowledge required to succeed in upper level courses; however, it fails to address the type of “core knowledge” described by Roderick et al. (2009) that is a critical component of college readiness. One effective approach to remediation may incorporate a portfolio approach, as outlined by Soliday (1996), which presents information in a less “abstract and isolated nature [that] may prevent students from seeing the usefulness of what is being taught in real-world situations and applying the skills that are learned to later academic and vocational coursework” (Levin & Calcagno, 2008, p. 185).

Levin and Calcagno (2008) suggested that remedial courses be taught with the following pedagogical approaches in mind: motivation, substance, inquiry, independence, multiple approaches, high standards, problem solving, connectiveness, and supportive context (p. 186). Each of these approaches contributes to a stronger and more contextual understanding of

curricular materials, thereby creating more successful remediation programs. Levin and Calcagno (2008) also believed that, in addition to utilizing the aforementioned pedagogical approaches, colleges should offer linked courses that combine basic remedial skills to core course work. This is similar to the mainstream approach explained by Soliday (1996), in that students will find more relevance in the material, be able to more successfully implement basic skills, and be more likely to succeed because they are building bridges that link them to the college culture rather than keeping them on the fringes.

In addition to pedagogical restructuring, Levin and Calcagno (2008) suggested restructuring the ways in which remedial programs are evaluated. They viewed current evaluative approaches as failing to “recognize what the program does – and therefore they provide little information about what should be changed to make it more effective” (p. 190). Similar to Bettinger and Long (2005a), they also took task with the manner in which remedial student outcomes are compared to non-remedial student outcomes. Typically, evaluations mix students with different socio-economic and education backgrounds, and for this reason the comparisons invariably reflect negatively on the success of remedial programs. They advocated that “we should, instead, compare only those remedial students who actually share similar backgrounds and academic preparedness” and that by doing so, “the effects of an intervention can be attributed to the program rather than to precollege differences” (p. 190).

Ultimately, Levin and Calcagno (2008) concluded that colleges must change the manner in which they teach remedial courses to help students achieve the skills and knowledge that were not gained in high school. They suggested that this be accomplished by abandoning drill-and-skill approaches to teaching and by engaging students in meaningful tasks that connect them to their core courses and academic pursuits. They also suggested that, until colleges develop a more

effective methodology to evaluate programs, inaccurate information will continue to be disseminated and remedial education will remain a stagnant drain on educational funds and institutions.

Barbatis (2010) continued the analysis of current programs by reviewing the needs for remedial education as well as for understanding the key components that lead to successful retention and graduation. To frame his study, Barbatis presented the question, “to what did underprepared community college students who participated in a learning community and completed their developmental classes attribute their having graduated (graduates) or earning at least 30-credit bearing college credits (the persisters) as compared to those who participated in a learning community but did not complete their developmental classes and who dropped out of college (dropouts)?” (p. 14). He relied on a theoretical framework established by Tinto (1975) and Astin (1984) as a basis for his work and applied a critical theory paradigm throughout his research.

Barbatis’ (2010) qualitative study worked to explore to what elements students attributed their success (as determined by graduation or credit status) for two groups of students in a learning community, those that graduated, and those that dropped out (p. 14). The study incorporated formal and informal interviews with 22 subjects (17 females, 5 males) ranging in age from 19 to 46 years. The collected narrative data was recorded then transcribed in face-to-face interviews, with the exception of one interview conducted over the phone. The data were analyzed using a constant-comparative method, in which the researcher focused on finding identity relationships that connected statements and events within a context.

Barbatis’ (2010) study revealed four key themes that relate to student success in remedial education courses: (a) precollege characteristics, (b) external college support/community

influences, (c) social involvement, and (d) academic integration (p. 16). These findings revealed that student success is determined by multiple factors that can potentially be addressed through college support systems. Barbatis recommended the development of family outreach programs to bolster student support beyond the first-year learning community program, as well as the development of a second year “readiness” program to keep students connected to the campus and engaged with their studies as they progress through their academic programs. Barbatis (and similarly Soliday, 1996; Bettinger & Long, 2005a; Levin & Calcagno, 2008) also suggested redesigning current remedial programs. He proposed restructuring programs so they are no longer taught in isolation, recommended the incorporation of new teaching strategies in which course pedagogies no longer reflect methodologies that many students encountered in high school, and advised that courses be available for transfer credit. These changes would ideally enable students to view remedial courses as a benefit versus seeing them as a barrier and may help to break down some of the negative stigma often associated with remediation. Although Barbatis recognized that many influences on student success (such as familial support, work responsibilities, etc.) are roadblocks to success, creating an environment that fosters and supports the key themes identified by his research would contribute to developmental success of students within their programs. Barbatis’ qualitative methods began to shed a light on some of the student identified themes, to success, which will be further explored in this study.

Remedial Education and Student Success

The skewing of remediation data was examined by Esch (2009), the results of which continued the debate surrounding the large number of students in need of remediation and colleges’ inability to meet the needs and expectations of such students. Esch concluded that many remedial programs are piece-meal, are taught by adjunct faculty, and have no real form of

accountability: “the programs have gotten bigger, but not better, suffering a particularly acute form of neglect and vagueness of mission that plagues the community college system as a whole” (p. 35). Esch noted that the real problem with poorly structured remedial programs is not that students are not being properly prepared, but that this lack of preparation and skills is leading to a higher dropout rate, as “remedial students run a high risk of dropping out and not graduating. One robust study found that only 30 percent complete all of their remedial math coursework, and fewer than one in four remedial students makes it all the way to completing a college degree” (Esch, 2009, p.34) An understanding of the lived experiences of these students may offer new insights and understandings of remedial programs, which may in turn help to lower number of students that drop out before degree completion.

Colleges face a wide array of problems related to remedial education, including demanding financial burdens, the stigma associated with such programs, and the ever-present fear of losing students before they complete a degree. Weissman, Silk, and Bulakowski (1997) examined the academic progress of remedial students at College of Lake County and determined that, although remedial coursework can be challenging for both students and institutions, students who completed their basic skills (most specifically in math and English) are more likely to find academic success (Bettinger & Long, 2005b; Weissman, Silk, & Bulakowski, 1997). For their study, Weismann et al. (1997) implemented a tracking system in order to create a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the policies governing the developmental education program (p. 191). This study garnered longitudinal data about students in a fall 1992 cohort, and tracked them through the end of the fall 1994 semester. Of the 1,644 students included in the study, 418 were “skill deficient”, and 239 received remedial instruction by the end of the fall 1994 semester. Persistence and performance measures were used to address the research

questions: Should skill-deficient students be required to remediate? Should skill deficient students be required to begin their program of remediation upon initial enrollment? Should skill-deficient students be allowed to take college-level courses before completing their program of remediation? (p. 190).

Weissman et al.'s (1997) results suggest that all skill-deficient students should be required to enroll in remedial courses, as students who remediated in their first term were more successful than those who only took college level courses during their first semester. Weismann et al. found that 62% of students who took only remedial courses and 71% of students who took remedial and college level courses concurrently persisted from fall semester, whereas only 46% of students that enrolled only in college level courses returned in the spring (Weismann et al., 1997, p. 195). Additionally, the research demonstrated that "skill-deficient students who remediated were far more successful and persisted longer than skill-deficient students who did not remediate" (p. 198). Of those who received remedial instruction, 84% remained enrolled in the spring semester, and 45% were still enrolled the following fall; in contrast, of those who had not received remedial instruction, only 37% were still enrolled in the spring, and only 7% were still enrolled the following fall (Weismann et al., 1997). The study also found that students who enrolled in remedial course work in their first term were more successful than those who did not enroll, suggesting that students should enroll in remedial programs during their first year of college. Although Weismann et al. recommended remediation upon enrollment, the study did not find that concurrent enrollment in remedial and college-level coursework was detrimental to academic success, as long as students were finding success in their remedial courses, keeping in mind, that success may mean different things to different students.

The idea of concurrent enrollment in remedial and college-level coursework is apparently foreign to many institutions; however, this type of policy change and examination of the system is what may be required to build stronger and more effective remediation programs. Fonte (1997) echoed the need for programmatic changes by suggesting the creation of a “structured open access philosophy” which employs the “systematic use of academic standards linked with additional approaches to assist students to reach their educational objectives” (p. 45). The structured open access model also suggests that schools should adopt a “set of intrusive and proactive strategies” (p. 44) that require mandatory placement testing and restrictions on the course and credit loads of remedial students. While this policy is reminiscent of many of the procedures and policies outlined in the Bootstrapper academic plan (Shaw, 1997), it is less punitive and seeks to support rather than punish students for their academic shortcomings. Fonte (1997) found that early intervention and strong support systems were key to remedial student success and that “designs combining mandatory sorting by academic criteria with directive interventionist tactics of transforming, supporting, or connecting students actually increase rather than limit student achievement” (p. 45).

Remedial programs take on a variety of forms, depending on resources, funding, and a college’s commitment to remedial education. While some programs have been more successful than others (Soliday, 1996; Boylan, 2009), assessing the true effectiveness of programs remains problematic, given the current standards by which they are measured (Levin & Calcagno, 2008). Student success in remediation can be determined by a variety of measurements, but ultimately, it seems that student achievement and retention are so far the best measures of program success (Fonte, 1997; Weismann et. al, 1997), despite the fact that subjective factors related to students’ lived experiences are not incorporated into such measures

Preparing Students for Success

As the war wages about who is to blame for the lack of skills and prerequisite knowledge possessed by recent high school graduates entering college, some would say the most obvious place to lay the blame is at the feet of K–12 education (Hoyt & Sorenson, 2001; Maeroff, 1982; Rockefeller Foundation Report, 2008; Roderick et al., 2009). While K–12 is not the singular source of this problem, it is important to begin questioning the policies and techniques used to grade, monitor, and assess student academic development at this level. According to Roderick, Nagaoka, and Coca (2009), high schools must not only reconsider the curricular content of their programs, but they must also carefully examine the meaning of “college readiness.” Roderick et al. (2009) pointed out that one of the foremost indicators of college readiness is the distinction between content knowledge and core knowledge. They asserted that “core academic skills are highly valued by colleges and are most often cited by college professors and students as the weakest areas of preparation” (p. 190). K–12 schools overemphasize content skills, i.e., knowing the basics of a subject, rather than developing the kind of deep thinking and analytical skills necessary to navigate the college curriculum. Core knowledge skills enable students to develop “college knowledge,” knowledge that “includes information and skills that allow students to successfully navigate the complex college admissions and financial aid processes, as well as develop an understanding of college norms and culture” (Roderick et al., 2009, p. 190). As explained by Roderick et al., these higher order thought processes cannot be developed through the surface-level, content-centered teaching that is currently taking place in high schools.

In addition to highlighting the types of skills that should be cultivated in students, Roderick et al. (2009) also called into question the criteria currently being used by high schools to assess “college readiness.” Most schools rely heavily on three indicators: preparation through

coursework, test scores (such ACT and exit exams), and GPAs to determine if students are prepared for college. These three indicators seem to be the standard means for determining preparedness for collegiate study. As noted by Roderick et al., however, these determinants can be seriously flawed. For instance, Hoyt and Sorensen (2001) identified glaring flaws in these evaluation methods, pointing out that “student failure to take college preparatory courses, grade inflation, and a lack of academic rigor in high school courses all contribute to the need for remediation in college” (p. 26). In addition, Hoyt and Sorensen (2001) demonstrated that, despite having earned a passing grade on course work, a large number of students still require remediation to succeed in college. This trend, also observed by Roderick et al. (2009), called into question the standards for grading, the level of rigor, and the methods of evaluation currently in use in K–12 education. Both research teams suggested that “teachers may be awarding passing grades to many students who have not adequately learned the material” (Hoyt & Sorensen, 2001, p. 32). When considering this information, the question arises as to whether K–12 educators are lowering their expectations for the quality of students’ work, and inflating grades to create higher pass rates, or simply pushing students through the system without ensuring that they have mastered certain standards.

Many defenders of the K–12 system have argued that, despite possible grade inflation or unwarranted advancements or “promotions” within the system, exit exams or college preparatory exams, such as the ACT, maintain the integrity of K–12 preparation and demonstrate successful completion of skills and acquisition of knowledge through the present system. Unfortunately, the use of ACT tests to determine college readiness has some major flaws. In most states, unless the ACT is the states’ accountability test, students taking the ACT are self-selected according to their goal to attend college, resulting in a biased pool of ACT test takers (Roderick et al., 2009)

(i.e., the most academically inclined students); the ACT is not, therefore, an accurate predictor of the level of college preparation amongst students in a particular high school. High school exit exams are another determiner of college readiness. The problem with this form of evaluation, however, is that exit exams “set minimum standards for graduation... and... exam standards are lowered to cover only material to which students would have been exposed by tenth grade and are generally aligned with tenth-grade, not twelfth-grade standards” (Roderick et al., 2009, p.194).

As demonstrated by Roderick et al. (2009), many schools view proficiency as successful completion of tenth-grade work. Given that criteria, it is not surprising that there has been a backlash and accusations of incompetence directed towards K–12 education. *Diploma to Nowhere* (2008), a study conducted by Strong American Schools in association with the Rockefeller Foundation Report, highlighted the failure of K–12 institutions. The study claimed that a “hoax is being played on America”; one which leads the general public to believe that a high school diploma indicates that a student is ready for college-level work (Rockefeller Foundation Report, 2008), while the research presented by this group shows that high schools are falling short of their educational missions. According to the U.S. Department of Education’s 2004 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, “34 percent of all undergraduates reported having once been enrolled in a remedial course” (Rockefeller Foundation Report, 2008, p.9), revealing that “43 percent of those attending public two-year institutions required remediation... and 29 percent [enrolled at public four-year institutions] needed to enroll in a remedial course” (p. 9). For a system that claims proficiency and adequacy in preparation, these are extraordinarily high numbers of students who require remediation.

What factors contribute to so many high school graduates requiring remediation? Like Roderick et al. (2009) and Hoyt and Sorenson (2001), Rockefeller Foundation Report (2008) showed staggering deficiencies in the level of rigor and performance expected of students. Today's K–12 system is not sufficiently demanding of students, and too often gives passing grades for less than adequate work. The students themselves seem to echo this sentiment, as an astounding 80 percent said, "They would have worked harder if their high school had set higher expectations" (Rockefeller Foundation Report, 2008, p. 8). In addition to student sentiments about preparation, many educators and policy makers have begun to view grades as unreliable indicators of student performance due to possible grade inflation and inconsistencies in grading policies across high schools (Roderick et al., 2009). Even when students were enrolled in higher level courses, this skepticism remains as there is "limited evidence that the tougher requirements have delivered on their promise to improve achievement" (Roderick et al., 2009, p. 201), and surprisingly, even students enrolled in advanced AP and college preparatory courses have found themselves underprepared for college level courses.

