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Community College Faculty Experiences with Literacy and Student Engagement in Developmental Courses

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Amber L. Duncan Schoolcraft

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

Community College Faculty Experiences with Literacy and Student Engagement in Developmental Courses

by

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MA, University of Texas at San Antonio, 2008

BA, University of Texas at San Antonio, 2005

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Community College Leadership

Walden University

February 2021

Abstract

There is a literacy gap reflected in high school students' preparation as they enter college. Empirical literature has indicated the importance of faculty connecting with students by using best practices for more engagement to increase literacy, learning, and comprehension. A question remained what the experiences of community college faculty members were as they worked to increase student engagement and improve literacy in reading and writing in developmental freshman community college composition courses. The theory of andragogy and the theory of cultural literacy provided the framework for understanding community college instructors' approaches of engaging their adult students in developmental courses. Using a basic qualitative design, interviews were conducted with 8 faculty who taught developmental freshman composition courses for at least 2 years and the data were analyzed with open-coding. Themes that emerged from data analysis included meaningful dialogue, lack of college readiness, development of voice through engagement, cultural variety of material, and student-centered learning that resulted in a positive experience from their student population. A possible contribution to positive social change was the identification of innovative methods that can be used by community college faculty teaching developmental composition classes to increase basic reading and writing skills of students through student-faculty engagement.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my father, Lex Duncan, MA. He never gave up on me.

Acknowledgments

First, I must thank God…because without Him, I would not have made it this far.

Second, I will forever be grateful for my committee chair, Dr. Alice Eichholz, whose support has guided me every step of the way. Her time is invaluable, and she dedicated much of her time assisting me through my doctoral journey. Her words of encouragement will always stay with me as I start new chapters in life…I'd better "Get to it!"

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Many thanks to Walden University…this has been a wonderful experience and I have made some lifelong friends through my journey.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Entering community college students are required to complete placement exams for English and math to see if they are “college ready” (Wilson, Dondlinger, Parsons, & Niu, 2017), but there is evidence of a decline in literacy among community college students needed to prepare students for life and career skills (Henry & Stahl, 2016; Taylor & Kroth, 2009). According to Pruett and Absher (2015), community colleges struggle to retain students who initially take assessment tests and then are placed in developmental courses, both in math and English. College students who struggle in English have often argued that reading and writing were tedious tasks and not necessary for their field of study (Rabitoy, Hoffman, & Person, 2015); however, MacArthur, Philippakos, and Graham (2016) indicated that finding motivation for college students to learn to write is a goal an instructor can strive to achieve. If there was more knowledge about what innovative methods faculty were using to engage students and increase literacy in the developmental classroom, then more faculty might use those innovative methods to encourage students to read and write more, thereby increasing literacy and providing a foundation for staying in college longer and graduating.

This chapter includes several sections introducing various aspects of this research study. The first section is the background of the study that includes the gap of knowledge and reason for the study. Next, I discuss the problem statement, research question, and purpose of the study. This is followed by a brief discussion of the conceptual framework, the nature of the study, definitions used for the study, assumptions, the scope and

delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study. The chapter ends with a summary of the research I conducted.

Background

A community college's mission is to address the basic educational needs of students from diverse backgrounds and abilities (Jones, 2016). Jones (2016) reported findings from a survey about college student engagement that students understand the need to communicate more smoothly in the college setting. Blick (2015), Connors, Good, and Gollery (2017), Finn and Avni (2016), and Lonergan and Ayers (2015) indicated the need for innovative methods of instruction in the classroom to engage community college students to keep them engaged and retained, thus serving their educational needs. Additionally, MacArthur et al. (2016), Paulson and Armstrong (2010), and Singer and Alexander (2017) argued for instructors to try to motivate students by integrating innovative methods, including the use of new curriculum approaches and technology. Furthermore, Booker (2016) posited that students who relate to the subject matter being studied are more willing to stay in the class and finish school. Such relating to the material can be enhanced through innovative methods because many students possess some knowledge of popular culture already; integrating it into their learning environment is a way to support literacy needs (Weld, 2011).

There appeared to be a gap in the knowledge concerning how literacy was being addressed with innovative methods among community college students in English developmental courses. This suggested a missing element of research in current studies that had yet to be explored more fully. Many studies indicated the need for

developmental courses for students who underscore on placement exams (Allen, DeLauro, Perry, & Carman, 2016; Jaggars, Hodara, Cho, & Xu, 2015). However, little was known about how faculty use innovative methods to keep students engaged and build on literacy skills. For this study, I interviewed community college faculty concerning their innovative methods to motivate student learning of basic reading and writing. In the state of Texas, there is a movement to eliminate developmental courses. However, it has been proven time and again that not all students are college ready. Two 4-and 5-hour developmental English courses were created as a response to allow students to earn college credit while having additional class time with an embedded developmental component.

This study was needed to better understand community college faculty's best practices using innovative teaching methods in keeping students engaged to improve their literacy. Students who acquire strong communication skills in reading and writing early on in their college career have been found to benefit both in terms of being able to complete degree programs and when they enter the workforce (Yu, 2017). Students who gain literacy skills in communication courses may be able to use those skills in additional courses, such as sciences, math, and history (Wu, 2019). These communication skills can be used in leadership positions or managerial positions as well to increase logical thinking and critical thinking analysis.

Problem Statement

Two-thirds of entering community college students are generally not prepared for college and are placed in a developmental course or a college-level course with an

embedded integrated reading and writing component, as offered in studies (Jaggars et al., 2015; MacArthur et al., 2016; Roberts, 2018). Jaggars et al. (2015) noted that a majority of the students placed in developmental courses do not complete the requirements because of frustration, lack of motivation, or a disconnect in student engagement.

Student strengths can include creativity, enthusiasm, leadership, and cooperative learning. Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2012) argued that identifying student strengths in academia could lead to productive and transferable skills outside of the classroom. One way to build stronger literacy skills is by finding a connection between the students and the material (McGrath, 2009; Roberts, 2017). Makoon and Ratcliff (2016) noted that in America, millions of adults lack essential literacy skills for the majority of living wage employment. McGrath (2009) noted that first-time college students lacked the motivation to read and write. McGrath also noted that composition courses continued to be mandatory classes students need to pass with a basic skill level of reading and writing to successfully move on to other courses and graduate. Using innovative methods and technology may increase student engagement (McGrath, 2009; Roberts, 2017). Taylor and Kroth (2009) argued that by understanding how adults learn instructors can educate adults toward obtaining life and career skills in community college to carry over after college.

Literacy has multiple meanings, but in the context of this study, it is defined as the ability to read and write sufficiently to be productive in the workforce and function in society. Armstrong, Stahl, and Kantner (2015) posited that literacy rates among college-ready students were not only low but also declining. With a decline in reading scores,

and an increase in technological advances of smartphones, tablets, music players, and laptops, it has become more difficult to hold students' interests and engage them with composition course material to increase literacy (Brickman, Alfaro, Weimer, & Watt, 2013; deNoyelles, Cobb, & Lowe, 2012; Goldstein & Perin, 2008; Royer, 2018). Scott-Clayton, Crosta, and Belfield (2012) argued that bringing in technology, instead of removing it from the classroom, may hold students' attention with the material being studied.

Since students often do not connect to the assigned material (deNoyelles et al., 2012; Severinsen, Kennedy, & Mohamud, 2018) and illiteracy has been rising (Harbour & Smith, 2015; McGrath, 2009), educators need to find ways to connect students to reading or writing to provide them with successful tools needed in a classroom or work environment (deNoyelles et al., 2012). Some community college instructors have begun altering curriculum and andragogy (Rabitoy et al., 2015). Some innovative methods instructors are using include integrating popular culture and the use of technology into the curriculum (Dune, Bidewell, Firdaus, & Kirwan, 2016; Finn & Avni, 2016; Paulson & Armstrong, 2010). There appeared to be little research, however, related to understanding the experiences of community college faculty who are trying to address students' literacy needs or the support provided by students through using innovative methods.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand how community college developmental course faculty are using innovative teaching methods in their

classrooms to increase student engagement and literacy. I obtained data through interviews with faculty at a community college in the Southwestern United States.

Research Question

What are the experiences of community college faculty using innovative methods to increase student engagement and improve literacy in reading and writing freshman developmental composition courses?