Transition from Secondary School to College

To make meaningful improvements in remedial education programs, all parties must be able to examine the shortcomings and limitations of existing systems and be prepared to embrace the potential for future change. Jez and Venezia (2009) argued that policy structures must change. They suggested that colleges must be more transparent in their efforts to remediate students, and that unless schools begin to clearly articulate what skills students need, there will be a continued deficit in academic proficiencies: "Without community colleges and their partners creating and distributing information on standards, the situation will not change, and students will enter expecting either that they are prepared or that the community college will prepare

them” (p. 104). This misinformation is also reflected in a study by Gewertz (2011). Gewertz examined the Early Assessment Program (EAP) and its effectiveness in helping students gauge their readiness for college. While there is data to show that the EAP was effective in its measurement of student “readiness”, others argued that the test does not validly demonstrate students’ abilities, and more importantly, assist students who are recognized as unprepared.

One of the largest flaws in the EAP testing program is that it is not implemented until the 11th grade, and by that time many of the students identified as deficient do not respond to remedy the problem: “By the time students get the news that they are not college-ready—when they’re rising seniors—it’s often too late to rearrange their class schedules. Many students, also, are too far short of the mark to catch up in just one year (Gewertz, 2011, p. 4). In addition to the late notification, many students do not seem to understand the urgency of the situation and plan on using the community college as a place to build skills, without fully considering the time, money, and commitment involved in completing remedial coursework (Gewertz, 2011; Rosenbaum, 2004).

This apparently lackadaisical attitude of students about their own education is apparent far too often in both the post-secondary and K–12 systems. It seems that students simply do not understand the need for, or the importance of, mastering basic skill sets. Maeroff (1982) addressed this issue by placing blame on the K–12 system for the creation of underprepared and under motivated students through the development of “a patchwork; an accretion of watered-down requirements, flabby electives, and slapdash mini-courses, altogether lacking in coherence” (p.12). Despite the seemingly low expectations of K–12 students, Maeroff pointed out that colleges were also to blame for the demise of the educational system through their own diminishment of admission and course requirements, which have affected the exit proficiencies

of students at the high school level. Although this article was published in 1982, the problems that Maeroff described are just as poignant, if not more so, in high schools and colleges today.

In spite of Maeroff's (1982) substantive critique of K-12 and college education systems, he provided some novel ideas and solutions to the issues, including: (a) suggesting that high schools and colleges work together to help prepare students and to fill in gaps in their education; he asserted that it is only reasonable that "colleges and universities should now be expected to turn whatever expertise they possess to the advantage of the nation's beleaguered public school systems" (p. 64); (b) providing high school teachers with college tutors who could provide one-on-one attention to students; (c) creating dual enrollment programs or "Middle Colleges" to help students advance to two-year degrees; and (d) providing adequate counseling and advising services for students in order to help alleviate some of the burden from teachers. Maeroff saw the disconnect between high school and college professionals as one of the greatest hindrances to establishing a workable system.

The goal of institutional collaboration was further examined by Richey, Mathern, O'Shea, and Pierce (1997), who suggested that "the necessary first ingredient when designing a purposeful and successful project is rich collaboration between the secondary and post-secondary institutions involved" (p. 65). Richey et al. examined a collaborative effort between Owens Community College and Findlay High School in Ohio. Both groups worked together to create a portfolio writing project that would not only work to identify the remedial needs of students, but would also act as a catalyst for building the skills needed to prepare students for college level work. The success of the project was credited to the "diplomacy and genuineness" of the college and the "willingness of the high school faculty to accept suggestions for change" (p. 69). As

demonstrated by Maeroff (1982) and Richey et al. (1997), colleges and K–12 systems must learn to work together to most effectively serve students.

Perhaps one of the most successful collaborative efforts involving high school preparation programs was cited by Kerrigan and Slater (2010), who examined El Paso Community College’s (EPCC) Achieving the Dream program, and described how collaboration with local high schools helped EPCC meet the standards and goals outlined by the Achieving the Dream program. EPCC, like many colleges, was struggling to retain remedial students. Many students were not prepared for college-level work, and those enrolled in remedial courses were often discouraged by the process and did not continue to complete their degrees. In an effort to increase retention and degree completion, EPCC established two major directives to enhance student performance and slow attrition rates. First, EPCC set out to help prospective students build basic skill sets so that they could avoid enrollment in remedial courses. Second, EPCC wanted to assist students who were not in need of remediation to complete their coursework in a much shorter period of time. To achieve these goals, EPCC developed the “college readiness protocol”, which ensured that all students would “(1) complete a joint admissions application to EPCC and UTEP (University of Texas at El Paso), (2) learn about and prepare for the ACCUPLACER test, (3) take the ACCUPLACER test, (4) review scores with counselors, and (5) refresh skills and take the test again if needed. Some students also (6) enrolled in a summer bridge program to strengthen their basic skills, if necessary” (p. 1). These six initiatives, designed to reach students before they enrolled in college, were crucial for determining student success at the college level. As demonstrated by Kerrigan and Slater (2010) and reinforced by Gewertz (2011), the earlier an intervention is implemented, the more successful it is going to be.

As part of their protocol, EPCC worked closely with area high schools to discuss and identify areas misalignment between the expectations of high school outcomes and the skills and knowledge needed to be successful in college (Kerrigan & Slater, 2010). This type of open communication is critical to creating successful programs, addressing the needs of students, and ensuring acceptance by both K–12 and college systems. As a result of this collaborative effort to provide early identification of remedial needs, create a clearer understanding of college placement testing, and provide interventions while still in high school, EPCC was able make changes and improvements at both institutions that were helpful in increasing college accessibility and success for students who are typically left in the gap.

In addition to a general lack of clarity and miscommunication of expectations between institutions, there seems to be an overall level of dishonesty and false pretense when helping to prepare students for college. Rosenbaum (2004) suggested that students simply do not understand the connection between high school performance and college performance, despite “the tight connection between high school preparation (in terms of both the rigor of courses taken and grades received) and college completion are well known to statisticians, researchers, and policymakers who follow such matters” (Introduction, para.3). Although the mission of community colleges is to serve all students, regardless of their level of preparation, Rosenbaum contended that “our well-intentioned efforts to encourage all students to go to college regardless of their grades inadvertently gives them the impression that high school grades don’t matter” (Introduction, para. 5).

This misconception, as well as others defined by Rosenbaum, (college success is not linked to high school preparation, college plans lead to increased school effort, high school homework doesn’t matter for college success, going to college means taking college level

classes, and going to college for a two- or four-year degree takes two or four years), has created the illusion and false hope that all students will be able to enter college and successfully complete coursework. These “myths” have created a false sense of security and have failed to provide students with the stark reality that many will need remediation and a variety of other supports in order to be successful (Rosenbaum, 2004).

Rosenbaum (2004) refuted the argument that students are to blame for their lack of preparation and perceived failures, and stressed that in reality, “most students tend to be motivated if they see incentives for effort” (The New Rules of the Games, para. 14).

Unfortunately, educators are not working to dispel the misconceptions and tell the hard truths that some students need to hear in order for them to properly prepare for their futures. Regardless of how accessible college is, if students are not properly prepared and made aware of potential problems and pitfalls while they are in high school, they may find themselves in remedial programs, struggling to complete coursework, and may find that a college degree is not as easily attainable as they were led to believe.

Summary

Despite an extensive body of research concerning remedial education, a disconnect remains between the goals of remedial programs and the realities of the students that they serve. Whether the problems stem from faulty expressions and implementations of an institution’s mission and vision, absence of a clear ideology, disjointed program implementation, or with a K–12 system that has failed students in the past, the students who require remedial education are the ones who suffer. The problems presented in this review demonstrate a need for transparency that will enable meaningful conversations between educators and students, to assess whether students adequately understand programs, expectations, and guidelines for success, as well as

how being placed in remedial education might create unforeseen issues with how students view themselves as succeeding. The phenomenological study presented here, one that is focused on students' lived experiences within remedial education programs provides new and unique perspectives into a phenomenon that continues to grow and challenge educators each year.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The methods and procedures outlined below describe the methodology for examining the lived experiences of students enrolled in remedial education at the community college. The chapter begins with a discussion of the rationale for the methodology, followed by an explanation of the study population and sampling procedures. The chapter highlights the data collection procedures, as well as how the data were analyzed, and with details that validate the methodology but also reveal possible methodological limitations. A brief summary discussing the importance of the IPA method is presented at the end of the section.

Research Design

Creswell (2013) states that qualitative research is conducted when a problem needs to be “explored,” and that exploration is needed in circumstances in which variables cannot be easily measured, or in which “silenced voices” need to be heard (p. 47–48). Students enrolled in remedial education programs at community colleges are often those “silenced voices”; they are students whose unique set of experiences cannot be readily understood by quantitative measures alone, as quantitative measures and associated statistics often fall short of adequately capturing the complexities of remedial students’ experiences (as suggested by Barbatis (2010)). As such, a qualitative approach is the most appropriate way to begin to understand the experiences of these students.

IPA as Method

To gain an understanding of students’ lived experiences in remedial education at the community college, the researcher applied the methodology of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009), as this approach enables both participants and

the researcher (myself) to arrive at a co-constructed understanding of students' experiences through open dialogue that allows for the sharing and interpretation of multiple perspectives. Although phenomenological research in some of its early iterations (Husserl and van Manen, as presented by Moustakas, 1994) could be used to gain insights into the lived experiences of remedial education students, the IPA approach as defined by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) permits a more flexible and interpretive process. The approach defined by Smith et al. enables the researcher to not just "bear witness" to emergent themes, but rather to become an active participant in the discovery of those themes (Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty, & Hendry, 2011).

Although IPA has its roots in phenomenology, IPA looks beyond simply uncovering meaning, and employs a double hermeneutic approach, a process which includes both discovery and interpretation of the meaning of an experience while remaining intrinsically focused on the individual and the experience itself (Pringle et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2009). The IPA approach is flexible and responsive, and encourages an organic flow of questioning, interpretation, and meaning making as the process unfolds, for both the participant and the researcher (Smith et al., 2009; Willig, 2001); it involves not only examining what is said, but also looking beyond the words themselves to begin questioning what those words might mean in the larger context of the experience. The IPA approach also differs from traditional phenomenological approaches in its ability not only to identify, but also to capitalize on both convergent and divergent themes, and as such often highlights the value of those differences, rather than simply focusing on the commonalities; this latter approach of commonality seeking tends to be prioritized in more traditional phenomenological approaches (Pringle et al., 2011). Thus, an IPA approach enabled me, the researcher, to reflect on the subjective nature of reality, and thereby illuminate each participant's view of remedial education, while maintaining the validity and uniqueness of the

individual's experiences. These detailed accounts of the experiences as told by the research participants helped to create a greater understanding of what it means to be a remedial education student, and thus to explore the intersubjectivity of what it means to be a learner (Smith, et al., 2009, p. 17).

Research Questions and Study Protocol

A single main research question framed this study: What are the lived experiences of students enrolled in remedial education at the community college? This main question is followed by the following sub-questions: (1) How do students enrolled in remedial education at community colleges describe their educational journey?; (2) How were students prepared for post-secondary education prior to enrollment in remedial education?; and (3) How do these students see themselves as succeeding in post-secondary education? These questions, as well as the literature review (Chapter 2), helped to shape and inform the semi-structured interview questions that were the main basis for the data-collection phase of the study.

The interview protocol was heavily influenced by the literature presented in Chapter 2 and was focused on eliciting information that would help to inform the research questions. The protocol included nine open-ended questions, but often diverged into other lines of questioning, as the protocol was specifically designed to allow participants the freedom to explore their experiences, and to create a space for a co-constructed interview in which both the participant and the researcher were actively engaged in the conversation and in the recollection of the lived experiences. The semi-structured interview approach is believed to be an effective research-based data collection method that engages participants in meaningful conversations (Smith & Osborn, 2008), "while allowing the researcher and participant to engage in a dialogue whereby initial questions are modified in the light of the participants' responses and the investigator is

able to probe interesting and important areas which arise” (p. 57). The IPA approach facilitates the creation of a co-constructed environment, and embraces the concept that multiple realities can and will exist not only for the participants in the study, but for the researcher as well. The research questions and the co-constructed approach provided an open framework for exploring these realities, and in turn created a greater understanding of the remedial education experience (Lincoln, Lynam, & Guba, 2011).

Study Recruitment

The selection of participants for the study was based on their remedial student status. Sampling was purposive, and participating students were currently or recently enrolled in at least one remedial education course at a community college. Information about the study (including a Letter of Cooperation (Appendix A) to be acknowledged by the college campus, a Letter of Consent (Appendix B) to be signed by the participant, and a Participant Letter (Appendix C) outlining the study) were sent to remedial education departments of local community colleges, in order to introduce the study and request permission to conduct research within their remedial education departments and with their students. The initial intention of the researcher was to recruit students by asking local community colleges to pass along information about the study to prospective students (via an IRB approved recruitment flyer, Appendix D) and to provide the researcher's contact information so that students might voluntarily enroll themselves in the study. If students expressed an interest and agreed to take part in the research, the researcher planned to use a snowball sampling approach to gather additional participants to join the study. However, as the procedure was implemented, many of the colleges contacted were reluctant to take part in the study, and others required the researcher to fill out Institutional Review Board (IRB) forms for

their specific institution in order for the research to proceed (a requirement with which the researcher complied).

Additional Recruitment

As a result of the aforementioned challenges, the recruitment technique was modified and utilized a specific contact at a local community college. This contact then put the researcher in touch with a remedial education teacher at a local community college. A brief summary of the study was sent to the teacher, who then agreed to share information about the study with her students. Four students agreed to take part in the study, at which point the researcher sent Consent to Participate and Participant letters to the teacher to distribute to the interested students. The teacher was then used as an intermediary to schedule meeting times with the participants. One other participant was recruited for the study through word of mouth. The participant was contacted by a friend of the researcher who knew about the study. Once the person expressed interest in participating, the same recruitment procedures were followed, including sending more information about the study and a Consent to Participate letter via email.

Participants

In total, five participants were enrolled in the study, with four being included in the final analysis. The fifth participant did not attend two scheduled interviews and was therefore excluded from the study. Colorado State University IRB (Appendix E) approval was received prior to the start of the study and all participants received and signed Consent to Participate forms. Participants were informed that participation in the study was voluntary, and that they could remove themselves from the study at any point. Participants were also assigned pseudonyms to help ensure anonymity.

As noted above, a total of four students were included in the study, and the small sample size allowed for a deeper analysis of experiences and enabled the researcher to identify common or divergent themes that constituted the lived experiences of being enrolled in remedial courses (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Table 1 presents basic details about each of the study participants.

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Experience Prior to Enrolling in Community College Prior	Remedial Courses	Future Plans
Andrew	21	Male	Attended community college directly out of high school	Math – completed during first year Enrolled in other courses	Transfer to four year and/or take some time off to pursue own business
Oliver	26	Male	Served in the military for 8 years prior to enrolling in community college	Advanced Academic Achievement, College Reading and Composition, Math Only taking these courses	Attend Police Academy
Gwen	24	Female	Served in the military for 5 ½ years prior to enrolling in community college	Advanced Academic Achievement, College Reading and Composition Enrolled in other courses	Begin working
Beth	22	Female	Attended another college before enrolling in community college	Advanced Academic Achievement, College Reading and Composition Not enrolled in other courses	Attend four year college

Interview Locations

When scheduling the interviews, it was important to find a location and environment that were both safe and comfortable for the participant. The first interview was conducted with Andrew, and the interview took place at a location of his choosing. He elected to meet at a local restaurant, and we selected a quiet back room for the interview. Andrew seemed to feel comfortable in the setting and did not seem to mind the public location. Given the selection of the more secluded space, the conversation was able to take place with little to no interruption.

The remaining four study participants were recruited from the same community college, and they all agreed to conduct their interviews at that location. The teacher who had helped in the recruitment process reserved a conference room in the college and worked with the students to find times that worked with their schedules in order to conduct the interviews. Again, the teacher acted as an intermediary in this process and all initial contact with the students was through her. Additionally, she arranged for the initial introduction between the students and me, the researcher, and she helped reschedule interviews if scheduling conflicts arose.

Interview Process

At the start of each interview, participants were asked to once again to review and sign (if they had not signed already) the Consent Form (Appendix B), and were asked if they would permit the conversation to be recorded. Participants were given time to ask any additional questions, and then the purpose of the study was restated before the interview began. Interviews were semi-structured, and were scheduled to last approximately 60–90 minutes. Each of the interviews began by using an interview protocol (Appendix F), but in each interview, additional questions emerged as the conversation progressed. The interviews were conversational in nature, and because of this, the actual interview times varied from thirty minutes to over an hour. At the

conclusion of each interview, participants were asked if they would consent to providing follow-up information or to more thoroughly address a previously discussed topic. Each participant agreed to this request and shared their personal email addresses for future contact.

Researcher's Role

The researcher served as the main “instrument” (as referenced by Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in the study, and acted as a guide and interpreter of experiences for participants during the semi-structured interviews. The researcher was keenly aware of her own feelings about students involved in remedial education, and took precautions to “bracket”: or withhold interpretations and preconceived notions about students and their experiences. This “bracketing” process helped to keep the interview as authentic as possible, and worked to minimize preconceptions or individual beliefs about phenomena based on the researcher’s prior experiences (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). To avoid the researcher’s background as an educator shading or biasing the analysis, careful attention was paid by the researcher to monitoring her own personal feelings, and looking for instances when she might have begun to insert her own “reality” or perception of reality into the analysis. A research journal was maintained to monitor this process, and the journal entries allowed the space necessary to capture initial thoughts and feelings immediately following the interviews; the journal was also brought out upon initial and subsequent readings of the transcripts. This journal enabled the researcher to not only bracket her own thinking, but also to help sort out preliminary impressions and reactions to interviews that were later called upon to help inform thinking or questioning during the iterative analysis process.

Data Collection

Data collection began once the research proposal had been finalized and subsequently approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The first step in the process included

recruitment, which was immediately followed by participant interviews. The purpose of the study was explained and the interview protocol was discussed before the start of each interview. Additional questions or follow-up questions varied with each interview, as the researcher was willing to let participants' follow their own "journey" as they recalled their experiences leading up to, and their experiences in, remedial education programs. This open-ended approach is supported by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) as a valid and "integral part of the inductive principles of phenomenological research" (p. 65) that enables the researcher and research participant to explore the phenomenon without being constrained by a predetermined process.

Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed, and participants were made aware of the varying levels of time commitment, noting that their contribution would not exceed five hours. The completion of interviews and the generation of transcripts and analyses of the data were logged in a research journal, which provided a record of research procedures, notes, and organizational tools, so as to enable easy access to transcriptions, notes, and analyses. The data were stored on a password-protected computer, and stored in password-protected files on the hard drive.

Data Analysis

Utilizing the IPA analysis approach as detailed by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), the data analysis was conducted as an iterative process that included multiple readings of transcripts, and three specific levels of coding that were used to identify emergent themes and superordinate themes across cases. Each transcript was analyzed individually, and the researcher worked to bracket findings and initial thoughts from previous interviews with other participants. In this methodology, bracketing was done in an attempt to consider each case on an individual basis, and in an attempt to refrain from using the themes identified in earlier cases to shade the analysis

of a new case (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Although the researcher recognized and had been warned about completely removing her knowledge and insights about the data from previous cases (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009), being cognizant of the process helped the researcher consider each case on an individual basis during the first steps of the analysis, and prevented the researcher from inappropriately ascribing ideas or emergent themes to new cases.

Levels of Coding

Initial Reading

Each transcript was given a preliminary read, immediately following each interview, during which no comments or markings were made on the page. The purpose of this initial read was to familiarize the researcher with the data, and to ensure that no errors had been made when creating the transcripts. During a second reading, comments and first impressions of the content were captured in the researcher's research journal. This preliminary level of analysis created a level of familiarity with the text and enabled the researcher to simply make note of interesting words or phrases that stood out in the text without attempting to make meaning of what was said. This exploratory process worked to spur question development regarding the phenomenon and create a level of awareness of the described experience.

Descriptive Coding

Next, the text was re-read, and a line-by-line analysis was performed, honing in on particular words or phrases that appeared to stand out in the text. The words and passages were highlighted and included in this level of "descriptive comments", as described by Smith et al. (2009). Descriptive coding helped the researcher to begin to identify particular words or phrases that stood out in the text due to frequency, connotation, or perceived importance to either the participant or the researcher. The highlighted items added to level of inquiry developed in the

initial reading of the text as well as identified further areas of interest to be explored in additional readings and interpretations of the text.

Linguistic Coding

The next level of coding, “linguistic comments” (as described by Smith et al., 2009), included a deeper examination of previously highlighted sections, as well as notations about frequently repeated words or phrases in the text. This level of analysis focused on specific word choices, and considered the many linguistic levels of meaning that may exist in each word and phrase, both within and outside the context of the sentence. In addition to noting specific word choice or frequency, attention is also paid to the use of metaphor or other linguistic elements that are used to describe the experience.

Conceptual Coding

The linguistic coding helped to set the stage for “conceptual comments”, the third level of coding. This level of coding moved away from the “explicit claims of the participant” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 88) and initiated a more conceptual realm of interpretation. The conceptual comments level of coding helped to elicit deeper levels of meaning within the context of the experience, and enabled the identification of emergent themes that helped to capture the essence of the participants’ experiences. Figures 1 and 2 provide examples of the types of coding that were performed on each transcript.

According to whom?

I don't know. They just said because of where I am... which is their fault?
 Can you explain a little bit more about that? What do you mean?

Well, it is just because they, they challenge me enough to really learn more than where I was, so it was like we were reading at a 5th grade level in high school. Which is, really easy, so... and we had books on tape and stuff and I'd be like helping people do their homework because I would get done early, and it was just like a no brains type of thing, and they thought it was too hard because of my learning disability, cause I am slower, they were just afraid I wasn't going to keep up with the class and fall behind and be all in a mess. I don't really know. They didn't really explain much. They just said you know, based on her tests you take every year in high school, the CSAP, like based on those results, she can't take any other classes because it is too hard. And it's just like, well, you never know until you let me try? I can always come back, and be like, it is too hard, I'm not going to be in this class anymore. But, just let me try. I mean, I am a whiz at history. I mean I was teaching my teachers history because they were missaying histories facts, and I was just like, um actually, this happened. And they were just like, oh well, okay. And then I had choir so I missed out on history, so I was ... I like history. And I was like, can you guys let me take one with like normal people? And they were like no. And I was like, why? And they were like cause it's too hard. And I was like, it is not too hard. I can do it. And they're like, not really. And I was like okay... It is like they are kinda going off of normal special ed kids that are lower functioning. That's the thing, they have like middle functioning, lower functioning, and higher functioning that are in higher classes. And I couldn't be in the higher one because there is somebody in there that I couldn't be around, but I mean either way, we could have figured out something if they just took the time to figure out something, but they just didn't... I don't know... It was just complicated. It was like that in middle school too. It was like they just didn't know what to do with you. They put you here, and then we will figure out stuff later. But in middle school I could take stuff. People were with me helping me, but I

Always refers to them even when students behave slowly. They are an entity that confuses her

She felt completely unheard and disregarded by the system. They would not even attempt to challenge her and meet her needs

the her not be able to do the things she wanted to do.

She identifies as special ed, but still doesn't buy as "one of them"

5

Figure 1: Levels of coding illustrated using the transcript from the interview with Beth¹

[7:30]. That's funny, I like that you can pin point it back to when you think it like...

It was an interesting time. It was 6th grade. 6th grade was definitely different from... the transition from elementary school to sixth grade was weird. Also, I became super popular and I did not pay attention a lot in math. The teacher literally told my mom at parent teacher conferences, your son is incredibly intelligent, but the laziest person I have ever met. And she was just like sitting there like, what?? And I was sitting there too like, huh??? And it was like even we went to high trials, this camp thing; he was our like person who watched over us to make sure that we were good kids in 6th grade. And so, I had him as a math teacher, he knew my mentalities and how I was going to, not behave and just be kind of a bad kid, so he was particularly watching me the entire time and [inaudible] some time to send me home because it was just not a good situation, so THAT is the reason why I attribute me not knowing fractions, because I never paid attention to it. And now I know them to the point where I need to, but I still am not super confident. Taking that college level course kind of skimmed me through it, and then when I started doing the higher level math it started making sense.

[8:54] It sounds like you kind of understand, or think you have an understanding of why you ended up in that class, so... kinda?

Yes and no. I mean um... I, high school everything, like I was saying earlier, I pick up on equations and science and functions, I mean its simple plug and chug as long as you know what it is and you know where to find the number, its... a gimme A, you know. So I was going

lots of references to not paying attention - was he engaged? - not challenged? - distracted?

Is not paying attention a way to avoid not understanding?

See himself as a "bad" people "bad" behavior from him

Figure 2: Levels of coding illustrated using the transcript from the interview with Andrew

¹ Descriptive Comments - Highlighted
 Linguistic Comments - Red Ink
 Conceptual Comments - Green Ink

Theme Analysis

Once coding was conducted and initial themes were identified in each individual transcript, the researcher began to look for connections between the themes both in single transcripts as well as themes that connected across transcripts. Initially, a table was created for each transcript that worked to organize the three levels of coding and to begin to make connections to emergent themes and superordinate themes for each participant. Table 2 is an example of the tables created for each transcript:

Table 2: Emergent Themes - Beth

Name	Descriptive/ Frequently Used	Linguistic/Key Words	Conceptual Comments	Emergent Themes	Superordinate Themes
Beth	Frustrated/frustrating Disappointed Angry Irritated	She is frustrated by not being heard Others (teachers) were frustrated by her and her needs	Frustrated with the educational process Frustrated/angry that she wasn't challenged She felt like she was never understood and that she was never prepared for life beyond HS Frustrated that other people get upset with her because she needs help She was never allowed to "try" things because she was told that she could not do them	Misrepresentation and mistreatment Not feeling recognized or valued as an individual Being let down by a system that is supposed to help	Marginalization
	They		Implies there is an outside force controlling her Even when she switches between schools and situations, it always remains an ominous "they" who controlled her fate	Not belonging, views the world as a me v. them (this shifts thanks to new college)	Marginalization by the people in "power" What power structures are in play here?
	Fault	"It wasn't my fault..." (p.5). "I am angry at my school because they should have taught or helped me prepared for	There is a lot of blaming. She frequently says, "it was their fault, it wasn't my fault" She feels slighted by the system and blames them for her struggles	Blame	

		college more than they did” (p. 3)			
	Special Ed v. Normal Not fitting in – physical space and personal relationships Being secluded in a separate space – being placed in a space she didn’t feel she belonged	“It was like they just didn’t know what to do with you” (p. 5) “It was all over the place where I went to school, but it was a big school. So, big school, big everything. Everywhere. (p. 11). Being “cramped up in there” and “crammed in the same room for hours” (p. 12).	Establishes a difference between herself and “normal” kids and “normal special ed” kids. She doesn’t fit into either category “I am the highest functioning” (p.6) “You can’t do it” (p. 7) In HS the special ed students were physically removed from the other students – they had their own building Does this cramming into a space relate to her shell analogy?	Belonging Being misrepresented because she was misunderstood.	Physical and social marginalization
	Challenge Hard	“it’s too hard” Being told “no” when asking for a challenge “They just would not let me” (p. 4) “You’ll fall behind and fail” “You’ll never know until you let me try” (p. 5) “Just let me try”	She continually asked to be challenged and she was continually told that those things would be too hard for her. She said they based it on CSAP tests. She felt that didn’t represent her ability, but they said no. She felt they assumed she was like other Special Ed students, she sees herself as more than that.	Self-improvement Denial of self-improvement	Empowerment Denied access
	Welcoming Environment	Make you feel comfortable Approachable Nicer Supportive/support system “It just feels like they want you more to just succeed here... you know, they want you to succeed” (p.8). “I mean they are always asking questions, which is really, really,	This college has made her feel like it is okay to be herself Talks about people doing little kind things, like holding doors, that makes her feel welcome and accepted. Teachers are always checking in to see how she is doing and helping her improve	Self-acceptance	Empowerment

		nice to get my input. It feels like I matter” (p. 9).			
	Judgment	After taking the test “I thought I was better than that” (p. 2) People mocked her	Judged by others Judged by a diagnosis Judged by her family Judged herself	Fear Abuse? Bullying	Self-expression/denial of self-expression
	Violence	Lashing out “Fire coming out of his nostrils” (p. 15). “going to jump on you” “jump on me” “All judgmental and go crazy” (p.15).	Fear associated with self-expression “Instead of being so scared to try new things” (p. 13).	Denied self-expression	Self-expression
	Negativity	“I just felt like a piece of junk” “getting made fun of” “feeling like crud” “I didn’t matter” (p. 15). Negative self-talk	She had no self-worth and felt like her voice did not matter. This came from her father and all of her experiences in school.	Low self esteem	Self-worth Lack of power/voice Marginalization
	In a Shell	“the shell that I was put in” “I was put into one” (p. 15)	Was the shell for protection? Was it a way to contain her? If so, who was trying to contain her?	Fear Denial of Self-expression	

As themes began to emerge within and across transcripts, an additional table (Table 3) was created to help visualize not only where the themes converged or diverged, but also to help identify how themes might tie back to the research questions. Specific quotes as well as interpretative thinking and an initial analysis were captured in the table, and were used to help formulate and identify key moments identified in the data. Specific quotes were used to check the correspondence of the analysis with the actual words of the participant, and to help highlight important themes or experiences of the participants. As themes and superordinate themes began

to converge or diverge across transcripts, the additional table helped to combine the narratives of all the participants, and to highlight common and/or outlier experiences (outlier experiences are in italics) related to being a remedial education student; and to tease out deeper levels of meaning for each participant. Table 3 illustrates how the data were organized and used to link ideas and experiences back to the research questions, as each row represents questions from the interview protocol as well as emergent themes.