Conceptual Framework

For this research, I chose a combination of Knowles's (Knowles et al., 2012) theory of andragogy and Hirsch's (Hirsch, Kett, & Trefil, 2002) theory of cultural literacy as the basis for understanding community college instructors' approaches to engaging their adult students in developmental courses. Knowles's theory of andragogy or adult learning describes the way adults learn, which is different than that of children (Knowles et al., 2012). The theory of andragogy is divided into two aspects: methods and principles used within adult education. Methods of adult education may include accelerated and self-directed learning. Principles of adult education include, but are not limited to, being an active participant in one's learning, possessing a sense of self-awareness, and having prior experience of learning. Hirsch's cultural literacy theory can be described as consensus, meaning that one cannot obtain critical literacy unless the development of cultural literacy is achieved (Hirsch et al., 2002). Cultural literacy theory is a means of being able to look at cultures through a communicative perspective, by trying to understand why a culture or set of cultures communicate a certain way. I discuss this framework in greater detail in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

I used a qualitative research design with a basic qualitative methodology by conducting interviews, as described by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). I interviewed experienced community college faculty of developmental freshman composition courses who self-identify as using innovative methods to increase engagement and literacy. I used a semistructured interview protocol developed specifically for this study.

Definitions

Cultural literacy: Cultural literacy is the ability to understand and participate in different cultures, other than one's own (Hirsch et al., 2002).

Developmental courses: Developmental courses refer to community college classes that are designed to address the needs of students who do not pass entrance exams (Rabitoy et al., 2015). For the purposes of this study, the developmental courses are freshman English—reading and writing—that involve more class hours and a combination of the curriculum for students who have not had or have not mastered earlier schoolwork.

Developmental students: For the purpose of this research, developmental students are those students who did not pass a portion of the entrance exam for community college and were subsequently placed in a developmental course in math, writing, or reading (Bol, Campbell, Perez, & Yen, 2016; Royer, 2018).

Innovative methods: Tools, such as videos or supplemental texts, to create engaging classroom environments (McGrath, 2009).

Literacy: Literacy is the ability to read and write (Allen et al., 2016).

Nontraditional students: Nontraditional students are students who are older than 25, who may commute to school, have full-time careers, families, or attend school online (Royer, 2018). Their needs for developmental courses may be similar to those of traditional students.

Traditional students: Traditional students are students under 25 years of age or those who have just completed high school (Royer, 2018). For this study, they may also have the same curriculum/developmental needs as nontraditional students.

Assumptions

I assumed that the participants who volunteered and self-identified for this study had experience with developmental community college courses and were using innovative methods to increase engagement and literacy. I further assumed their experiences would be sufficient to richly describe their literacy and engagement approaches. I also assumed that the participants were honest in their responses and share their experiences truthfully.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of the study is limited to faculty who self-reported using innovative methods to teach developmental freshman English among five community colleges in the southwestern United States. The research participants were delimited to eight community college faculty members who have taught, for at least 2 years and at least one freshman developmental composition course. My study concentrated on faculty experiences with incorporating innovative methods of instruction to promote engagement and literacy in adult learners instead of traditional classroom lectures.

Limitations

One limitation of the study was the nature of qualitative research producing unverifiable results. However, according to McLellan, MacQueen, and Niedig (2003), conducting a qualitative study questions a generalizing factor, meaning that particular outcomes of the study may be anticipated based on inferencing a certain observation. A second limitation would be participants not being able to remember, during the interview, specifics of how they applied innovative methods and possibly needing additional time to reflect on past classes, or their memory may have faded. Creswell (2009) noted that through the act of a strong qualitative research process, trustworthiness and validity are increased.

Significance

Literacy, the means of being able to read and write (Allen et al., 2016), even among community college graduates, remains an issue in the future productivity of the workforce (deNoyelles et al., 2012; Pruett & Absher, 2015; Roberts, 2018). A potential significance of this research was in understanding how community college faculty were working to increase student engagement and literacy to promote stronger readers and writers and diminish illiteracy. The results of the study suggested ways to revise pedagogical approaches in the classroom. With faculty support, identifying innovative ways to improve engagement and literacy can institute positive social change among the 2-year college community by increasing student success.

Summary

Studies have shown that literacy rates among community college students are not improving (Makoon & Ratcliff, 2016; Royer, 2018; Taylor & Kroth, 2009). Community college instructors are implementing new technology and different forms of media to break away from lectures to promote engagement and participation in the classroom (Severinsen et al., 2018). In my study, I examined how community college faculty of developmental courses were using innovative methods to approach engagement and literacy concerns in their adult students. This research was designed to address the gap in the literature related to understanding how community college faculty members who teach developmental freshman English are addressing their students' needs to stay engaged by incorporating innovative teaching methods in order to improve literacy skills. In this chapter, I discussed the background of this qualitative study, the problem, and the purpose of the research. Then, I provided the research question, the conceptual framework selected, as well as the nature of the study. Next, I explained definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and the significance of the study to provide context. In Chapter 2, I explain the conceptual framework and present the literature review, containing scholarly research and empirical studies to address the importance of engagement with adult learners and achievement of developmental courses.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

A lack of interest in reading and writing continues among college students (McGrath, 2009; Taylor & Kroth, 2009). Increasing illiteracy rates observed by Harbour and Smith (2015), Makoon and Ratcliff (2016), and McGrath (2009) have prompted instructors to implement innovative methods of instruction to address the needs of developmental students in the community college classroom. Developmental students represent an increasing portion of community college students with decreased literacy skills (Royer, 2018). One growing approach is to incorporate into the curriculum material that connects with the adult learners, such as real-life scenarios, music, film, or art (Chadha, 2018; Finn & Avni, 2016; Hawk & Hill, 2016; Singer & Alexander, 2017).

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand how community college developmental course faculty were using innovative teaching methods in the classroom to increase student engagement and literacy. This study was accomplished by interviewing community college faculty about their best practices of using innovative methods in their classrooms to address the engagement and literacy skills of their students in developmental English composition classes.

For many students, community college represents a transitional school where students move from secondary education to a university or to a trade and may therefore find themselves unsure of their position in school or what future path to pursue (Dolnicar, Podgornik, & Bartol, 2017). Dolnicar et al. (2017) found that instructors at community colleges can provide a guiding hand to students through positive interaction by engaging students in the classroom and providing availability through tutoring or conference

sessions. Full-time faculty have more opportunities for student engagement outside of the classroom than adjunct or part-time instructors do (Loversidge & Demb, 2015). In addition, Loversidge and Demb commented that all instructors, full-time or adjunct, should make the time available to mentor students within the classroom, whether in person or electronically.

Researchers have indicated that instructors should encourage student engagement through any means that motivate their students (MacArthur et al., 2016; Tewell, 2013). According to some studies, instructors should always strive to draw out students for enhanced engagement (Booker, 2016; Pruett & Absher, 2015; Tewell, 2013). However, other studies have indicated the value of a less intrusive style that encourages students to take initiative to approach the instructor (Dawes, 2017; Smyth, 2016). Finn and Avni (2016) and Paulson and Armstrong (2010) argued that instructors should use various methods including technology and other educational tools to increase student engagement. To determine what methods for student engagement may the most effective, further research needs to be conducted. There is extensive research on student engagement in the classroom but limited research on what instructors are doing to encourage student engagement related to building literacy skills specifically in developmental classes.

I begin the literature review section in this chapter with a discussion of my literature search strategy to locate the studies related to faculty experiences with student engagement and literacy. Next, I discuss the conceptual framework I used as a basis for understanding the faculty experiences related to the research question. Then, I discuss

the research literature related to the importance of faculty/student engagement, faculty approaches to engagement, achievement in developmental courses, and the use of innovative methods, such as popular culture, in higher education curriculum.

Literature Search Strategy

When I began to search for empirical literature related to faculty experiences with literacy and student engagement in colleges, I first went to databases and search engines ERIC and Academic Search Complete. I expanded to ProQuest and SAGE, and then later, I used the search engine Google Scholar to locate older research studies. Most of the articles selected fell within an appropriate timeline of the past 5 years, about 2013-2019, but there are some articles selected that are older. The older ones selected were chosen because the material yielded was invaluable. Several sources lead to other sources from the references they provided. The following search terms were used in all of the databases*: teacher experience*, *faculty engagement in higher education, student engagement*, *innovative instruction*, *popular culture*, *student/teacher engagement*, *developmental student experience*, *student reluctance, struggling adult learners, adult literacy, innovative methods, student literacy*, *adult learning theory*, *adult education, andragogy*, *teacher interaction*, and *student collaboration*. This search yielded research studies related to my research question and the conceptual framework as discussed in the following sections.