Table 3: Cross-Case Analysis²

Interview Questions	Andrew	Beth	Gwen	Oliver	Thoughts/ Connections
High school experiences	<p>Able to slide through</p> <p>Hung out with the “smart kids”</p> <p>Was on the track for mechanical engineering</p> <p>Middle of the road grades</p> <p>Never really worked hard</p> <p>Hung out with the “druggies” and was able to sleep through classes</p>	<p>Felt completely marginalized</p> <p>Wasn’t allowed to try harder courses</p> <p>Felt restrained both mentally and physically (the physical space)</p> <p>Mocked</p> <p>Made fun of</p> <p>Her wants/needs were ignored</p> <p>“They didn’t know what to do</p>	<p>Was focused on getting her CNA license</p> <p>Was able to “avoid” some traditional classes</p> <p>Was able to “jump” from program to program when it suited her or allowed her to avoid work that she didn’t like</p> <p>Selected program at community with no math</p> <p>-selected CNA to avoid gym</p>	<p>Hated high school</p> <p>Not engaged</p> <p>Poor grades</p>	<p>They all had “avoidance” techniques.</p> <p>Andrew used charm and social connections – Playing the game</p> <p>Gwen used course work towards degree completion – Track Switching/Avoiding</p> <p>Oliver played by the rules (minimally) but was disengaged. – Compliance</p> <p><i>Beth was marginalized and disregarded by the</i></p>

² Italicized font indicates outliers

		with me”			<i>system. – Put into a Shell</i>
How did they “game” the system	<p>Doing work in class the day it is due</p> <p>Being able to skate by without really working for it</p> <p>“study hall” instead of class – it was a place to hang out and play v. learning</p> <p>He is very charming and is able to speak eloquently and persuasively</p>	<i>It seems like she was denied access to even playing the game</i>	<p>Able to pick and choose classes v. taking a more traditional courses</p> <p>In ACC, selected a program that would allow her to skip math classes</p>	<p>Was able to make it through school “eventually”</p> <p>Seems like he was able to slide through the system without any real connection or accountability</p>	They were all permitted to “play the game” of high school except Beth. She wasn’t even allowed to participate.
How they see themselves as learners/students	<p>Average student</p> <p>Lazy</p> <p>“I knew all those people [referring to high achievers] but I am not one of them” (p.2).</p>	<p>Hard working</p> <p>Devoted to classes</p> <p>Slow learner</p> <p>“I do ok”</p> <p>“I like to ask questions”</p>	<p>Very organized</p> <p>Long range planner</p> <p>Visual learning</p> <p>Doesn’t like surprises</p>	<p>“One that always come to class” (p. 1).</p> <p>Tunes out if not interested</p> <p>Gets bored easily</p> <p>Has to be new and exciting for him to want to engage</p>	They all seem to have a pretty clear sense of who they are as learners. How many of the descriptions have been learned through experience versus applied by others?
Socially	Made some social connections, but none were significant	Has given her skills to work with other people more effectively	Recognition that she had been wasting time – she has found ways to make more time for	Struggles in dealing with another age group – finds them interesting and	Only Andrew expressed embarrassment at having to tell family and friends

	<i>He was embarrassed and ashamed to tell his friends and family</i>	<p>Created new friendships</p> <p>Found her voice – it is okay to have an opinion and the occasional conflict with others</p> <p>Helped to boost her confidence</p> <p>“I have a voice here” (p. 13)</p> <p>No longer afraid to speak her mind.</p>	her work, her family, and herself.	likes to listen to their new perspectives (p. 5)	that he was in remedial courses.
Academically	<p>Saw the course as a foundation</p> <p>Felt it enabled him to identify other “gaps” in his learning</p> <p>He became self-reflective</p>	<p>Feels like she is challenged for the first time</p> <p>Is doing better here than she has at any other school</p> <p>She feels like she is “earning it” (p. 13).</p> <p>Has been able to rethink her career path</p>	<p>Greatly saw the benefit and feels like she has made significant improvements</p> <p>She realized that she had been very unfocused before – now she has a plan for completion</p>	<i>He doesn't care about grades – he gets what he gets and knows that he has earned that mark</i>	<p>So what is Oliver getting out of all of this?</p> <p>Is it simply a means to an end? Is it a stepping stone on his way to self-actualization? (becoming a cop so he can be in control?)</p>
Financially	He has been able to “get paid” to go to school. No real burden.	Was frustrated by the financial aid process, but sought out	GI Bill – has a HUGE support at the college to help her get everything	Uses GI Bill and works part time.	Finances were an influencing factor in choosing CC, but students

	Again, sees it as a way to “game” the system	supports and feels good now.	settled. Has been on a budget forever, so this is nothing new.	Says he is “financially solid” (p. 5)	haven’t felt a huge burden. It seems to be what they have always know/felt in their lives.
Personally and/or Emotionally	Went through a “changing” period Grew up Sees himself as “tough shit” and that things don’t bother him. This process made him step back and reevaluate how he handles things.	She has learned to break free from her “shell” She has confidence in herself and recognizes that she matters She has stopped negative self-talk	More effective communication Is able to communicate her needs more clearly The ability to express needs and manage time has seemed to create a sense of calm for her.	<i>Frustrated by the process, but is trying to find the best in the situation</i>	All but Oliver see the value in the experience. All of the others have grown in some way, is Oliver “stuck” because he is always doing as he is told versus discovering things for himself?
How they did on the test v. how they thought they did	<i>“Steam out the ears” (p. 15).</i> <i>Shocked</i>	Felt like she could do better “I thought I was better than that” (p. 2) Disappointed Frustrated by the things she was asked to do v. what she felt she had been taught Surprised by English, not by math	English, no – knew her skills were not up to par Surprised that she didn’t need to take math	Not surprised at all – recognition that he had spent a number of years thinking in a non-academic way	Andrew was completely shocked – the others seemed to know that they would need the support.
5 Words	Anger Frustration Surprise (pure	Irritated Frustrating Angry (at my	“I am dumb” (p. 6) Help (as in, she knew the class	Anger Whatever	All of them immediately felt negative emotions as a result of

	surprise) Shock Embarrassment Humbling	school)	would be helpful)	Mad Hope (as in hope to learn something new)	placement.
Possible Themes					
Ways they tried to connect /belong/build relationships	Surrounding himself with the right “smart/business minded people”	Learned to reflect on past behaviors and interactions and learn new ways to work with people (AAA)	Looks for people that are like her (older, military, parents, etc.) Looks for an environment that is conducive to connection “reach out and touch” professors and support systems in schools	<i>Did not seem connected.</i> <i>Sees himself as outside of the two identified groups, young and old</i>	Oliver once again seems disconnected. Doesn’t seem to engage on a deeper level with anyone.
Ways they were empowered	Talks about being able to identify “gaps” in his life	Breaking free from her shell Being given a voice Being made to feel like she and her opinion matters	Developed tools to more effectively communicate Developed tools that enabled her to more effectively and efficiently manage her time – time = freedom	<i>No obvious evidence of empowerment</i>	Again, has Oliver had the opportunity to self-actualize when he has always been following the lead of others?
Ways they were marginalized	Given the label of lazy early on in his education Being made fun of by family and friends for needed thing remedial	Being “put into a shell” Not being valued Not being heard	Poverty	Has he ever been able to really express himself? Has is military upbringing limited his sense of	All of them come from self-described impoverished backgrounds. How much does that experience affect them now?

	course		when she said she wanted to be challenged			autonomy?		
	Poverty		Given a SPED classification that did not represent who she felt she was			Poverty		
			Being “lashed out at” or “jumped on” for expressing herself					
			Her father					
			Her peers					
			Poverty					
What labels were they given?	Gave themselves Andrew	Given by others Andrew	Gave themselves Beth	Given by others Beth	Gave themselves Gwen	Given by others Gwen	Gave themselves Oliver	Given by others Oliver
	Smart	Smart	High functioning	Special Ed	Poor	Soldier	Outdoorsy	Soldier
	Math and science geek	Lazy	Poor		Organized		Poor	Military – “we are a military family”
	Popular	Bad	Freakazoid		Visual		Straight forward – tell it like it is	
	Egotistical				Wife		Not the ideal	
					Mother			

	Poor				Workaholic		student	
	Lazy						Below average	

Analysis of the data was an iterative process that focused on both convergent and divergent themes in order to make meaning of the experiences of the participants. Varying levels of interpretation occurred throughout the process, as each iteration revealed new levels of complexity and depth in single cases, as well as across the experiences of all the participants.

Writing up the Results

Finally, a narrative account of the phenomena was created that explored the experiences of each participant and created an understanding of the phenomenon of being a remedial education student. This process began by first exploring the most salient themes presented in the data and worked to explore specific themes for each participant. Once evidence had been gathered to support the themes, the researcher worked to tell the story of the participant, highlighting their experiences and providing specific examples from the transcript that were reflective of the identified theme. Levels of interpretation occurred most frequently during this part of the process, but again, each interpretative assumption was reinforced by the participants own words.

Trustworthiness

Several methods were used to ensure the credibility and reliability of the study. First, the researcher’s experiences and understanding of previous experiences have been clearly bracketed, recognized, and identified as part of the research process. This has helped ensure that any preconceived notions about phenomena did not influence the participants or the analysis

throughout the progression of the study. All interviews were recorded and transcribed to guarantee accuracy, and to ensure that the analysis focused on participant responses. Member checking was used to validate interpretations and was incorporated throughout the interview process by frequently checking for understanding, clarity, and by asking for assurance that the researcher understood the experience correctly. Participants were also contacted after analysis and offered the opportunity to view and discuss the findings. One participant responded and confirmed the analysis. An iterative process, one based on analysis and participant feedback, helped to ensure that the researcher accurately captured and explained the “essence” of the participants’ experiences as remedial education students.

In an attempt to further support the validity and quality of the results, the researcher employed Lucy Yardley’s (2000) criteria for validity, as recommended by other qualitative researchers (Heffron & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Yardley’s work presents a broad array of quality criteria that can be applied in a variety of qualitative studies, including in IPA (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Yardley (2000) details four principles for assessing the merits of qualitative work: sensitivity to context, commitment and rigor, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance, noting that these principles are flexible in their application, but should coincide with qualitative methodologies. Yardley’s (2000) criteria was used to ensure that research is indeed credible, both in terms of technique and interpretation, and that the results are an accurate representation of a student’s lived experiences in remedial education.

Sensitivity to Context

According to Yardley (2000), a good qualitative study shows sensitivity to context. As part of understanding students’ lived experiences in remedial education, an extensive literature

review was conducted that focused on a variety of issues facing remedial education students. The literature was used to inform the researcher on past and current influences (institutional, cultural, developmental, etc.) on these students, as well as brought to light additional challenges and successes in how students are engaged in the learning process and are often empowered or marginalized by the educational system. This literature, which was more fully explored in Chapter 2, assisted in the development of research questions and the interview protocol used in the study, thereby improving the researcher's understanding of the remedial education student experience.

In addition to outside sources for knowledge, the researcher's direct experience as a secondary education teacher provided insights into the struggles and challenges that students often face in the course of their educational journeys. Although the researcher took great care to bracket out this prior knowledge through the use of a research journal, and was aware of her potential biases, in many ways these personal experiences on the part of the researcher created a level of sensitivity and understanding that may not have existed without this prior experience.

IPA Methodology

The selection of IPA as the methodology for the study acknowledges the importance of context and how it can and does shape a student's understanding and recollection of particular situations and experiences. The IPA approach embraces the varied contextual understandings of experiences and uses them as part of the interpretative process. Additionally, IPA allows for the recognition of potential perceived "power plays" (Smith et al., 2009; Yardley, 2000) when collecting data and working with research participants. In order to highlight these perceived roles, every research participant was viewed as a "co-researcher", and the process was explicitly explained as a co-construction, in which the "co-researchers" (researcher and the participant)

were working together to make meaning and develop an understanding of the emergent phenomenon. This co-constructed environment was first created by selecting an interview location that was safe, comfortable, and convenient for participants, with the researcher willingly rearranging schedules and traveling to make the interview fit the participant's schedule. Additionally, during meetings with participants, the researcher ensured that participants had a clear understanding of their pivotal role in the research, and would answer any questions that participants might have at the outset. In addition, the researcher was willing to share her own personal information if asked, and was thus able to quickly establish a rapport with participants that was maintained throughout the course of the interview.

The final element of IPA that assists in establishing sensitivity to context is the IPA's close adherence to using participants' own words in exploring and describing the phenomena to be studied in order to support the interpretations and claims that are being made (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher took great care in selecting verbatim extracts so as to support interpretations and highlight unique perspectives and understandings of being a remedial education student.

Commitment and Rigor

Yardley (2000) defined commitment as a "prolonged engagement with the topic (not necessarily just as a researcher, but also in the capacity of sufferer, carer etc.), the development of competence and skill in the methods used, and immersion in the relevant data (whether theoretical or empirical)" (p. 221). The researcher began exploring this topic in 2012, and has spent a considerable amount of time building on prior knowledge about remedial education students and remedial education programs. A pilot study conducted in 2014 explored remedial student experiences at a deeper level than could be gathered through a literature review; thus, the

pilot study was essentially a feasibility study to ensure that the research and research questions were valid and warranted further exploration. Rigor was established through in-depth interviewing processes, as well as through in-depth analyses and presentations of the data. The small sample size allowed for an intensive analysis and interpretation of themes, which were then member checked with participants. Each assumption and theme was linked back to specific quotes from participants, and interpretations were therefore fully explained and grounded in the experiences of the students.

Transparency and Coherence

Transparency was established by thoroughly describing the research methods and analysis process presented in Chapter 3. In addition to providing rich descriptions of how each level of coding was approached, the researcher included excerpts from transcripts that show each level of coding, as well as provided tables that were used to track and organize the data. The researcher also clearly recognized the importance of interpretation in IPA, and worked to adhere to the principles of IPA so as to produce a quality analysis. The researcher worked diligently to present a coherent and organized presentation of the data, interpretations, and an overall analysis of the research. Transparency was also achieved by clearly stating the limitations and delimitations of the study in later sections of this paper.

Impact and Importance

Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) and Yardley (2000) assert that the real test of validity lies not in whether or not the study can be replicated, but in whether its methods have been clearly articulated and whether it truly presents information and knowledge that is useful, engaging, and important. As stated in the purpose section, the research sheds light on an often marginalized and misrepresented student population. This IPA study, one that is specifically

focused on the lived experiences of remedial education students at the community college, will not only help to enhance current research on remedial education, but also offers a unique student-oriented perspective that can help provide insights into how to develop a better understanding of the multitude of struggles facing remedial students, beyond basic skill acquisition. This research has provided students with an opportunity to express their understanding of their experiences, which may in turn provide insights into how better to support these students and the programs that are designed to serve them.

Limitations/Delimitations

The study, which was based on students' lived experiences in remedial education, has been somewhat limited because of students' abilities to accurately recall and articulate their experiences in the time frame allotted for the interviews. The iterative process, as well as the co-constructed approach, helped to alleviate some of these limitations, and enabled students to reflect on their comments and the analysis. The small number of participants, which is a specific delimitation of the study, resulted in the majority of the participants being enrolled in the same community college and remedial level courses. This delimitation may call into question the generalizability of the study; however, it is important to remember that this research is not designed to generalize to a large population, but is instead more focused on understanding individual experiences and developing a body of research that is "useful" and "meaningful" in the eyes of the participants, so that the results help to deepen their understanding of their reality (Lincoln, Lynam, & Guba, 2011), as well as deepen the understanding of the experience in existing research.