Conceptual Framework

Knowles's adult learning theory and Hirsch's cultural literacy theories constituted the framework for my study. Knowles developed the theory of adult learning, known as

andragogy, to understand how adult learners learn (Knowles et al., 2012). I used Knowles's theory in this study to understand community college instructors' work to increase student engagement and improve literacy in reading and writing in developmental freshman composition courses in community colleges. Andragogy was described by Knowles et al. (2012) as distinct from pedagogy in that, compared with younger learners, adults are more self-directed and require less external motivation for learning to occur. Knowles et al. argued that there was a reason why certain subjects were being taught and certain materials used with adults. My study investigated those reasons in the context of community college and literacy development.

First published in 1988, Hirsch's theory of cultural literacy argued that more recent high school students are reading and writing less than those students who graduated years before (Hirsch et al., 2002). To engage students to develop literacy skills, bringing in popular culture and various forms of media has been used as a way to instill motivation (Hirsch et al., 2002). Hirsch noted that providing individuals with literature in pop culture could give them more of a reason to read (Hirsch et al., 2002). Literacy means understanding the written word and being able to communicate through the written word. If an individual can do both, and then add in materials from popular culture, such as film and graphic novels, then literacy is on its way to being mastered (Weld, 2011). Estes, Gutman, and Harrison (1988) indicated that Hirsch's initial work had some problems but that the literacy issue in higher education was evident and that something needed to be done. An initial problem obvious to Estes et al. was Hirsch's assessment that memorized phrases and words from another language automatically

granted the learner an understanding of the culture. Estes et al. argued that the act of participation with culture through education is how one learns about cultural meanings. Estes et al.'s work reflected Hirsch's original publication. Hirsch's own 1988 work was updated in 2002 to include extra chapters of cultural literacy as well as the original material from the previous publication (Hirsch et al., 2002).

By using these two theories as to the framework for this study, I intended to provide a basis for understanding *how* and *what* faculty members of adult learners are doing at community colleges to address adult literacy. These two concepts—Knowles's adult learning theory and Hirsch's approaches to cultural literacy—are used to understand what community college faculty are doing with their subjects and materials to reach students coming into the developmental classrooms with adult literacy needs.

Adult Learning Theory

Knowles developed the theory of adult learning called andragogy, in order to understand the process of how adults learn (Knowles et al., 2012). Five assumptions of Knowles' theory are self-concept, adult learner experience, readiness to learn, the orientation of learning, and motivation to learn (Knowles et al., 2012). Self-concept is the process of moving from dependent to independent, or self-directed. When an adult learner matures through learning, this is the adult learner experience. As an adult learner matures, the readiness to learn increases within social roles. Knowles et al. (2012) identified several stages of readiness to learn as an adult learner. The shift from subject-centered to problem-centered occurs in the orientation of learning assumption. In the final assumption, motivation to learn, the adult learner matures and the motivation to

learn becomes more internal and self-fulfilling. In these assumptions, four principles of andragogy (Knowles et al., 2012) are examined:

- Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction.
- Experience (including mistakes) provides the basis for the learning activities.
- Adults are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance and impact their job or personal life.
- Adult learning is problem-centered rather than content-oriented (pp 64-69).

Knowles's idea of self-concept relates to an individual becoming less dependent as they mature and more independent or self-directed when completing tasks. An adult learner's experience builds as a learner matures and gathers more and more experiences that one can save and build upon later in life. A person's readiness to learn refers to an individual using social roles or developmental tasks in order to drive the desire to learn. As individuals mature, they learn when to shift gears from applying learning to one subject to another in terms of problem-solving. Finally, when an adult learner matures, the ability to internalize the motivation to learn occurs. When faculty apply the four principles of adult learning they can use methods of explanation and instruction that take the five assumptions into account. Faculty members play a crucial role in how adults learn and retain information.

Cultural Literacy Theory

Cultural literacy is cultural-specific (Hirsch et al., 2002) meaning that to understand written and oral communication, the culture of the society also needs to be learned. Hirsch coined the term *cultural literacy* to understand how one can immerse

oneself completely in a given culture (Hirsch et al., 2002). Cultural literacy includes, but is not limited to, learning grammar, vocabulary, and the alphabet of a culture. Hirsch et al. (2002) argued that society "must understand more than the surface meanings of words; we have to understand the context as well" (p. 3). In order to be considered culturally literate, Hirsch et al. claimed that an individual would need to qualify for cultural fluency. Being culturally fluent is more than just an understanding the language of a culture, but it encompasses understanding of language with the ability to read, write, and speak another culture's language and to understand idioms, customs, and practices of that culture without incidence. Achieving cultural literacy lends to social mobility, being able to integrate from one culture to another with ease. However, according to Hirsch et al., mastering another culture's customs and language could inadvertently erase the native culture of the learner if a careful practice is not met. And maintaining the ability to participate in other cultures though is essential to unify people of economic, religious, and political backgrounds. Cultural literacy can help adults taking college-level or developmental courses by learning through a variety of materials from the culture.

Rationale for Conceptual Framework

Knowles et al. (2012) and Hirsch et al. (2002) emphasized the need to assist adult learners in educational and social areas of their lives. Assisting adults in education, helping them adjust to the role of school life, and understanding how and why they learn allows instructors to better serve. Instructors and students share a responsibility for motivation and engagement, which Knowles et al. (2012) stressed as important when it came to addressing adult learners' needs.

Adult learners who Hirsch et al. (2002) found struggled in reading increased in critical thinking, reading, and writing skills after being exposed to an innovative teaching method, such as film, comic books, or music. Hirsch et al. also noted that even though not every student was exposed to the various innovative methods, the students were receptive to learning the material in a new and different way.

In community college education, the whole school should act as a community, where students are welcomed into instructors' offices (Hicks & Lloyd, 2016). Open-door policies create friendly and inviting spaces, which is necessary when students have questions or concerns about a course. Knowles et al. (2012) and Hirsch et al. (2002) both provided insight into why adult learners pursue education, such as self-gratification or making a better and stable life for their family. Adult learners are often expected to learn autonomously but those in developmental classes or nontraditional students often need further guidance (Knowles et al., 2012). This provides a foundation for understanding community college faculty experiences to address the learning needs of adult learners.

Literature Review

The following section is a review of peer-reviewed and scholarly articles on how faculty members and students address literacy in community colleges. Specific topics include: (a) importance of faculty/student engagement, (b) faculty approaches to engagement, (c) achievement in developmental courses, and (d) use of innovative methods in community college curriculum. I conclude the chapter with a summary of the discussion on the cultural framework and these four components of the literature review.

Importance of Faculty/Student Engagement

Engagement in the classroom first begins by building faculty and student rapport (Jones, 2016). Creating effective student and faculty engagement means making connections that go beyond the classroom. Whether in person or online, engagement occurs when every student feels like a part of the class, according to Jones. Seeking to better understand the role of student-faculty relationships for successful students at community college, Wood and Newman (2017) researched African American male participation in 16 urban community colleges. A total of 340 African American male students took part in a survey on how they would rank certain aspects of their college experiences. While degree interest was high on the list, the highest-ranking was faculty validation. Wood and Newman reported that African American men who had limited interactions with faculty reported lower performance than their peers who met regularly with faculty. On the survey, the men who marked seeing faculty "sometimes" or "often" had 283% more success than students who chose "never." For students, faculty who established themselves as reliable or trustworthy were able to bond with students on an academic and personal level, according to Wood and Newman.

The findings in the Wood and Newman's (2017) study suggested that faculty who validate a student's achievement through engagement helped the outcome of the student completing college. If African American male students were given the necessary support in postsecondary education, Wood and Newman believed more would attend community college. Wood and Newman noted many studies that follow African American men's higher education at 4-year universities but there was less related to their experience at 2-

year institutions. In the next two sections, I discuss the research related to engagement on both sides of the relationship – first faculty and then students.

Faculty role in engagement. Loversidge and Demb (2015) completed five faculty interviews and found that faculty perceived engagement as making an effort to connect with every student, though that did not always happen. In the over 850 pages of transcription from the faculty interviews, the majority of faculty noted that positive influences students held were values such as religious and family upbringing, personal and social responsibility, and safety. Negative influences were poor role models and partnerships, celebrity role models, and conflict issues. Based on the findings, the faculty found that matching mentors with students gained positive reactions among student perceptions. Students often wanted faculty members to engage with them by taking in knowledge about their lives and how that can affect their education. Faculty, as indicated by Loversidge and Demb, may not always be aware of what drives student engagement.

Open faculty member communication is one of the leading indicators of strong engagement with students (Dolnicar et al., 2017). Open communication, according to Dolnicar et al., means being able to talk with each other both inside and outside of the classroom while maintaining a student-faculty relationship. In addition to Dolnicar et al.'s research, Hicks and Lloyd (2016) conducted a polling strategy where three instructional methods were compared related to engagement and information literacy based on faculty surveys: lecture-based learning, project-based learning, and problem-based learning. According to Hicks and Lloyd, information literacy is the ability to view media—radio, television, and film—and closely examine the parts for authority and

validity and to develop the ability to recreate media methods to share the meaning of the message with a diverse audience. While information literacy has its benefits, Hicks and Lloyd indicated that there were some users of the method who only share small sections of information among groups. They found that faculty members who exhibited the opposite of an open communication policy tended to not learn anything personal about their students, such as their interests, or even names. In Hicks and Lloyd's study, an intercultural environment was examined. Intercultural was defined as the ability to understand different cultures on a deeper level. Hicks and Lloyd argued that if the groups that were more close-minded had shared more information, then the possibility that the instructors would have been more receptive, and engaging was highly probable.

Faculty and students have varying perceptions when it comes to engagement (Loversidge & Demb, 2015). Students have been found to believe that just being present or giving the minimum of engagement, whether in person or online, leads to the result of being engaged (Booker, 2016; Dawes, 2017; Tewell, 2013). Other studies noted that instructors expected students to go above and beyond just the standard of engagement, such as learning their names, to fully achieve the outcomes of the course (Hicks & Lloyd, 2016). Hicks and Lloyd concluded that if students were not participating more than what the faculty expects, then the student may not achieve mastery of the course curriculum.

Dawes (2017) conducted 24 semistructured interviews among the first-time faculty at a public university to examine faculty perceptions in conjunction with the use of information literacy and how, if at all, students were influenced by information literacy. The outcome of the study showed that when information literacy was taught to

students who were experienced users of technology, the students were more engaged and motivated. Students who were not familiar with information literacy or the various uses of media fell under *informed learning*. According to Dawes, informed learning is when the faculty places information literacy at the core of the class and uses it as an additional tool for learning. Dawes concluded that first-year teachers have grand ideas about what to expect in the classroom and find themselves disappointed by the end of the year.

Attitudes of 221 full-time faculties concerning information literary were explored in a survey by Tewell (2013). The faculty were questioned on how they planned to use information literacy in their classes and what skills were needed to deliver information literacy. The main outcome of the survey revealed faculty concerns over the knowledge students have of informed learning, in connection with their skills and collaboration, but that ultimately the integration of informed learning was low in the classes. Faculty expressed concern that students entering colleges or universities were not prepared to properly use information literacy because they lacked the experience in research and critical thinking skills. Another concern faculty noted was the lack of engagement with collaboration among undergraduate students when working with new technologies. Undergraduate students, even though they were present in class or logged into an online class, were not perceived to participate as much as graduate students, as noted by Tewell.

Instructor engagement can inadvertently affect student engagement beginning with the first day of class (Jones, 2016). First days in the course may set the stage for instructor/student experience creating the experience of engagement. According to Jones (2016), if students do not attend the first few days or if an instructor is not present in the

first few days, rapport and participation are often negatively affected. Although some instructors do not expect student engagement and rely heavily on lectures, Chadha (2018) noted that more instructors have been turning away from the standard method of lecturing and moving toward an active classroom where engagement.

Faculty members may rely on students for more engagement by asking them to take ownership of their education. Gouthro (2019) explored the importance of adult education by providing an overview of developmental adult education through social and psychological theories examined using a feminist perspective. Gouthro argued the need for adult educators to be trained on the act of educating adult learners, even if the work for that falls on the learner's shoulders. Gouthro saw theory as a way to allow educators to grasp the complex nature of both the teaching and learning process. Gouthro argued that having this understanding shapes the personal and social contexts thereby enforcing literacy and citizenry. By taking ownership of one's work through "careful scholarship" (p. 73), the adult learner can succeed, and the educator would have made a difference in a student's life.

Phillipson, Riel, and Leger (2018) indicated that active learning is more than participating; it is about understanding. They noted that students who do not engage in class do not learn. These researchers as well as Chadha (2018) and Jones (2016) claimed that healthier and happier classroom environments occur when instructors are positive and encouraging toward students. To faculty, when a student does not engage it may seem that the student is not interested but it could be more than that, such as problems at home or work. Phillipson et al. (2018) discussed the creation of three active learning

classrooms (ALC) opened in Queens University, in Canada, noted as being a research-intensive university that prides itself on student engagement and participation. The ALCs were noted as being flexible, interactive, or team-based. Even though each ALC was different, all promoted an active learning environment. The goal of the dynamics was to see if classroom space, utilized differently, could enhance teaching and learning. Feedback from teachers indicated that adjustments had to be made in their teaching to accommodate the new arrangement. Students were generally welcoming of the change. Phillipson et al. concluded that students who do not engage in classes may be suffering from social anxiety or may have never been asked to participate and are unsure of the engagement process. Through a written survey, respondents noted that different perceptions occurred but that the act of teaching could be deemed as a learning process that can affect both the student and the teacher.

Phillipson et al. (2018) also noted that instructor and student engagement may be connected to the experiences both have in class. The experiences by students are gained through time spent in the classroom—whether physically or electronically. Experiences of students will be different in a face-to-face versus an online class; however, the experiences can help determine whether a student remains active in the class (Phillipson et al., 2018). Additionally, instructor experience differs from a first-year instructor to a veteran instructor, as indicated by both Phillipson et al. (2018) and Dawes (2017).

Not every student accepted into college is “college ready.” In Armstrong et al.’s (2015) study, 11 community college faculty questionnaires and 11 online student satisfaction surveys were analyzed to determine if students were ready for college after

making the transition from high school. A curriculum audit model, a tool used to indicate the best curriculum to implement, was proposed as a method of aligning the skills and competencies of students and acquiring student and faculty expectations of the course. Using this curriculum audit model to review course standards, faculty were asked a series of questions concerning the characteristics of a student considered to be college-ready. Faculty were further questioned about the student expectations and goals were for a proposed text issued by the college and what the reading culture was at the community college. The data were collected over a 2-year period determined that using the audit model allowed faculty to provide a structured process that students could easily follow for a successful transition from high school to college.

Student role in engagement. Research has suggested that student engagement and faculty engagement can promote meaningful learning experiences. Booker (2016) claimed that faculty and student engagement can be similar. Both faculty and students can experience engagement in the classroom at the same moment but have varying results. Through six student interviews of African American females, Booker noted that students reacted positively to authentic instruction and accessible instructors. This study took place over the course of one academic year. The female students of Booker's study admitted to feeling pressured in having to constantly stand up for their race. Because women of color, in particular African American women, have experiences in college that can be deemed as unique, faculty must be aware of this and ensure an open and safe environment for their students (Booker, 2016). The research concluded that there are not

enough qualitative studies that lend a voice to minority students of higher education in terms of how they are respected, valued, and accepted among peers and faculty.

If students are to develop a mindset of being in control, then flow should be established in the classroom. Students can be divided into three categories of classroom response: anxiety, boredom, and flow, according to Latz (2012). Flow theory addresses students' focus, engagement, and presence in the classroom. Students fully immersed in academic studies can experience a state of flow, being in the zone so the speak, and are guided by teachers. Instructors remind students to stay on task, but generally, a flow is student-centered. A flow takes place within the classroom when students are all engaged and perform the task asked of them. Latz discussed the process of flow theory, which can be described as the classroom being an "optimal psychological experience" (p. 2). While practicing flow theory, whatever is asked of students should be something that everyone in the class can perform, regardless of gender, race, or socioeconomic background. Such a task allows the instructor to reach all students. It is then up to the students to participate.