Summary

The methodology selected was finalized after much deliberation and exploration of the research problem and questions. The method of IPA was deemed to be the most appropriate approach for collecting and analyzing the data, as it incorporates several components that are essential to exploring student perspectives and gaining a true understanding of students' lived experiences in remedial education. First and foremost, IPA allows for co-construction, i.e., the ability of the participants and the researcher to work together to make meaning and share perspectives and interpretations of multiple experiences, while simultaneously maintaining a focus on the individual experiences as well (Pringle et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2009). The process of discovery evolved naturally through conversation, exploration, and interpretation, which was accomplished through deep conversations with participants and through multiple iterations of analysis (Smith et al., 2009; Willig, 2001). The IPA approach allows for unique explorations of the topic in question, as there is no prescribed hypothesis or theory attempting to be proven (Smith and Osborn, 2003, p. 53); it thus allows for more varied discussions of the findings, in terms of how the finding might relate to other theories, models, or approaches (Brocki & Wearden, 2010, p. 96).

Interpretative phenomenological analysis relies heavily on interpretation, and therefore does not require the researcher to completely "bracket" themselves out of the research. It welcomes the prior knowledge that is brought to the research, and acknowledges the role which it can play in making meaning. Even though bracketing is not required (or even advised in all cases), it became an important part of the research process. The attempt to "bracket" thinking (through the use of a research journal) allowed the researcher to capture initial ideas and theories for each individual participant and compartmentalize first impressions. The ability to separate

out initial perceptions enabled the researcher to approach each interview and initial reading with "fresh eyes" while still being able to look back to the journal to help inform later analysis. Acceptance of this prior experience and initial impressions captured in the journal helps to create transparency, and fits with the underlying theoretical approach of the method. Interpretation is crucial to creating meaning making, and to the overall purpose of this research, as the study focuses not only on understanding individual experiences but also on understanding how those experiences are connected to the wider social, cultural, and theoretical contexts from which they arise.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

As stated in Chapter 1 and in various other sections throughout this document, the aim of this study was to gain an understanding of students' lived experiences in remedial education at the community college. In order to gain this understanding, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to the answer following research question and sub-questions:

What are the lived experiences of students enrolled in remedial education at community college?

1. How do students who are enrolled in remedial education at the community college describe their educational journey?
2. How were students prepared for post-secondary education prior to enrollment in remedial education?
3. How do these students see themselves as succeeding in post-secondary education?

These questions, as well as an extensive literature review, helped to shape the interview protocol (Appendix F) that was used with students and was continually referenced as part of the iterative, analytic process. Guidelines for conducting IPA research as described by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) worked to help guide the analysis and create levels of coding that led to the discovery of emergent and subordinate themes throughout the data. Themes were identified within individual transcripts as well as linked across cases. Themes were not only marked for convergence across cases, but were noted as being related to individual cases as well.

This chapter begins by presenting the common themes discovered in the data by first exploring the themes as they emerged within and across cases. The superordinate themes

presented include marginalization through labeling, playing the game, and wanting to belong. Each superordinate theme incorporates multiple subthemes that provide greater detail to support the analysis. These sections highlight the students' unique experiences, while also demonstrating how labeling, marginalization, and belonging were common experiences despite their unique circumstances. Outliers are also identified and raise questions regarding student experience and what the outliers might mean in the larger context of understanding students' lived experiences in remedial education. The final sections of the chapter answers each of the research questions in relation to the identified themes.

Marginalization Through Labeling

When asked to describe themselves as learners, each of the students often began in the positive, stating that they were “smart”, “organized”, or “dedicated” to learning, but throughout the conversations, the positive attributes began to become less central as more negative descriptors began to emerge. With each new label, either positive or negative, a greater understanding of the students' educational journeys came into focus and began to shed light on the marginalizing effects of labels and how the students often felt isolated and misunderstood because of them.

Labeled by Others

Lazy.

When Andrew reflects on his educational journey, being described as smart, yet lazy, “the teacher literally told my mom at parent teacher conferences, your son is incredibly intelligent, but the laziest person I have ever met,” was a major catalyst for how he saw himself and his abilities. For Andrew, this smart but lazy label ascribed to him during his middle school years shaped how he saw himself as an adult, even adopting the language when he describes

himself now, “I am an average student... I’m kind of lazy though.” This early label followed him through his educational journey and he stated that others expected this behavior from him as well, “he knew my mentalities and how I was going to not behave and just be kind of a bad kid.” As Andrew progressed through school, he often describes being lazy or “not really paying attention”, “I just skimmed by” and saw himself as outside of his other, more engaged peers. Interestingly, Andrew also describes himself as smart, popular, and a math and science geek; and although he self-describes in this manner, he frequently speaks as if he is outside of that group and does not really belong in it. The lazy/bad label has marginalized him in a way that has him vacillating between acceptance and denial and has left him a space where he is constantly working to belong and to find acceptance as part of that “other” group.

Special education.

For Beth, the label of Special Education came with a variety of consequences and stigma that she felt she had no choice but to accept. As soon as she was born, she was labeled with a genetic disorder that placed her into a class that was separate from those that were deemed “normal”. This separation was compounded as she entered into the education system where she not only felt different, but also was frequently misunderstood and marginalized by the system that was supposed to support her. Although her disability has specific, defined symptoms associated with it, Beth does not feel like those symptoms represent her specific case. She sees herself as the “highest functioning” within the special education categorization and sees a separation between “normal special ed kids” and herself. She sees herself outside of her label, yet she does not feel like she fits with the “normal”, non-special education students either, as Beth frequently mentions feeling like she is being judged and that she is different. She describes herself as a “freakazoid” and mentions “being made fun of” by her peers. She notes that her

disability and the misunderstanding surrounding it often left her feeling undervalued and alone and “separated and judged” by her peers. Not only does she feel judged by her peer group, but she often felt judged and let down by the system that should have been advocating for her.

Both Beth and Andrew have struggled with the negative labels that were given to them early on in their education. For Andrew, the labeling has separated him from the “smart” kids and he frequently removed himself from that grouping, despite his obvious skills and abilities. For Beth, she has not only had a label placed on her by her peers, but has an actual medical diagnosis that she feels misrepresents her and is an inaccurate picture of her skills and abilities. Although neither student feels the label truly represents them, they remain prominent descriptors when asked to describe themselves as learners.

Labeled by Self

Wife, mother, workaholic.

Gwen is a self-described workaholic, “I am a disgusting workaholic... I will get the work done no matter what.” She is high energy and incredibly focused on her goals. She describes herself as a visual learner, one that needs to “see” the big picture and understand how all of the components fit together, “I like to do long range planning... I can schedule... it makes it easy for me to see, because I can see it coming long before it is even assigned.” Given her focus on school, coupled with her role of wife and mother, Gwen frequently feels overwhelmed and tries to find a balance between the demands of what she describes as “high-five parenting” and school. This “tag-team” parenting approach, one that rarely allows her and her husband to work as a true team, often leaves her feeling isolated and like her needs are not being met, “I am just here, trying to get through.” Gwen frequently struggles to manage the two roles of mother and student and does not always feel like she has a place to fit in in either world. At school, she feels

as if she is “old,” and tries to find camaraderie by working with the other nontraditional students in her classes. She identifies this “older” group as the group that is more committed to learning, “It is like the older people are sitting, you know in the front... we are all in the front. We are all trying to pay attention,” and she seems to find comfort in the fact that they are there together and “everybody else was on my level.” She actively seeks peer groups that she can relate to, other veterans for example, but often remains separate due to her other self-ascribed labels of wife and mother.

Soldier, disengaged, straight forward.

Oliver sees himself as a very straight-forward, tell it like it is kind of guy, “I told people how it was and how it was going to be done.” He also served time in the military (part of this time was spent as military police) and feels like he had two very distinct types of communication as a result of those experiences, “I have two types of writing, which is verbal garbage and police reporting.” The military was clearly a defining experience for him, and as a result finds it difficult to “fit in” and feels like the system does not recognize or value his previous experiences, “I have already been through four classes like that already... here we go again, which made me mad.” Despite his frustration, Oliver always comes to class and “tr[ies] to be engaged” versus “be[ing] bored all day.” Even though he attends classes, he is not engaged and seems to be simply going through the motions. Oliver accepts the fact that he does need support to build his language and math skills and recognizes that he has been “dealing with other ways of thinking” due to his military experience, but he still does not find the experience at the community college engaging and remains disconnected from the learning experience.

Gwen and Oliver have both been labeled as soldiers and as nontraditional students. They are unique in that they see themselves as separate from the other students or “kids” due to the

fact that they are both older, have served time in the military, and see themselves as having more life experience and understanding than their peers, “we [implying older students] are all kinda on the same level, and then there are the kids that just got out of high school and they are kinda on their own level” (Gwen). Oliver sees a further separation, as he explicitly identifies a “younger generation” and “older people” and sees himself as fitting somewhere in-between.

Poverty.

In addition the specific labels that were either self-ascribed or given by others, the additional societal label of poverty was revealed by each of the participants. Although it was not a dominant theme of the conversations, it was mentioned by every person in the study and was a descriptor that they all felt was important to mention. Some explicitly stated that they had struggled financially, “I’m rather poor” (Andrew), “I grew up poor. Stayed poor pretty much my, most of my adult life” (Oliver), while others revealed financial status through stories of applying for food stamps (Beth) and working within other social support systems.

Each student recognized their financial standing, and for some, it was the catalyst for enrolling in community college or enrolling in the military, “I was broke, first of all, my family isn’t well off, at all, I mean I knew they didn’t have money and I wasn’t going to do student loans because I didn’t want to pay them back for the rest of my life, so I went to the recruiting office...” (Gwen). “Being poor” had become an integrated part of their identities, one that was only mentioned in passing during the interviews. Although students did not specifically call it out as a limiting factor, it had created barriers (whether seen or unseen) for these students in regard to their access to the type of education they could feasibly pursue and worked to marginalize them further by restricting their choices.

Playing the Game

As participants reflected on their educational experiences leading up to placement in remedial education, a theme of “gaming the system” began to emerge. This gaming was often subtle, but was expressed in a variety of ways that included everything from avoiding specific classes (Gwen) to simply being allowed to coast through school without any real accountability or repercussions for actions (Oliver). Only one participant specifically called out being able to “game the system” (Andrew), as this strategy appeared to enable the students to manipulate the education system in a way that allowed them to successfully move through the system and graduate without accessing some of the skills that they would need to be successful in post-secondary education.

Track Switching and Avoiding

Gwen has been able to successfully game the system by identifying paths that do not require her to enroll in courses that she finds difficult, “I did NJROTC [in high school] cause it gave me something to do and I didn’t have to take a gym elective, cause I don’t like to take gym.” Although this seems like a minor course omission, it has been an avoidance strategy that Gwen used throughout high school, “I was not a good student... I would do the bare minimum of classes,” and continues to use at the community college, “I don’t have to take any [math]. There is a plus to this degree. Cause I looked and I was like, do I need math? No math, and that’s... we’re going there. No math. It is a plus.” Gwen has been able to consistently avoid courses and challenging material by switching to other electives, courses, and majors throughout her educational experiences. Gwen clearly recognized that this was an avoidance strategy “I feel like I did more electives than I did English and stuff” and realizes now that this was not a good approach for her, “I don’t really know what I was thinking, but up here (pointing at head), it

made so much sense.” This “track switching and avoiding” has left her at a disadvantage in terms of her skill sets, and yet she seems to carry on this pattern as demonstrated in her avoidance of math at the community college. Even with her continued avoidance, it seems that Gwen will still be able to successfully navigate the system to degree completion.

Compliance

In contrast to Gwen’s avoidance techniques, Oliver has learned to game the system by simply complying. He describes himself as “the one that always comes to class,” that completes the assignments and then “just gets on with my life.” He sees no real value in the work, “I’m not even paying attention to the book... blah, blah, blah” but has been able to successfully move through the system with marginal grades (Ds and Fs in high school), which never acted as an influencing factor in his learning, “I am not one of those people that cares about grades. I mean if I get a grade, I get a grade. I know I earned that grade.” Oliver has been able to move through the educational system not necessarily by being an active, engaged learner, but by simply showing up and going through the motions, “I will have to fill my time with something. So if I am going to be here, I might as well be in the class.” It is questionable how large of a role Oliver’s compliance has played in his current placement in remedial education, and how much compliance will allow him to continue to move through this and other programs at the college.

Pretending

Perhaps the richest description of playing of the system came from Andrew. Andrew is a charismatic young man that appears to have been able to move through the system by simply pretending to be much more confident and competent than he believes himself to be. Andrew is a self-described “math and science geek” and despite this description, he sees himself as an “average student [that] learns very, very quickly” but is also “kind of lazy.” Andrew describes an

educational journey that was filled with high-level math and sciences classes, high expectations from family and friends to achieve in these courses, but no real commitment to the work of learning.

Another interesting distinction made by Andrew was that although he was enrolled in these higher-level courses, he alludes to being separate from the other “smart” students, “I knew all of those people... but... I’m not one of them.” He also frequently describes his social circles as being comprised of “really intelligent people” or “people that are way more mechanically inclined than I was.” Andrew recognized the advantage of associating with these types of people and often relied on them to help move through more challenging situations:

I was always surrounding myself with really intelligent people as well, so if I had any issues, I could always ping really cool ideas or understand by having them help me out, and like I was saying, I knew the valedictorian, I wasn’t the valedictorian, but I knew him. And I made sure to surround myself with those kinds of people, and so school made a lot of sense.

Andrew’s ability to surround himself with the “right” people, speak articulately and intelligently, and his overall charm often allowed him to move through courses without really learning the material, “I was kinda coasting through it. I wasn’t really shooting for the stars.” His ability to game the system through pretending came to an end when he was placed in a remedial level math course and was forced to identify the “gaps” in his learning and had to work to fill them on his own rather than with the support of others.

Not Permitted to Play

While three of the four study participants were able to “game” the educational system in order to move through it without acquiring the basic skills needed to succeed in college level

work, one participant was never even allowed access to the game. Beth was unique in her educational experiences, as she was enrolled in special education. Beth's disability was never viewed by her as a limiting factor or cause for her lack of basic skills, but she instead blames the system that failed to prepare her for college level work, "it was just frustrating, not really disappointed, but just kinda like, I'm not really angry with myself, I am just angry at my school because they should have taught, or helped me prepare for college more than they did." Beth frequently talks about a system that did not understand her needs, and rather than supporting her, held her back and denied her access to learning:

In high school, I was in Special Ed classes, it's just cause I have a slight disability and it's like rare and stuff, mine is, and they are kinda like I don't know where to put you, so I am just gonna... you know the advanced thing is too hard and that was too easy and so now we are in the middle somewhere, and then it's just like I kept going, can I take this class? Can I take a history class? Can I take a math class? Can I take something harder? And they are just like no, that's too hard... um nope, nope that's going on and we have this... and you can't be... and da, da, da... and my mom like argued with them all the time and they just would not let me... I had to argue with them to take advanced acting, and like... and like, I did fine. It's just like, what? I want to take German because I can understand it fluently, and I was just like, I really want to learn how to pronounce it, and she, they were just like, no, it's too hard. You'll fall behind and fail.

Beth is not oblivious the challenges brought on by her disability or the fact that she is indeed "different" than other students, as she often describes those outside of special education as "normal people;" but even with this recognition that she is not "normal" she still feels like she

has been misrepresented and mislabeled by a system that did not seem to know how to handle her unique situation,

It is like they are kinda going off of normal special ed kids that are lower functioning... we could have figured something out if they just took the time to figure out something, but they just didn't... it was like they just didn't know what to do with you.