Lecture-style classes are where faculty lead the classroom by delivering a presentation or speech. According to Russell, Andersland, Horne, Gikonyo, and Sloan (2017), lecture-style classes can decrease student learning, leaving teachers to find a way to boost morale. In a study of over 200 students, the results were telling in that nearly unanimously, students found student-centered learning made the classroom more appealing than lecturing. When classrooms are more student-led or student-centered, the focus shifted from the teacher as the source of learning to the students generating the learning. Accordingly, when students are actively participating in the classroom, the

teachers' role can become more challenging because teachers need to guide students to push the engagement along. Meeting the goal of having every student engaged may not be possible, but it should still be attempted, according to Russell et al. When students are faced with challenges, they can take up those challenges and try to use them as teaching and learning lessons. Russell et al. noted that in some cases students can back away or give up from the challenge, decreasing student engagement, but that in many cases, a student peer can motivate another to participate. Their findings indicated that participation and student engagement often go together, but classroom engagement and participation can be considered both collaborative and individualized.

Student engagement seems more likely in groups when five or more students discuss the material together (Russell et al., 2017). During an individualized engagement with course material, only one student participates. While active learning can take place, the collaborative setting seemed the better option for student-centered engagement. In the study, Russell et al. posited that whether individual or collaborative active learning took place, the focus should be on the activity of active learning—student participation.

Forcing students to participate in classroom discussion can lead to strained and awkward situations, but it can also result in rich and relaxed environment. Student participation should be led by students in order to prepare them for future courses and for skills that can be used outside of class (Russell et al., 2017; Thomas et al., 2018). A cultural gathering starting in 2015, documented by Thomas et al. (2018), included approximately 130 students, both a mixture of graduate and undergraduate. This gathering has spanned over the years into an annual tradition. In 2016, 45% of the

students who attended were Chinese and 30 % were of Iranian descent as well as alumni, faculty, and staff. The remaining participants of the cultural gathering represented a mixture of international backgrounds. Through the gathering, students who first expressed loneliness and isolation said that the gatherings have helped them adjust to other social situations. Thomas et al. noted that domestic students also feel enriched by the program because they learn about other cultures. Thomas et al. suggested that engagement could be encouraged as an agreement made by teachers to students but agreed upon and kept by the students. A mutual agreement for engagement creates a teacher-student bond. Establishing common ground with students can help form a necessary bond between the student and teacher. Thomas et al. argued that four basic commonalities can be explored when trying to build mutual engagement with a student. These commonalities were: experience, celebration, faith, and challenges. A rapport that is built is just one way to create an open and inviting classroom of trust. Trust is important in the classroom, Thomas et al. noted because it can result in respect. When students respect the instructor, they respect the class, the material instructors bring into the class to share with them, and then, they respect one another.

Creating a classroom culture is important for promoting positivity. Through religion, cultural, and socioeconomic shared experiences, students from diverse backgrounds and histories, according to Thomas et al. (2018), get to know and understand each other. Thomas et al. noted that even students of international and domestic backgrounds who have diverse faiths and celebrations can create a bond. Thomas et al. noted a challenge of faculty helping to increase bonds between students

from diverse backgrounds and that further research should be conducted. If faculty were more open in assisting peers to unite in the classroom, then the unity can be spread into the community. Engagement with peers can increase with faculty help and if peers engaged with each other in the class positively, then that attitude can be transferred onto the college campus and in the nearby surrounding community.

Students and faculty both go into the classroom with a set of expectations. Thomas et al. (2018) noted that students expect peers and faculty to respond and to offer appropriate and constructive feedback. Faculty members similarly want responsive students who attend class and provide respectful engagements. By creating an engagement beyond academic conversation, students show more interest and more likely to attend class regularly.

Professional independence is not only available with the autonomy of faculty, but also with students in higher education. College students are autonomous, which means that they control their own academic progress (Wu, 2019). There are different levels of motivation that can reach students: extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic motivation relies on a value, like a reward, for doing something. Wu argued that intrinsic motivation, personally doing something for oneself, is more beneficial to lower-achieving students because of the feeling of satisfaction received after a specific task was performed. In Wu's study, a cohort of three groups from the fall of the first year, and the spring and fall of the fourth year were asked about their college experience. Participants in Wu's study using the Wabash (Indiana) National Study of Liberal Arts Education survey, the student cohorts discussed learning outcomes and college participation. Student academic

progress was monitored, and Wu suggested that students who stayed in college for at least 4 years showed an increase in motivation and participation than students who drop out and return.

Faculty Approaches to Engagement

Faculty connecting to students can assist with student persistence in completing their college degree. Faculty experiences at improving engagement are related to the nature of the college experience for students (Greenberg et al., 2011). Students, according to Greenberg et al., have other factors of influence, such as study groups, gatherings, and clubs, but faculty have a critical role in creating a learning environment that provides engagement to improve skill-building. Faculty members have developed varying approaches to establishing engagement.

Supportive interactions with faculty can play an important role with student in school. Armstrong et al. (2015), Greenberg et al. (2011), and Singer and Alexander (2017) discussed how faculty participation in student undergraduate experiences makes a difference in the student's studies. Through investigation, Greenberg et al.'s analysis (2011) tried to find an appropriate approach to reading strategies for adult learners who were tested at a sixth-grade reading level. Although interventions were seen as a viable solution to help with improving reading strategies, the question remained, which interventions were most effective.

Decoding, as defined in the study, referred to words unknown by the reader but understood through context clues within the passage. Greenberg et al.'s (2011) study concentrated on patterns of decoding, reading comprehension, fluency, and extensive

reading. Reading comprehension was described as an ultimate goal, to be able to understand the meaning of the text from page to page. In order to be able to grasp reading comprehension, one must be a fluent reader. Lastly, extensive reading coincided with reading comprehension and fluency and occurs when readers practice reading frequently. In the pilot program, 11 adult participants whose reading level was approximately rated at second grade, proved that an intensive reading intervention could work with adult learners as it had with high school learners.

Required reading has many values, such as preparing students for the real world by showing that what occurred in the past can also occur in the present. Armstrong et al. (2015) used a student focus group questionnaire, classroom observations, and online surveys from both instructors and students to gather information about required readings, what reading expectations were, how frequent readings were required, and what tasks were required of the text. The goal of Armstrong et al.'s study was to review the models of practice. The first student focus group was used to determine college-text readiness among students. The second focus group surveyed developmental reading courses. Data were gathered from pre-college and literacy level courses. The final focus group centered on student's voice. Those students who were enrolled in developmental reading courses were additionally asked if they felt prepared for college-level English classes. Students who said faculty lectured less and had more hands-on activities felt more prepared than students who had faculty that lectured during the classroom instruction for the majority of the period.

The overall outcome of Armstrong et al.'s (2015) study was that faculty decreased text requirements either because students did not acquire the text or interest level in the text was low. Because faculty members were invested in student learning, the researcher also made a point to have faculty engage students with a variety of material and treat them with respect. When faculty members showed interest in students' lives, they had a better chance of succeeding in the class.

Faculty should take the time to get to know their students. To implement student engagement as a component of the curriculum, faculty must be able to get a sense of the group of students that constitutes their class in order to gauge when it is best to try new methods and materials for student engagement (Dolnicar et al., 2017; Royer, 2018). Incentives to motivate student engagement were considered options by MacArthur et al. (2016), but not the only options. When faculty bring in incentives, they noted, students who do not necessarily need the extra reward are the ones that typically go for the incentive. Bringing in student group work or collaborative assignments can aid in not only motivating students but also engagement. Asking students to work together create conversation naturally in a learning environment. Through collaborative assignments, students become more acquainted with one another, every member of the team has the opportunity to provide equal time, all ideas of group members can be explored, and everyone can learn something new or different from someone else of their team because everyone will bring in different ideas and experiences from their backgrounds.

There are ways for faculty to make their classroom accessible to the majority of students. Singer and Alexander (2017) looked at various accessibility of print and digital

books and found that digital books were not only more affordable but that the majority of students were drawn toward an electronic copy of a text over a print version. Giving the option of material to use allows the student to assume responsibility for some of their own learning. Additionally, the researchers found that reading digitally, from Kindles to smartwatches, is increasing. The study sought to inform readers about the reading comprehension in the use of print and digital literature, how it is accessed, defined, understood, and reported. Singer and Alexander gathered data from 878 articles, then through the process of elimination of studies that did not fit the criteria of reading comprehension, used the remaining 36 viable studies to assist in questioning 162 academics about reading comprehension of their students. The researchers found that digital reading was more complex with the variety of forms from which to choose and that the academics defined reading comprehension differently when considering different types of media.