The educational system that Beth experienced prior to enrollment in remedial education courses left her feeling unheard, undervalued, and completely disregarded by the system. She felt like she did not belong there and frequently refers to the educational system as an ominous “they;” “*they* thought it was too hard... *they* were just afraid I wasn't going to keep up... *they* didn't know what to do.” This separation and identification of another “they” implies that the option to “game” or simply engage the system was taken from her and that an outside source was in control of her fate.

Track switching, avoiding, complying, and pretending were all strategies used by the participants to work their way through the educational system without mastering the basic skills required for college level work. This revelation brings up interesting questions about the educational system regarding current structures, requirements, and success measures for students, as well as how much students are able to continue to “game” once they reach college. However, perhaps the most intriguing part is not what happens to students when they successfully game the system, but what happens to them when they are denied access to the game.

Wanting to Belong

As a result of feelings of isolation or marginalization, another common theme expressed by the study participants was a desire to belong. For some, belonging is expressed through social

groups and increased communication, while for others it is evident in their desire to be physically connected to others and have frequent access to supports. Wanting to belong is an innate human desire that has been explored numerous times by theorists (Dewey, 1958; Osterman, 2000) and for some students, placement in remedial education courses can either build that sense of belonging or isolate them further from their peers (Steele, 1997). For the three of the students in this study, remedial education helped to create a new understanding of belonging as well as supplied tools to help build and strengthen relationships, while the fourth remains somewhat disconnected and disengaged from learning.

Belonging Through Self-Awareness

Andrew seeks belonging through acceptance of the situations and surroundings in which he finds himself. When he first discovered that he needed to take remedial education courses, he described feeling shocked and ashamed “I was pretty floored” and it was “embarrassing and humbling.” Given this reaction, it would have been easy for Andrew to withdraw or rebel against the college. Instead of reacting in a negative way, Andrew took it upon himself to reflect on why he may need to be in remedial level math and began to fully immerse himself in the program, “I was always the kid that was hand up, gonna do something.” He became self-reflective, and began to recognize ways in which he may need to continue to build his character. He describes a recognition of “gaps” in both his learning and his personal life and saw this process as a learning experience, one that would eventually help him to meet his goals and become a stronger, more self-aware person.

Ah, that gap would still be there if that class wasn't there, but I would have just skipped over it, not knowing that it was there. I just, boom, blown through college and I would have just kept going, probably on the same path that I am on now, but, knowing that there

were gaps in my life, kind of opened my eyes to where else might there be some gaps. I could kinda look and be more observant on yourself and pay attention to what you do and you don't know, and fill those...so knowing that I'm missing a gap there, kinda helped me realize, oh hey, so there might be a few other gaps that I should pay attention to.

This new level of self-awareness enabled Andrew to not only fill his educational "gaps" but also enabled him to identify and fill ones in his personal life. He is now more focused on his future and has a new awareness of how to "fill the gaps" and find a place to fit in, "And uh, that's kind of what I got from that remedial course is that there's this aspect in your life that you are blind to, and that you need to pay attention with."

Belonging Through Support

Throughout the interview, Gwen often characterized herself as different and outside of the typical student at the college. Despite these differences, it was evident that Gwen selected her current community college because it gave her the opportunity to feel like she belonged and was part of a community, "I found that I learn better in a smaller environment... more of a close knit way." Even though Gwen perceived herself as outside the norms of the traditional college student, she still actively sought connections with others.

For Gwen, this sense of belonging was established by physical proximity to teachers and the level of support provided by the college. She stresses on multiple occasions how important it was to her to feel like she could get support and feel like her education mattered to someone other than herself, "You can physically reach out and touch somebody... it was so easy to get a hold of him... hands on..." She speaks very highly of the teachers and of their commitment to making sure that students feel connected and have access to resources they need to be successful.

Additionally, Gwen was able to discover skill sets through her coursework that enabled her to make stronger connections with her family. She was able to more effectively manage her time, “I didn’t realize how much time I was wasting,” and was therefore able to more clearly articulate her needs. She describes her communication style as having “changed drastically,” and that she is now able to “communicate more exactly what I need.” This ability to express her needs in a more succinct manner has strengthened her relationship with her husband, and has carried over into her education as well. Gwen is now able to plan more efficiently for school and personal tasks and has developed the skill set to not only actively seek support, but to articulate her needs for support both at home and school.

Belonging Through Self-Acceptance

Given her struggles in the educational system, Beth had felt separated from others for many years. Her disability not only set her apart in terms of skill acquisition, but she described being physically separated from other classmates as well, “we had one, like two separate buildings, one for ours and one for regular classes, but ours was like, really small and we were like all cramped in there.” Beth’s isolation continued to grow as she frequently talked about being ridiculed and misunderstood by peers and family, “getting made fun of... I just felt like a piece of junk... feeling like crud and like I didn’t matter.” She not only felt like she was constantly being judged by others, but began to judge herself harshly as well, “I learned you can’t really be yourself” and that “my opinion didn’t matter.” Beth even goes on to describe being forced into a shell, “I was put into one, just growing up and everything. I wasn’t really allowed to say anything” and that “the best way to please people is to not say anything.” She was continually made to feel like she was wrong or inadequate in some way and was “put into this

little thing [shell] where I wasn't expressing myself the way I wanted to because it was wrong in some way."

Once Beth was enrolled in remedial education at her community college, she expressed a shift in not only how she was viewed by others, but in how she began to view herself as well:

It has helped boost confidence in a way, cause I have a voice here. It is kinda like, I can be afraid to express myself or talk to people or whatever, it is okay if I say something wrong. No one is going to jump on me for saying something wrong. They just go oh well, that wasn't quite what that meant... I don't know, it just feels like you can express yourself a lot more. And it definitely, the classes have helped me with that because, raising your hand, talking in class, that helps you get out of that shy mode, where you are like, nobody look at me... I don't want to raise my hand, I am scared, are you going to yell at me for saying a weird thing? I don't know? Are you going to be judgmental? I don't know? And then you just realize, no one really cares, so just say what you are going to say, so I get ... that's a good change I think, to feel like you matter. And you can be yourself, and people can like you or hate you, it doesn't really matter.

This shift in perspective was brought on through her course work and supportive environment, "it feels like they want you more to just succeed here" which has enabled her to feel like she has more control and that she is "really trying." This supportive atmosphere coupled with an overall welcoming, safe environment, "it is more accepting here... there is like a mutual respect here... people are just awesome... always hold[ing] open doors... smiling, kind of, how you doing, it is so good to see you" has finally made Beth feel like she has a place to belong. The remedial education program and community college has developed Beth's sense of belonging,

acceptance, and of being valued. These developments have enabled her to shift her view of herself, therefore empowering her to seek new challenges and have more confidence.

Lack of Connection

Many students choose to attend community colleges because they offer close-knit, supportive environments (Merrow, 2007; Lang, 2009) that can often be lost on larger college campuses. Although community colleges provide this smaller environment, not all students actively seek out connections with teachers or peers in order to build support structures for success. In stark contrast to the others included in this study, one participant, Oliver, did not actively seek to belong or fit in with a specific group. It seems as if he intentionally keeps himself separated by drawing boundaries between his school and personal life, “I try to keep everybody separate.” He sees himself as separate from the other students, “I gotta deal with another age group” and lacks any real connection to his peers and the school. Although he describes himself as a very straightforward person, his experiences reveal a pattern of compliance that often negates his true feelings, resulting in him going along with things simply because it is what he has been told to do. This level of compliance is most directly seen when Oliver talks about abandoning his desire to become a police officer and joining the military:

I love law enforcement, I mean, ever since I was pretty much a kid, I always wanted to be a cop. But, when the Iraq Afghanistan kicked off, I was like, well, I gotta go play Army and be in the military because it is what my family does. If there is a war, we go fight in the war even, if we didn't believe in it.

Oliver's revelation, "we go fight in the war, even if we didn't believe in it" reinforces his pattern of compliance and the term "play Army" reveals once again, that although he was participating, he may not have truly been engaged or seen himself as belonging in that role.

Oliver seems to have spent much of his education on fringe, "I hated high school. Like I hated it to death," never really engaging in his learning or connecting with others. The only time that Oliver has expressed interest in education is when he is learning something new and working in areas that "actually make me think." Although Oliver is disengaged and not actively seeking to belong in the college, he does hope to one day belong in the police academy. Unlike the other students, Oliver's desire to belong is a more long term goal and not reflected in his day to day interactions with the college, and his lack of engagement over the years may in fact be a direct result of not feeling like he belongs (Farrington, Roderick, Allensworth, Nagaoka, Keyes, Johnson, & Beechum, 2012).

Answering the Research Questions

This study set out to develop an understanding about the lived experiences of students in remedial education at the community college. An IPA approach helped to reveal the many complexities of the remedial experience and illuminated the major role that prior educational experiences play in preparing (or not preparing students) for post-secondary work. Additionally, the study examined the influence of labeling and how remedial programs can either reinforce or deconstruct those labels.

How do students who are enrolled in remedial education at the community college describe their educational journey?

According to Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) it is important to select a homogenous group for IPA studies, as their sharing of similar experiences should enable a deep and more

thorough analysis of the phenomenon, that adequately represent the student perspective rather than a population (Smith et. al, 2009, p. 49). In an effort to establish this perspective, the study was delimited to students either currently or recently enrolled in remedial education programs at community colleges. Although there were few limitations in the study, the participating students often described themselves in similar ways, came from similar backgrounds, and their educational journeys were marked by marginalization and a subsequent desire to find a place to belong.

For these students, their educational journeys were marred by the labels that they had either given themselves or were given by others. Some of the labels have positive connotations, such as mother or soldier, while others have much deeper and damaging associations, “he knew I was going to not behave and just be a bad kid” (Andrew). Whether positive or negative, these labels acted as marginalizing elements for each of the students, as they often found it difficult to connect with others “I knew all those people, but I’m not one of them” (Andrew); “being looked at like a freakazoid (Beth)” and frequently saw themselves as outside of the “normal” students. This feeling of disconnection often left them feeling as if they did not have a voice to affect change and that their previous experiences and understanding did not matter. These students arrived at the community college with a set vision of themselves, and the colleges structures and programs worked to either confirm or breakdown these preconceived notions.

How were students prepared for post-secondary education prior to enrollment in remedial education?

Feeling inadequately prepared and let down by previous education experiences was a common theme expressed among participants. Some felt let down or disillusioned by the system, “I am angry at my school because they should have taught or helped me prepared for college

more than they did” (Beth), while others felt like they were able to coast through without really developing the skill sets they needed and entered college at a deficit. Both Beth and Andrew describe the transition as difficult, a sort of “shell shock” (Andrew), that left them feeling overwhelmed by the new, more intense workload, “it [high school] wasn’t challenging, and then when I got to college it was overwhelmingly challenging” (Beth). None of the student’s spoke highly of their high school experiences and all seemed to imply that they were not prepared for the rigors and stresses of school, “I was honestly not prepared. No, not at all” (Andrew); “I was prepared to go to college, I just wasn’t mentally prepared to go to college” (Oliver). Oliver also mentions his appreciation for the college’s advising team and their support in the enrollment process, “okay, this is how you apply for college,” which implies that these types of discussions never took place when he was in high school. Gwen also seemed to be able to move through high school without developing essential skills and describes her school as enabling her to miss key educational opportunities via her “track switching” techniques, “in the south, you are allowed to do that.”

How do these students see themselves as succeeding in post-secondary education?

For the students enrolled in remedial education programs, understanding how they defined succeeding within post-secondary was important because it helps to shed a light on what students deem as valuable and important in their education. For the students in this study, the idea of success developed into something more than the acquisition of basic skills; it was about filling the void of an unmet need. Additionally, learning to navigate their way through marginalizing labels and developing the confidence needed to face challenges and no longer “game the system,” which became central to their sense of belonging and empowerment within secondary education, resulting in great successes in terms of confidence, self-efficacy, and the

ability to see themselves as a valued and important part of the educational process, “It feels like they want you more to just succeed here; you know they want you to succeed” (Gwen). Although Oliver remains on the outskirts in terms of developing a sense of belonging, he has been successful in his progression towards his goal of becoming a police officer. Additionally, all of the students have clear goals in sight for their futures and feel as if those goals are attainable.

What are the lived experiences of students enrolled in remedial education at community college?

The lived experiences of students enrolled in remedial education at the community college are not easy to define. While each of their experiences were unique, common themes of identity, support (or lack thereof), belonging, and empowerment resonated throughout the descriptions, resulting in positive experiences for all of the students in the study and a type of self-actualization/verification that may not have been achieved without this experience.

For these students, the remedial education experience worked to help redefine the labels they had been carrying and helped them to break free of the marginalizing effects of said labels. They were able to work to redefine how they saw themselves both in and outside of the college. In Andrew’s case, remedial education helped him become more reflective and to identify areas in which he hoped to continue to learn and grow. Both Gwen and Beth made huge gains in terms of becoming advocates for themselves and in learning that they do indeed have a voice that matters. Gwen is now able to find time for herself, which she describes as “glorious” and is able to express her needs in a way that give her a sense of power and control over her life that had been missing before. Beth was able to break free of previously held visions of herself and has begun to view herself in a more confident, positive light. For the first time in her educational journey, she feels like she has a voice and that she matters, which is incredibly empowering in both her

education and personal life. She has learned to become an advocate for herself and now recognizes that she does indeed matter, “people want to listen more...I just feel more expressive... I am in a different mindset.”

Although Oliver appears to be an outlier, he did express appreciation for the college and for the supports that are in place to help students through the program. He specifically thanked his advisor and described meeting with the advising team as, “probably one of the best things that this school requires you to do.” Although he did not make the same connections or develop a sense of belonging or levels of empowerment like the other students, Oliver’s experiences are still important because they help to shed a light on the experiences of students that are not engaged in the process and can help to shape questions around how to increase engagement for students like Oliver.

The lived experiences of students in remedial education centered on finding a place to belong, which led to feelings of empowerment and breaking free of the labels that had been used to define them in the past. Students’ educational journeys and preparation for post-secondary education played pivotal roles in how they defined themselves and how they perceived themselves succeeding in college. The experience of being enrolled in remedial education worked to dismantle previously held beliefs about themselves and their abilities and ultimately worked to empower and engage students in the learning process.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS AND SYNTHESIS

This chapter highlights the importance of the key themes identified in the analysis of students' lived experiences as they relate back the structure of remedial education programs, as presented in Chapter 2 and other places throughout this document, highlighting especially the elements that have helped make these students successful. The topics below emphasize the importance of understanding students' lived experiences, and the value of listening to their perspectives, so as to offer insights into what has most helped and hindered their success.

Identity

One of the most prevalent themes to emerge from this study, including the pilot study, is related to questions of identity, and in particular, how students enrolled in remedial education programs perceive themselves as learners and participants in post-secondary education programs. Numerous researchers (e.g., Arendale, 2005; Holland, 2015; Oyserman & Swim, 2001; Steele, 1997) have discussed the negative effects of stigmas, stigma associated with enrollment in remedial education programs, and the negative effects that a remedial label can have on students. Arendale's (2005) research discussed the many names and philosophical ideologies regarding remedial programs (deficit model to developmental), and supported the notion that regardless of the name ascribed to programs, the negative stigma remains. Frequent paradigm shifts have often led to confusion for remedial students and programs (Shaw, 1997) as institutions need to find a way to not only support students in the process, but also work to break down the stigma and negativity that often accompanies the remedial label. If the stigma remains, students will often engage in a myriad of behaviors in order to mitigate the effects of the label. Both Steele (1997) and Holland (2015) highlighted the multiple strategies that students use to cope with stigma

(internalization of the negative stereotype, disengagement, avoidance) which can not only affect how students engage in the learning process, but can also affect self-esteem and self-efficacy.