Just as students have different learning styles, faculty have different teaching techniques. Co-teaching can take six approaches: one-to-one teacher/observer ratio, station teaching, parallel teaching, alternative teaching, teaming, and one-to-one teach/assist ratio. Lock et al. (2016) discussed a method of co-teaching where teachers shared teaching responsibilities for one class. Lock et al. also discussed how co-teaching was not an easy practice because of different methods and approaches and noted that in some cases, co-teaching groups had to be split or re-assigned because of the differences. Time and effort make a successful co-teaching team. In a co-teaching situation, there is usually a lead teacher and a secondary teacher, however, the roles can switch throughout

the course. Lock et al. interviewed co-teachers in a nursing course by asking questions that related to their experiences and method of co-teaching. The interviews took place over a semester where the course was taught in three sections with six teachers in teams of two. All teachers agreed that for the class to be successful, open communication was needed on a day-to-day basis. Those co-teachers who worked together formed strong relationships in their partnerships. The co-teachers in the study saw their partnership as a partnership that displayed a positive attitude in and out of class. The co-teachers who worked individually were positive in some respects but felt disconnected in the classroom. Partners were able to engage in more thoughtful approaches in the classroom and were more likely to engage the students.

Benefits of co-teachers included increased academic performance of students and less workload on faculty. Upon reflection, co-teachers in the Lock et al. (2016) study who formed partnerships were successful collaborators and agreed to participate in a co-teacher union again. Third-party observation for co-teachers offered suggestions on strengthening bonds, especially for the co-teachers who lack unity. When co-teachers were united this can positively affect the student experiences as well as the faculty experience. As previously discussed above under the Importance of Faculty/Student Engagement section, unity in the classroom has a way of impacting the learning experience (Wood & Newman, 2017).

Classroom behavior and student behavior can affect engagement. Other methods of engagement can be applied, but it needs to be an instructor’s decision on what is best for the class (Brickman et al., 2013; Severinsen et al., 2018). Requesting students to

participate in class can be detrimental to an instructor's rapport. In many colleges, instructors have implemented on their syllabus (a binding contract between the instructor and student) requirements for participation and attendance, among other things. This method is not an assurance of participation and can backfire if instructors do not implement the program as stated (Brickman et al., 2013). Severinsen et al.'s (2018) suggested that instructors need to motivate adult learners in order to increase literacy skills. Motivation may include collaboration and autonomy and self-directed learning.

Achievement in Developmental Courses

Developmental courses are often a part of many college students' paths. Likewise, participation and engagement are mainstays in community college developmental courses (Royer, 2018). As such, developmental courses often either do not carry credits or carry fewer credits than standard courses and often have nontraditional students— students who are older and returning to the classroom after a time of absence—or students with learning disabilities. Composition and mathematics courses generally are offered as both college-level and developmental courses. College-level, or standard, courses are for credits and can be used toward university degrees.

In community college, students are expected to learn skills that they can one day carry over into the real world. Real-world learning is something that every college student expects to acquire (Roberts, 2018; Royer, 2018). Royer asserted that applying skills to a future career is a stepping-stone in joining society as a productive citizen. Before students take this step, they can start to build the necessary skills by interacting with one another and their instructors in the developmental courses. It is not uncommon

for entering community college students to take one or two developmental courses in writing, reading, or math. However, Royer noted that it is more likely that students in college-level classes speak up and collaborate with peers than those who are in developmental courses. This makes it important that faculty in development courses focus on engagement and appropriate curriculum materials for students to achieve literacy skills. Roberts (2018) noted that millions of Americans lack the essential resources of literacy to perform jobs that result in a living wage.

Many factors can contribute to a student being placed in developmental courses. Bol et al. (2016) noted that a critical factor was that those students placed in developmental classes were often not given the necessary material in their previous education in order to be successful in college. They noted that students who are unprepared for college fall into three categories related to their preparation: academic, emotional, or culturally unprepared. In most cases, students who fall under the category of being unprepared are enrolled in developmental courses upon admission.

Community colleges are known for an open-door policy. What this means is that people who apply are generally accepted, as long as transcripts and other verification records are in order (Bol et al., 2016). This open-door policy does not guarantee a student direct access to college-level standard courses and that is where developmental courses come into action. According to Bol et al., there has been an increase in higher education to bridge developmental courses to college-level courses by employing hybrid, or blended courses, combining online and in-class activities. These hybrid courses make credit obtainable and blend developmental with college-level materials. The courses may

not be suitable for everyone because they may be either accelerated or spread across 2 semesters or 1 year.

Controlling one own's learning environment is essential for self-regulated learning. For students in developmental courses, a process of self-regulated learning may develop where a constant evaluation and re-evaluation of goals are made (Bol et al., 2016). Learners set goals and work at achieving those goals while in the course of their academic careers. The goals established by the student are defined by the success or failure achieved. Students who are successful or fail on the first try are taught that the outcomes can change. This is important for those who fail because it is easy for students to give up. While individualized learning can work for many people, it is not for everyone. Individualized learning can be self-regulated, meaning that the individual works at his or her own pace and sets his or her own goals for achievement, according to Bol et al.

Bol et al.'s (2016) study was conducted in a community college in Virginia and monitored 116 community college students enrolled in developmental courses. The participants each took an entrance exam into the college and failed at least one portion—math, writing, or English—that placed them in a developmental course. The participants were asked to create a series of goals for themselves and re-evaluate those goals weekly. The goals were academic, such as creating better study habits or eliminating distractions. The students continued this practice for 3 weeks. The results indicated that students aware of their goals and outcomes were more academically prepared in developmental

courses than students who were not placed in developmental courses. Students were more likely to be successful when self-regulation was practiced.

Rabitoy et al. (2015) noted that, at the time of the study, nearly one-half of the nation's undergraduate population were enrolled in community colleges. If a portion of them are in developmental courses, it is critical to understand the nature of their achievement in those courses. Developmental students, according to Rabitoy et al., are capable of achieving their goals. In some cases, the achievement was based on a selected program within the college or university a student was enrolled. A program developed at the University of Missouri-Kansas City paired students in developmental courses with mentors in a supplemental instruction (SI) program. According to researchers, the majority of SI mentors had also been in developmental courses but ended with a strong and successful academic career.

Successful SI mentors were supported by faculty members who advocated for the program's initial establishment. Cohorts of five different groups were created at the university for the Rabitoy et al.'s (2015) study, with each cohort assigned one SI mentor. The individuals were divided into cohorts by the attributes of gender, ethnicity, and GPA. Overall, the results indicated that the male students of color had an increase in GPA slightly with the assistance of a SI mentor. In contrast, White female students showed a slight decrease in GPA. It was noted that the ethnic background of the male students and their mentor were similar while that was not the case for the white females' mentors. Although the cohorts involved in the university study noted a decrease in GPA, all students still reported that they felt more confident having a SI mentor to help them.

Rabitoy et al. (2015) indicated that further research can be explored with a qualitative method by including observations of mentors and mentees. Their study was based on the GPA scale, but looking at other methods, such as community service and involvement, could also produce success with SI leaders and students. Students who see SI leaders as role models may also influence the outcome of the results of the study and should be taken into account if qualitative research is practiced because SI leaders had a positive influence on students, overall.

Achievement can be performing successfully, whether in school or in a career. The word *achievement* has positive connotations, as indicated by Rabitoy et al. (2015). When it comes to student achievement, students and faculty play roles. The role of students relates to retention rates and completion rates. The role of faculty varies but is often associated with mentoring, leadership, and/or guidance (Rabitoy et al., 2015; Yu, 2017). Both Rabitoy et al. (2015) and Yu (2017) noted that community colleges have a high enrollment of undergraduate students in the United States with about 37% of those undergraduates completing an associates or certification in 3 years (Yu, 2017)). Retention rates and student achievement differ, according to Yu, at 2-year and 4-year institutions. At a 4-year university, students are expected to complete at a higher rate than those at 2-year community colleges.

Can students achieve in a community college if their expectations are already lowered because they attend a community college? Based on Yu's (2017) research, students cannot achieve success on their own. In order for a student to be successful, faculty must provide the learning tools, such as projects, and additional sources. It is up

to the students as to how they use those tools. Instead of only looking at the achievement and completion rates of students in college, Yu suggested student pre-college experience should be investigated first. Yu noted that previous background—experience, social engagement, behaviors—all contribute to how students achieve or not in college. In a survey monitoring the 2003/2004 school year, Yu drew a sample of 1,980 students from 50 community colleges. These surveys indicated that students who maintained a passing GPA in high school were more likely to complete college successfully. This result indicated that pre-college experiences influenced, whether directly or indirectly, the likelihood of achievement in an institution of higher learning. Furthermore, Yu noted that minority students were less likely to complete college in 6 years, but full-time White female students showed a higher completion rate.

Students from a low socioeconomic background attending a large, 4-year university, directly after high school, were less likely to obtain a degree than low socioeconomic students who attended a community college first. Yu (2017) noted that in addition to socioeconomic background, an institution's size also contributed to student completion rates. Financial aid and the cost of tuition did not seem to affect student decisions to attend either a 4-year or 2-year institution. However, financial aid and fees are significantly lower at a 2-year college and this can influence the enrollment rate.

Student interests should be considered when designing classroom materials and curriculum. Allen et al. (2016), Finn and Avni (2016), and Paulson and Armstrong (2010), discussed how instructors could incorporate more material that would interest students in order to enhance participation and, as a result, achievement. Upon the

entrance to a community college, the majority of students are asked to take a test to determine their skills in math, reading, and writing (Finn & Avni, 2016). Once tests are reviewed, students are placed into classes, including a few levels of developmental classes. Instructors can make a student's transition to a developmental course smoother by integrating familiar material relevant to the students' lives. One method of relevancy includes media and popular culture, which I discuss in the next section of this literature review.

The role developmental courses has on student learning can vary depending on student participation and retention. Allen et al. (2016) wanted to understand the role developmental courses had on students regarding an increase in their literacy. The purpose of the study was to see if success and performance were predictable using developmental reading and writing courses. Students who finished a psychology or geography course and had at least one developmental English course and were not identified as an English as a second language learner were used in the sample of 1,339. The Texas Higher Education Assessment was used to determine whether students' scores were considered passing on the developmental and college-level. Overall results indicated that the majority of students who were successful in a developmental course went on to be successful in a college-level course.

Additionally, Paulson and Armstrong (2010) discussed tactics of addressing literacy needs in community colleges among developmental students with teachers preparing students for life outside of the classroom. Creating a cohesive, unified approach for postsecondary literacy education was the proposed framework of the study.

Instructors used critical thinking or problem-solving approaches to teach the respective subjects. Paulson and Armstrong argued that instructors who did not create a unified approach were inconsistent with the information and students were left confused; however, the majority of instructors who provided critical thinking or problem-solving approaches, such as identifying the problem, demonstrated marked literacy improvement among students.

Paulson and Armstrong (2010) commended teachers try to create successful learning environments by using commonalities, but problematic cultural limitations existed. If teachers do not try understanding where students come from in terms of their background or cultural understandings, it is more likely that the students will not be fully engaged in the course. When addressing students in the classroom, Paulson and Armstrong noted that instructors avoid using certain terms—remedial versus developmental, for instance—to create a positive tone in the classroom. At best, the term *remedial* has negative connotations, according to most educators though ironically, it is the term used the most by the U.S. Department of Education at the time (Paulson & Armstrong, 2010). The term *developmental* has a more positive reaction based on the idea that students are continuing to develop within their academic career.

Teachers who are unprepared to teach developmental students should be required to take a certification course, according to Paulson and Armstrong (2010). Paulson and Armstrong noted that teachers at that time remained unprepared for instructing students at the developmental level. In order to ensure student success, they stated a need for faculty training to enhance their knowledge, skills, and attitudes working with students in

developmental courses. While it may not be conceivable for all educators who instruct developmental students to take additional training, they indicated teachers should have a background in literacy or an associated field to assist with struggling learners of all types.

Greenberg et al. (2011) discussed one-on-one techniques and after-work tutoring to see positive outcomes. They used a randomized control study to address possible solutions for struggling adult readers. From a population of over 1000, there were 277 participant learners selected, including both native and nonnative speakers of English were enrolled in the study. Overall, the 198 participants in the final sample, had some marginal increase in academic progress using invention practices such as decoding, fluency, comprehension, and extensive reading. There was, however, not a particular intervention method that proved to be better over another. In the end, any intervention was determined to be the best practice described to help increase reading levels for the adults who score low on reading tests. Through careful screening, the participants who remained were put through an accelerated tutoring program.

The Greenberg et al.'s (2011) study revealed that during a week of at least 8 hours, and no more than 100 hours, levels of comprehension, extensive reading, and fluency were monitored. Every one of the participants showed positive results, some more than others, but all showed an increase in reading skills. An administered reading exam was taken, and each of the remaining participants' scores rose. The participants noted that extensive reading helped the most when taking the exam. Greenberg et al. noted that extensive reading was one of the reasons why some of the participants dropped out of the program.

Innovative Methods in Community College Curriculum

Incorporating innovative methods in community college curriculum can lead to stronger engagement. As indicated in the previous discussion of Finn and Avni's (2016) study, instructors can make a student's transition from a developmental course to a standard course smoother by integrating familiar material that is relevant to the students' lives. A method of relevancy includes media and popular culture. According to Blick (2015), Hawk and Hill (2016), Lonergan and Ayers (2015), Morgan and Levinson (2017), Parmegiani (2014), and Pierson (2014), popular culture instruction has made headway in the community college classroom, bringing student experiences to the forefront. This allows instructors to teach relevant material that can include real-world situations. Watching a film can help students develop stronger writing skills through a method called visual literacy (Chadha, 2018; Dillion, 1992; Hawk & Hill, 2016). Hawk and Hill describe visual literacy as a method of understanding, reading, writing, and creating visual images such as seen in posters and film.

Bringing in popular culture in community college courses can not only aid in students discussing certain classroom topics, but also open up dialogue for students who may be hesitant with other course material. Blick (2015) discussed how popular culture was being integrated more into community college libraries. This allows students to have access to political, socioeconomic, and cultural changes in an evolving society. In a meta-analysis of eight studies done at research libraries in metropolitan areas of the United States, Blick confirmed that the use of popular culture material was on the rise in universities. Also, Finn and Avni's (2016) qualitative study focused on students'

developmental writing and the experience of academic literacy. The researchers began by acknowledging that success was not solely based on tests. They were interested in understanding how focusing on developmental writing would bring success in academic literacy. In their study, assessment tests were used as an indication of student success. Finn and Avni observed instructors in the classroom. The instructors defined academic writing by relating it to standard university mandated policies during training and syllabi composition, but these instructors would often change their definitions when reviewing writing from students because of the diverse nature of the work, thereby revising the mandated policies. It was clear that a set definition could not be applied to every student. The researchers concluded that it was difficult to measure developmental and remedial students on the same level as college-ready students unless factors such as sociocultural and socioeconomic standards were included. Because instructors altered the material they delivered to students, looking at these standards may take the form of innovative approaches to instruction to improve academic writing, such as using *The New York Times* and other credible articles from magazines and newspapers.

However, not all faculty will be able to incorporate popular culture in their classes for students, but that does not mean it should not be made available to students. Lonergan and Ayers (2015) made a case for the incorporation of popular culture in community college libraries. The authors addressed the growing popularity of creating popular culture studies in universities and community colleges, which led to significant connections among the readers and additions of the material to the library. Because of the

influence of popular culture in students' lives, instructors were encouraged to use an active approach of adding materials in the classroom with the assistance of the library.

Singer and Alexander (2017) examined how to print and digital books influenced learning. In their research discussed more thoroughly previously, Singer and Alexander looked at the differences in comprehension between reading print and reading digitally. Ultimately, they found that students learned more effectively with print media even if the students believed that reading digitally was easier and more accessible. Even when the portability of materials was taken into account, the results remained that students, including those in high school and college, learned more effectively and efficiently from print media.

In higher education, teaching and learning with the use of popular culture, such as graphic novels and comic books, can be effective (Dune et al., 2016). Dune et al.'s qualitative study was created from a cohort of 569 undergraduate students in 12 programs, 14 students divided into three teams produced seven videos that recorded their college experiences regarding motivation and involvement in the classroom. The project contained open-ended responses indicating that students found the videos to be both educational and entertaining. Video multimedia was selected because the students were familiar with this mode of communication. The purpose of creating the videos was to promote healthy competition among students. According to Dune et al., students were asked to self-reflect after completing the video and evaluate each other's videos after viewing them. The result combined both a grade for the students and a cash prize for the

winners. From 569 students, 299 surveys were returned that indicated that 64% found the videos educational, and 86% were entertained.

Written narratives included shared experiences of students from similar backgrounds of socioeconomic and financial situations that reflected the advantages or disadvantages they encountered when introduced to reading and writing. Parmegiani's (2014) case study involved reviewing literacy narratives written by students to reach a diverse audience. Students wrote their own stories of when they began to read or were first introduced to literacy methods using a literacy narrative mode. Academic success could be found in student writings when they are permitted to write about their own experience. Through the use of narrative writing, students were able to transfer their skills into composition courses as well as other courses, such as history and the sciences.