Pilot Study

The pilot study that helped shape this research gave initial insights into how labeling and stigma can affect students' ability to learn and function within an education system, as well as how it affects feelings of competency and self-worth. The findings of the pilot study demonstrated that the remedial label worked against the participants' views of self and acted as a catalyst for an identity crisis, of sorts, one in which the remedial label was in stark contrast to who they believed themselves to be. Both participants in the pilot study struggled to come to terms with how the remedial label redefined them as learners, and each took a different approach to ease the effects of said labeling. One participant worked to disprove the perceived stigma (not intelligent, incapable) of the label by fully engaging and succeeding in her course of study (a form of coping described by Holland (2015)). The other seemed to internalize the negative stigma, became incredibly frustrated with the process, and completely disengaged from the learning. Regardless of their approach to dealing with the label, both participants' felt that the label was an inaccurate representation of their abilities, one which created a great deal of stress and anxiety as they worked to reidentify themselves as learners.

Current Study

The participants in the current study had the additional burden of the remedial label added to the labels they were already carrying from earlier in their lives (lazy, poor, etc.). This additional label was seen as one more defining element used to reinforce their perceived academic abilities in prior educational settings. In contrast to the students in the pilot study, who aggressively rejected the remedial label, the participants in the main study had actively adopted

and were effectively living the labels that had been imposed upon them by their own and others' language. The participants in the main study did not seem to suffer through the same type of identity crisis as the pilot participants, thus incorporating this label into their already diminished view of self, helping to perpetuate the notion that they were not of value and did not belong in the traditional education setting. Although it is unclear at this time why one set of participants more readily adopted the label than the other, it is important to consider how the labeling shaped the participants' approaches to learning and their perceptions of their abilities in regard to academic success.

Moving Beyond Labels

For the participants in this study, their experiences in remedial education were actually antidotes to their preconceived notions of self, and helped liberate them from the labels that had worked against them in other educational settings. For one participant, this liberation originated from being held accountable by his teacher to actually complete the assignments, thus showing what he had learned. This resulted in more active engagement in the learning (sitting in the front of the class, participating in discussions, and taking responsibility instead of making excuses), which helped to shed a former label of laziness. There was an appreciation for this new level of accountability, as it was seen as a catalyst for shifting previous avoidance behaviors. Holding students accountable to the work not only engaged them in the process, but also fostered a new feeling of value and respect as a learner. Accountability acted as a critical component of the remedial experience because it enabled students to shift from a passive to an active learning process.

Another major component that enabled participants to move beyond their previous notions of self was a safe environment that welcomed students and worked to create a sense of

belonging, regardless of perceived academic abilities. While the participants in the pilot study described uncomfortable, almost hostile environments in remedial classrooms, ones that perpetuated negativity and alienated them from non-remedial students, this study reveals the importance of welcoming, supportive programs focused on student strengths rather than weaknesses and ones that make students feel included at the institution. The focus on a welcoming environment echoes the research of Barbatis (2010), which highlights the importance of social interactions and the integration of remedial programs into the system. One participant shared perhaps the most dynamic shift in self-perception, as she described not only being put into a shell by her former educational experiences, but also of feeling completely unworthy and undervalued throughout her entire K–12 experience. For this student, enrollment in a remedial education program gave her the tools to express herself in a new and exciting way, and helped her to “boost her confidence” in a way that she had not experienced in the past. She now feels that she has a place to belong, where “nice, approachable people” are available to help her, and that welcome her to the campus. She feels challenged: “I feel like I am really trying”; and for the first time feels that her voice and her opinions really matter: “I have a voice here.” Although exact elements that created this welcoming environment are unclear and should be explored in future research, this study supports other studies (Mellow & Heelan, 2008; Merisotis & Phipps, 2000) that have shown the importance of having clear ideologies regarding how remedial students are to be served, who is best suited to serve them, and the type of environments that are needed for students to feel supported and successful.

While two participants in the current study were able to shed their labels, two others retained them, but learned new strategies to incorporate the labels in a positive way. One participant was able to channel her “workaholic” nature in a much more productive and positive

way, and instead of spending time on meaningless tasks (“I didn’t realize how much time I was wasting”), she has used her new-found skills learned in class to create “more efficient” time to devote to her family and school. The participant credits this shift to the skills she developed in her classes and to her incredibly supportive teachers, which again demonstrates the importance of creating a supportive environment for students. Although one participant has retained many of his labels (straightforward, disengaged), and is not engaged in the learning process, he continues to attend classes and does actively seek ways to become engaged: “let me go and learn and see if I learn something new.” Like the other participants, he expresses admiration and appreciation for his teacher (“I love my teacher to death, she’s awesome”) and he enjoys that aspect of class. Perhaps it is this connection with his teacher that keeps him coming to class, even though he is not fully engaged in the learning. This participant’s experience bring up interesting questions regarding relationships between students and teachers as well as questions regarding motivation and engagement for students that have yet to be engaged in their education.

Accountability

Many of the perceived problems in today’s educational system seem to stem from arguments around who should take the blame for students’ failures. In many cases, post-secondary schools blame secondary schools for ill-prepared students; while students blame teachers, and teachers blame seemingly unmotivated kids (Hoyt & Sorenson, 2001; Maeroff, 1982; Rockefeller Foundation Report, 2008; Roderick et al., 2009). As highlighted by Hoyt and Sorenson (2001) and the Rockefeller Foundation Report (2008), far too many students receive passing grades, but still require remedial support in college. This study supports these assertions, as three of the four participants’ described ways in which they were able to “game” the system,

and move through the K–12 system without having truly mastered the skills and competencies needed to be successful in post-secondary education.

Some of the participants in the current study were active game players, specifically manipulating coursework and classes to avoid more difficult tasks, while others seemed to slip through the cracks without raising any major concerns or questions about their abilities. Whether the game playing was intentional or not, this recollection of experiences in K–12 education seems to echo the research that denigrates K–12’s current measures of success, accountability, and rigor (Gewertz, 2011; Hoyt & Sorenson, 2001; Kerrigan & Slater, 2010; Maeroff, 1982; Rockefeller Foundation Report, 2008; Roderick et al., 2009, Rosenbaum, 2004) and calls into question the current systems that are used to measure and evaluate students’ college readiness, as well as the current measures of accountability and success for students.

One of the most interesting findings that emerged from this study is that, in addition to the development of “core knowledge” skills (as described by Roderick et al., 2009), as a college competency, the development of non-cognitive factors are just as important, if not more important, in a student’s development of self-efficacy and levels of engagement in learning. Roderick, Nagaoka, and Coca (2009) contended that current K–12 systems lack an understanding of what it means to be “college ready” and that schools are too focused on content knowledge and are not providing students with the “core knowledge” skills they need to be successful in college. While students do need “core knowledge” skills (i.e. analytical thinking) to be successful in post-secondary education, a critical literature review conducted by Farrington, Roderick, Allensworth, Nagaoka, Keyes, Johnson, and Beechum (2012) presented an additional skill level, non-cognitive factors, that need to be considered when working with students. Farrington et al. (2012) presents a compelling argument that non-cognitive factors, academic

behaviors such as academic perseverance, academic mindsets, learning strategies, and social skills (p. 8) are all critical components to learning, and that a deficit in even one of these areas can greatly impact how students learn and engage in their education. Farrington et al. (2012) maintain that these factors are absolutely essential, and that without these skills, students will engage in a myriad of behaviors that can detract from their overall academic performance.

The games that these participants described playing are not unique, and are often representative of deeper issues (e.g., feelings of inadequacy or of not feeling valued within the system) (Farrington et al., 2009; Osterman, 2000) and call into question the ways in which we currently evaluate and measure college readiness and a failure to identify deeper issues. Perhaps it is not that schools have failed to teach the basic skills and academic mindsets that students need to be successful, but instead that the schools have perhaps failed to recognize the “games” that students play to manipulate the systems as a way to cope with unfulfilled needs. For the participants included in this study, the remedial education experience worked to strengthen many of these non-cognitive behaviors (development of study skills, time management, etc.) and held students accountable to the work in a way that they had not experienced in the past. Three of the four participants also describe learning that was relevant to their lives, which supports the notion that remedial programs need to be dynamic, not drill and skill (Levin & Calcagno, 2008; Soliday, 1996) and that the learning should be authentic and relevant to students’ lives. This new level of accountability helped the participants work through challenges, develop skills for success in college and beyond, and helped build confidence and adjust to academic mindsets, as the students began to see new successes both in and out of the classroom.

Sense of Community

One of the greatest creators of an academic mindset and academic engagement is the development of a sense of belonging. Belonging is an essential part of the educational experience as, “feeling part of a school or classroom community has significant psychological benefits for students and makes them more likely to engage in productive academic behaviors” (Farrington et al., 2009, p. 28). Based on the recollection of the students’ educational journeys, this sense of belonging was missing from their previous educational experiences. A couple of participants described being disconnected from their learning and saw themselves as “not good students,” which resulted in avoidance of challenging classes and disengagement from the process entirely. Although one participant describes a pleasant K–12 experience, it is evident from his frequent distinction between himself and “the smart kids” that he did not feel a sense of belonging or community either. Another participant was constantly denied access to belonging through physical (being in another building) and social/academic (not being permitted to take classes with “normal” kids) isolation, which resulted in lowered self-esteem and diminished feelings of worth.

The notion of belonging or being part of an educational community is an essential part of the learning process as “teachers and students share membership in this community, and it is through collaboration that learning occurs” (Osterman, 2000, p. 324). A sense of belonging can be established through welcoming environments, positive student–teacher interactions, and peer-to-peer interactions (Abelman & Dalessandro, 2008; Farrington et al., 2009; Hadden, 2010; Mellow & Heelan, 2008; Osterman, 2000), thus hearkening back to the work of Abelman and Dalessandro (2008), Mellow and Heelan (2008), Merisotis and Phipps (2000), and Shaw (1997), whose research highlights the importance of not only creating a welcoming environment for

students, but in having a comprehensive mission and vision for the college that truly welcomes and is willing to serve all students, not just those deemed to be “college ready.” Exclusive environments that prioritize and value one class of students over another can lead to feelings of “isolation, alienation, and polarization” (Osterman, 2000, p. 324) which will in turn affect students’ motivations and academic development, leading to poor performance and or poor acquisition of skills.

Three of the four participants in this study expressed a clear desire to belong. As discussed in Chapter 4, each participant took a different approach to gaining acceptance (i.e., by seeking belonging through either self-awareness, support, or self-acceptance) and fortunately, they were all able to make strong connections that enabled them to move beyond their feelings of isolation and gain positive experiences that allowed them to become more reflective, confident, and empowered in their learning. This sense of belonging enabled the participants to see themselves in a new and positive light, which was focused on future aspirations instead of on shortcomings. They were able to move beyond their labels and to see themselves as succeeding in post-secondary education. The remedial education programs examined in this study were a major influencing factor in shedding these labels, as they created the type of welcoming, supportive environments that enabled a safe space for these participants to build and actively engage in new learning and skill development as well as begin to address the non-cognitive skills that are an essential part of the educational process.

Summary

The findings of this study offer two unique insights regarding experiences in remedial education. First, the study examines how students perceive remedial education programs, the course structures, skills taught, teachers, and supports. It supports research that highlights the

need for programs that are supportive, not punitive (Shaw, 1997) and programs that work to hold students accountable to their work through the use of strong pedagogical practices and the creation of work that is relevant to students lives (Levin & Calcagno, 2008; Soliday, 1996). Additionally, this study begins to explore how students' education journeys leading up to enrollment in remedial programs influences their acceptance or rejection of the programs and has begun to offer some understanding around the key skills and cognitive factors (Farrington et al., 2009; Roderick et al., 2009) that may need to be considered when working with these students. Ultimately, this study has shown the complexity of meeting remedial education student needs and the importance of valuing students' perspectives and of giving students a voice to express those needs.

Researcher's Reflection

When this inquiry first began, the researcher was heavily influenced by her prior experiences in education, both in teaching and in her own educational journey. These experiences and somewhat rudimentary understanding of remedial students were greatly altered through the course of the research process. This study has worked to enhance the researcher's personal understanding of the remedial experience through the identification of common themes and outlier experiences for these students. In addition, the identification of outlier experiences has prompted new thinking around the importance of outliers in research. For example, while three of the four participants in this study described active engagement in their remedial programs, one participant remained disengaged. Despite his disengagement, he continued to attend classes, complete assignments, and was actively working towards his goals. This unique experience of continuing to participate, even while being disengaged has created numerous

questions regarding student engagement, compliance, and motivation and has created a desire to continue to build upon this research topic.

Future Research

This study works as a launching place for further research and brings up additional questions regarding these students, the programs that are designed to serve them, and the K–12 system that is supposed to prepare them. Given the relatively small sample used in this study and in the pilot study, it would be useful to enlarge the sample size to see if the identified themes continue to resonate in larger and more diverse populations of remedial education students. Additionally, given that three of the four students in this study were from the same community college, a larger study might identify differences in remedial programs at different schools. Alternatively, given that three students all spoke very highly of their experiences at their college, it would be interesting to spend more time analyzing the specific remedial program at their school, as well as how the school has established an overall culture and a welcoming environment. The current research, which used IPA to incorporate student voices into the analysis of remedial education, suggests that studies that do *not* include student perspective will be losing a critical element of understanding into the complexities of this issue. Additional research will continue to benefit and support remedial programs and the students they serve, especially in helping to break the stigmas and negative associations that often accompany these programs. Exploring these issues further may be handled in the following ways:

Case Study

One of the major questions that arose from this research revolves around how much individual experience influenced the participants' perceptions of remedial education. Given the unique perspectives and experiences of each participant, it would add to the body of research to

continue this line of research using a case study approach. A case study would allow the researcher to delve more deeply into each individual's experience, as well as provide an opportunity to explore the areas in which participants had outlier experiences in more detail. This approach was not considered in the current research, as it would have seemed to have compromised the focus on remedial education and would have required a shift in methodology.

Additionally, it is suggested that a case study approach be conducted that examines each of the institutions used in the study in order to explore specific program options, course requirements, as well as pedagogical classroom practices. For one school in this study, a welcoming environment seemed paramount to student success. A case study approach would enable the researcher to truly study the environment at each college and discern if this welcoming, supportive environment is related to specific teacher, specific courses, or if it represents an overall ideology for the school. This type of research would build on the work of Mellow and Heelan (2008) and Shaw (1997) that emphasize the importance of culture and ideology in student success.

Mixed Methods

One of the key areas that needs further development is in exploring what can be done differently within K–12 systems. Currently, K–12 is bombarded with a multitude of accountability measures (PARCC, CMAS, ACT, etc.), but these measures alone are not giving an accurate picture of what is happening for students within the system. This research study supports the work of Gwertz (2011) and Hoyt and Sorenson (2001) that show that current accountability measures are often not accurate predictors of success, as well as supports critics of K–12 (Brenneman et al., 1998; Maeroff, 1982; Rockefeller Foundation Report, 2008; Roderick et al., 2009, Rosenbaum, 2004) who clearly admonish the system for inadequate preparation,

poor grading policies, and lowered expectations, as participants in both studies (pilot and main) felt like they had been either misled or let down by the current system. In order to gain more insights as to what is happening for students as well as within the system as a whole, it suggested that additional qualitative studies, in conjunction with quantitative analysis, be conducted with students, teachers, counselors, and school leaders. A multiple methods approach to studying the K–12 system would enable researchers to develop a more in-depth analysis and understanding of the complexities of the system and the students it serves. An iterative process, one utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods (using one to inform the other) would help to bring to the surface issues that may not be seen when only one type of data is used. Exploring the K–12 system (inclusive of all stakeholders) using both quantitative and qualitative methods would help to create understanding around how both forms of measurement and analysis can work together to tell the story of what is happening in K–12 education.

Conclusion

A major goal of this study was to add to the current body of literature regarding remedial education programs and to gain an understanding of how these programs affect students by exploring their lived experiences leading up to, and enrollment in, remedial education. The intention of the researcher was to gain insights into the remedial student population and to develop a more thorough understanding of the multitude of issues that face these students, beyond their needs for basic skill acquisition. The methodology used in the study, IPA, allowed the researcher to delve deeply into the experiences of four students, and to explore more intimately the phenomenon of being a student enrolled in remedial education at community college. The IPA approach was selected for its reflection of the researchers ontological, epistemological, and methodological beliefs and because of its heavy reliance on co-construction

and a double-hermeneutic inquiry that encouraged the type of flexible and open interpretation that was needed to break down perceived power structures to truly explore this phenomena.

Despite the small sample size, this study illuminated many important issues facing remedial education students that cannot or have not been explored by traditional quantitative approaches. The study highlights how labels (given either by others or by ourselves) are representative of our feelings of worth (Holland, 2015; Oyserman & Swim, 2001; Steele, 1997), and more importantly, that these labels can be broken down or reinforced by educational structures and supports. This research supports current literature on the benefits of accountability measures for K-12 education, as three of the four students noted that accountability was a key element to breaking their concepts of failure, and reinforces studies that suggest that current accountability measures do not tell the whole story of what is happening for students. This study also highlights the importance of non-cognitive learning, and suggests that non-cognitive factors can be just as, if not more important than, the development of skills.

Perhaps most importantly, this study has provided an opportunity for students to express their concerns, their struggles, and their successes within remedial education programs at the community college. Interpretations have been based on students' exact words and have helped to highlight the importance of student perspective in research. These students have often felt marginalized, as if their voices did not matter; this study therefore serves to validate their experiences and to give voice to an often voiceless population.

In particular, this study demonstrates that students need to feel valued, and to have a voice and a say in their education. The results show for the participants in this study, feelings of self-worth were critical in their success in remedial education; thus, remedial programs should consider increasing their efforts to raise feelings of self-esteem and self-worth, which have been

undermined by prior stigmas and negative experiences that have often accompanied students on their journeys to the remedial classroom. The importance of recognizing and valuing students' prior experiences and allowing students the opportunity, safe space, and institutional supports to explore and express their needs as they move through the system may be the most important conclusion of this study.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Letter of Cooperation

Appendix B: Letter of Consent

Appendix C: Participant Letter

Appendix D: Recruitment Flyer

Appendix E: Colorado State IRB Approval

Appendix F: Interview Protocol

Appendix A

Colorado State University
Institutional Review Board
321 General Services Building
Campus Delivery 2011
Fort Collins, CO 80523-2011
Attention: Janell Barker, Senior IRB Coordinator

Dear Sir or Madam;

I am aware that Kathleen Lannan, a graduate student in the School of Education at Colorado State University, is conducting a research study entitled: “*An Interpretative Phenomenological Approach to Understanding Students’ Lived Experiences in Remedial Education at Community Colleges,*” and she has shared with me the details of the study. **<Institution must indicate that they understand the study and feel that the participants will be adequately protected>** I feel comfortable that the participants in this study will be adequately protected, and I give Kathleen Lannan permission to conduct this study at our <agency/institution/school>.

<Outline the organization’s involvement in the study> Our human resources office will provide Kathleen Lannan the email listing of our employees in order to send them an email survey that will not ask for their names.

<Name of agency/institution/school> requests that the <agency/institution/school> name and identifiers of its employees be kept confidential in the research results. Kathleen Lannan has agreed to provide my office a copy of the CSU IRB approval document before beginning recruitment.

If there are any questions, please contact my office.

Sincerely,
Qualified Individual

<Document should be signed by the individual qualified to obligate the organization>

Appendix B

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Colorado State University

TITLE OF STUDY: An Interpretative Phenomenological Approach to Understanding Students' Lived Experiences in Remedial Education at Community Colleges

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Sharon Anderson, Ph.D., Professor, School of Education, Sharon.Anderson@ColoState.EDU; (970) 491-6861

CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Kathleen Lannan, Doctoral Student, School of Education, kt66@hotmail.com; (540) 336-3809

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH? You have been asked to participate in this research study because you have recently completed or are currently enrolled in at least one remedial education course at the community college.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY? The study will be conducted by the co-principal investigator, Kathleen Lannan, a doctoral student working on a dissertation study. The principal investigator, Dr. Sharon Anderson, will be available for support in data collection, analysis, and all phases of the study.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY? This study is designed to gain an understanding of the experience of being a remedial education student at the community college level. This study will offer a unique, student perspective of this phenomenon and will attempt to give a voice to an often underrepresented student population.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST? You will take part an interview at a public locations (coffee shop, campus libraries, etc.) that is conveniently located for you. If an in-person interview is not possible, your interview will be conducted online or over the telephone. All interviews will be audio or video recorded and will kept in a secure location until analysis is complete. Interviews are anticipated to take from 60-90 minutes and follow-up interviews may be requested after initial analysis is completed. Even with follow-up interviews, your total time commitment will be no more than 5 hours.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO? You will be asked to answer several interview questions relating to your educational experiences before, during, and after (if applicable) enrollment in remedial education. The interviews will be informal and you are encouraged to speak openly and honestly about your experiences. We will be working together to understand your educational experiences, and you may be asked to review analysis or notes of the interview to ensure

accuracy. You may also be asked for follow-up interviews if questions or more information is needed after initial analysis. Follow-up interviews are not required, but encouraged. As it is important to accurately capture your thoughts and comments, all in-person interviews will be audio recorded and online interviews will be videotaped. The researcher will request verbal permission to audio or video record before beginning the interview.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY? You should only participate in this study if you are at least 18-years-old and have recently completed or are currently enrolled in at least one remedial education course at the community college.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS? There are no known risks associated with the procedures of this study. Although it is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, the researcher(s) have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? There may be no direct benefit to you associated with participation in this research; however, you may benefit from the study from being given the opportunity to express personal beliefs and experiences related to being a remedial education student. This study may provide a better understanding of this phenomenon, may help to give voice to an often marginalized student population, and can help to inform future programs in a way that may be more beneficial to students.

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY? Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE? We will keep private all research records that identify you, to the extent allowed by law. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private. All participant identifiers will be replaced with pseudonyms, and all audio files and transcripts will be stored on a locked, password protected computer. Only the researchers will have access to these files and the audio files will be destroyed once they have been transcribed. When we write about the study to share with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have

gathered. We may be asked to share the research files for audit purposes with the CSU Institutional Review Board ethics committee, if necessary.

CAN MY TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY? You may be removed from the study if you fail to show up for scheduled interviews. Every attempt will be made to accommodate study participant's schedules, but repeated absences may require participants to be dropped from the study.

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS? Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the investigators, Sharon Anderson at Sharon.Anderson@ColoState.EDU or Kathleen Lannan at kt66@hotmail.com. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the CSU IRB at: [RICRO IRB@mail.colostate.edu](mailto:RICRO_IRB@mail.colostate.edu); 970-491-1553. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW? You may be asked for follow-up interviews.

The researchers would like to audiotape your interview to be sure that your comments are accurately recorded. Online interviews will be videotaped with your permission. Only our research team will have access to the audiotapes/videotapes, and they will be destroyed when they have been transcribed.

Do you give the researchers permission to audiotape your interview (in-person interview) or videotape your interview (online interview)? Please initial next to your choice below.

Yes, I agree to be digitally recorded (audio or video) _____ (initials)

No, do not audiotape or videotape my interview _____ (initials)

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 3 pages.

Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study

Date

Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study

Name of person providing information to participant

Date

Signature of Research Staff

Appendix C

Dear Participant,

My name is Kathleen Lannan and I am a researcher from Colorado State University in the School of Education department. We are conducting a research study on the experience of being a remedial education student at the community college, which is designed to understand educational or personal experiences leading up to, during, or after enrollment in remedial education courses at the community college. The title of our project is *An Interpretative Phenomenological Approach to Understanding Students' Lived Experiences in Remedial Education at Community Colleges*. The Principal Investigator is Sharon Anderson, Ph.D., School of Education and the Co-Principal Investigator is Kathleen Lannan, School of Education.

We would like you to take part in informal interviews at a public location (either a coffee shop, library, college campus) that is conveniently located for you. Participation will take approximately 60 to 90 minutes and additional interviews may be requested to provide follow-up information or to more thoroughly address a previously discussed topic. You may also be asked to review notes of your interview to ensure accuracy. Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participation at any time without penalty.

We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private. All participant identifiers will be replaced with pseudonyms, and all audio files and transcripts will be stored on a locked, password protected computer. Only the researchers will have access to these files and the audio files will be destroyed once they have been transcribed. Data will be used for a dissertation study and will be reviewed by Colorado State University educators. While there are no direct benefits to you, we hope to gain more knowledge on the phenomenon of being a remedial education student in an effort to give voice to an often underserved student population. An additional goal of the study is to use this unique student perspective to help inform and perhaps restructure future remedial education programs. There are no known risks associated with this study.

If you would like to participate or have any questions, please contact Kathleen Lannan at kt66@hotmail.com, (540) 336-3809 or Sharon Anderson at Sharon.Anderson@ColoState.edu, (970) 491-6861. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the CSU IRB at: RICRO_IRB@mail.colostate.edu; 970-491-1553.

Sincerely,

Sharon Anderson, Ph.D.
Professor, School of Education

Kathleen Lannan
Ph.D. Student, School of Education

Appendix D

An Interpretative Phenomenological Approach to Understanding Students' Lived Experiences in Remedial Education at Community

REQUEST FOR RESEARCH

Who is conducting the study and what is this study about?

Researchers from the School of Education at Colorado State University are recruiting participants for a study that will explore the experience of being a remedial education student at the community college. The study is designed to understand educational or personal experiences leading up to, during, or after enrollment in remedial education courses at the community college.

Who can join this study?

You should only participate in this study if you are at least 18-years-old and have recently completed or are currently enrolled in at least one remedial education course at the community college.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to answer several interview questions relating to your educational experiences before, during, and after (if applicable) enrollment in remedial education. The interviews will be informal and you are encouraged to speak openly and honestly about your experiences.

Why should I join this study?

There may be no direct benefit to you associated with participation in this research; however, you may benefit from the study from being given the opportunity to express personal beliefs and experiences related to being a remedial education student. This study may provide a better understanding of this phenomenon, may help to give voice to an often marginalized student population, and can help to inform future programs in a way that may be more beneficial to students.

How do I join this study?

If you want to join this study, contact the Study Coordinator listed below.

Katie Lannan, Ph.D. Student, School of Education
kt66@hotmail.com

PLEASE CONTACT US FOR MORE INFORMATION	
Katie Lannan 540-336-3809 kt66@hotmail.com	Sharon Anderson Professor, School of Education Sharon.Anderson@colostate.edu

Appendix E



Knowledge to Go Places

Research Integrity & Compliance Review Office
Office of the Vice President for Research
321 General Services Building - Campus Delivery 2011 Fort Collins,
CO
TEL: (970) 491-1553
FAX: (970) 491-2293

NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

DATE: May 06, 2015
TO: Anderson, Sharon, 1588 School of Education
Kamberelis, George, Lannan, Katie, 1588 School of Education
FROM: Swiss, Evelyn, Coordinator, CSU IRB 2
PROTOCOL TITLE: An Interpretative Phenomenological Approach to Understanding Students' Lived Experiences in Remedial Education at Community Colleges
FUNDING SOURCE: NONE
PROTOCOL NUMBER: 14-4904H
APPROVAL PERIOD: Approval Date: May 28, 2015 Expiration Date: May 27, 2016

The CSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human subjects has reviewed the protocol entitled: An Interpretative Phenomenological Approach to Understanding Students' Lived Experiences in Remedial Education at Community Colleges. The project has been approved for the procedures and subjects described in the protocol. This protocol must be reviewed for renewal on a yearly basis for as long as the research remains active. Should the protocol not be renewed before expiration, all activities must cease until the protocol has been re-reviewed.

If approval did not accompany a proposal when it was submitted to a sponsor, it is the PI's responsibility to provide the sponsor with the approval notice.

This approval is issued under Colorado State University's Federal Wide Assurance 00000647 with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP). If you have any questions regarding your obligations under CSU's Assurance, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Please direct any questions about the IRB's actions on this project to:

IRB Office - (970) 491-1553; RICRO_IRB@mail.Colostate.edu
Evelyn Swiss, IRB Coordinator - (970) 491-1381; Evelyn.Swiss@Colostate.edu

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Evelyn Swiss". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Swiss, Evelyn

Approval to recruit the remaining 1 participant with the approved recruitment and consent materials. The above-referenced project was approved by the Institutional Review Board with the condition that the approved consent form is signed (in-person or via email) by the subjects and each subject is given a copy of the form. NO changes may be made to this document without first obtaining the approval of the IRB.

Approval Period: May 28, 2015 through May 27, 2016
Review Type: EXPEDITED
IRB Number: 00000202

Appendix F

Interview Questions:

1. Please tell me about your decision to enter a community college.
 - a. Why community college instead of university? What attracted you to community college?
2. Please describe how you see yourself as a student. As a learner?
 - a. When you found out that you had to take remedial courses, describe any feelings or questions that came up.
 - b. How was the remedial education process explained to you?
 - c. Can you explain your understanding of why you had to take remedial courses?
 - d. What were five words that popped into your mind when you found out you had to take remedial education courses?
3. Please describe a typical remedial class session.
4. If you think back to graduating from high school, please describe how prepared you felt to move into college coursework.
5. How have the remedial courses that you have taken been different than other courses you have taken (either in the community college, high school, or both)?
6. Please describe what it feels like to be enrolled in remedial coursework?
7. How has being enrolled in remedial coursework affected you?
 - a. Socially
 - b. Academically
 - c. Financially
 - d. Personally
 - e. Emotionally
8. What are your long term plans for your education or career? How has being enrolled in remedial education courses affected those plans?
 - a. Did you see the courses as beneficial or detrimental to your educational and or career goals?
9. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me about your experiences being in a remedial education course?