Pierson (2014) conducted an exploratory study and argued that using learners' own lives was a useful approach to create the curriculum for community colleges. In the project, the author noted that student stories were relatable, especially for ESL students who are learning the English language and may be struggling. Pierson posited that bringing in technology, such as student-created video and PowerPoint, improved students' technological skills as well as connecting students to the material presented. Pierson noted that sharing personal stories on the computer or in the classroom had an impact on students because it validated their being in school and their experiences.

Regardless of study, reading and writing is a craft all students continue to sharpen in higher education. Although reading and writing skills among community college students continue to be a challenge (Harbour & Smith, 2015; McGrath, 2009), many

community college instructors have been using innovative techniques to reach students who are disinterested in reading and writing (Dune et al., 2016). Some innovative techniques include graphic novels and film being integrated with classroom material. For instance, in an English class, students may be studying a section on dialogue while using sections of graphic novels.

Information literacy along with reading and writing is needed for career opportunities (Togia, Korobili, Malliari, & Nitsos, 2015). Togia et al. (2015) indicated that literacy skills aid students in avenues such as analytical and critical thinking. The authors explained that diverse forms of materials for instruction, such as magazine articles or documentary videos, and other digital forms of information can provide a boost toward students' confidence by developing literacy skills through technology-based mediums.

Hawk and Hill's (2016) conceptual framework of critical media literacy was set as a background for a study on how community colleges are portrayed in media to prospective learners to see if that representation in popular culture was related to student decisions about attending college. Hawk and Hill noted that community colleges were rarely represented in the media, but when they were mentioned, the message was often geared toward traditional students, such as students just graduating from high school, and not toward nontraditional students who had been out of the education process since high school. The participants in the Hawk and Hill study were asked to fill out a questionnaire after viewing four short media clips about the community college being represented in the segments. Then, in semistructured interviews, negative and positive media clips of

how community colleges were reviewed and commented upon by the participants as to whether they made an impact on the viewer’s decision to attend a particular college. The evaluation of the study supported that media as popular culture can teach about unfamiliar things to a diverse audience. The stigma surrounding 4-year and 2-year institutions may be the cause of why the media has portrayed community colleges in a lesser light than 4-year universities. Hawk and Hill posited that negative media clips can influence students and that creating new media literacy would attract students to community colleges.

Being able to recognize multiple forms of media is one element of media literacy, being able to understand it is another. Other methods of media literacy were explored in Morgan and Levinson’s (2017) qualitative case study, which examined the use of digital tools, such as programs like PowerPoint, to teach writing. Instead of written essays, students were required to create digital essays, substituting PowerPoint slides for pages. Students teaching students, as mentors, helped students find mistakes, share insightful writings, and support one another through writing. Because a digital essay is a new method of writing, instructors need to be comfortable with it to propose this method. One way to draw students into this new method was by adding popular culture elements such as comic book and film images or stills that relate to the context of the digital essay. Under the instruction of digital essays, teachers discovered that using digital essays was described as a liberating experience combined with curiosity and valued among peers. By reimagining how essays were created, students opened up and shared experiences of their college participation.

Summary and Conclusions

Addressing adult literacy in community college developmental courses remains a critical concern with a lack of student interest in reading and writing (McGrath, 2009; Taylor & Kroth, 2009) and a need to increase literacy rates (Harbour & Smith, 2015). To understand the need for research for how community college instructors are approaching this problem, I provided the search strategies that I used to complete this review, as well as the conceptual framework of Knowles's theory of andragogy and Hirsch's cultural literacy theory for my study. I looked at research on both sides of the engagement process–faculty and students— how student engagement can affect student learning, how instructor engagement can affect classroom rapport. I also explored research on instructors' approach to engagement in the classroom, and achievement in developmental classes. Finally, I reviewed research on implementing innovative methods of instruction.

How adults learn and what adults learn are connected to how instructors experience their attempts to create a meaningful curriculum to increase student engagement and literacy in community colleges (Finn & Avni, 2016). Addressing adult illiteracy may seem like a daunting task, but some teachers are finding that developing teaching strategies to increase engagement and using new materials are ways to reach students and increase literacy (Booker, 2016). Literacy strategies and selecting what is the right type for a class should be the main concern for instructors because knowing how to read is a valuable skill in any course (Dune et al., 2016). Through my research of the literature, I learned that not every adult student learns the same way (Knowles et al., 2012), and catering to as many learning styles at once can attract several types of

learning, thereby attracting more students to the subject (Finn & Avni, 2016). Noted by Dolnicar et al. (2017), students who have difficulty understanding the lesson were more than likely to choose a peer to talk to, who may have more worldly knowledge of the material or the tools used with that material (e.g., computers or the internet), than an instructor.

Literacy is not just reading, but it is understanding and applying the material. Sometimes peers need to work with peers in order to excel in the classroom (Knowles et al.). Because students learn in different ways and at different levels, instructors need to practice patience, conduct formative assessments to monitor students' progress throughout the term, and need to consider innovative methods and materials to improve engagement and, as a consequence, learning (Dawes, 2017). The research for this study is designed to understand how community college instructors in developmental composition courses are approaching literacy concerns in their curriculum. In Chapter 3, I provide the details of how the research was conducted.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand how community college developmental course faculty are using innovative teaching methods in their classrooms to increase student engagement and literacy. I interviewed community college instructors about their approaches to this problem. In this chapter, I discuss the research design and rationale, my role as a researcher, the methodology, trustworthiness, and the ethical procedures associated with my study.

Research Design and Rationale

The research question guiding this study was this: What are the experiences of community college faculty using innovative methods to increase student engagement and improve literacy in reading and writing freshman developmental composition courses?

Because the research question aligned with a qualitative approach, I used a basic qualitative methodology as described by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), interviewing both new and seasoned instructors of developmental freshman composition courses in community colleges using a researcher-designed, semistructured interview protocol developed specifically for this study. I asked them about their approaches and experiences addressing literacy skills using innovative methods in community college classrooms in the southwestern United States.

Qualitative researchers receive information, such as people's perceptions of their experiences and beliefs, commonly seen also in phenomenological studies (Patton, 2015). Phenomenological studies focus on how people make meaning of a certain phenomenon that may have affected them. Although I am interested in the experiences of instructors, I

am not seeking the underlying meaning of their experiences that may invoke psychological or emotional responses or unique life paths, such as analyzed in phenomenological studies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Likewise, other qualitative study approaches, such as case study, ethnography, and grounded theory, would not have been the best approach for my study because I am not analyzing particular cases, observing faculty in the classroom setting, or developing a theory based on data.

A basic qualitative methodological approach was the best choice for my research because I was interested in seeking the understanding of instructors' interpretations or perceptions of their experiences in the community college classroom using innovative methods of instruction. Open-ended interviews are a frequent choice for data collection because of their flexibility in nature (Patton, 2015).

Role of the Researcher

I was an adjunct faculty member for a community college for 10 years. During that time, I also maintained several other adjunct positions at four other colleges and universities in my surrounding area or online. I worked with students who tested into developmental English courses as well as refresher courses that integrated reading and writing. I left on good terms with all the schools and believed there to be no conflict of interest as I no longer taught at any of the locations. Because I continued to have contacts at these colleges and universities and because they all have some form of developmental English courses, I reached out to the faculty in those communities and asked them to participate. I posted my recruitment flyer on each of the schools' bulletin boards and my social media sites, LinkedIn and Facebook. Even though I had a previous

relationship with all of the colleges and knew some of the faculty, some of the faculty were participants in the study. However, I did not have any working relationship with any of them at the time of this study. I maintained my role as interviewer professionally and sought to minimize bias by having my committee review transcripts and my analysis. In addition, I offered participants the opportunity to review their interview statements and make additions or corrections.

Methodology

In this section, I describe the methodology, including how I determined participant selection criteria, developed and used the self-designed interview protocol, recruited participants, and collected and analyzed the data.

Participation Selection Logic

I recruited eight faculty members from one of the five colleges located in a section of a southwestern state in the United States. Each participant met a specific set of criteria to participate based on the following: (a) had taught developmental English composition for at least 2 years, (b) had taught at any of the five community colleges selected in the southwestern United States, and (c) had used innovative methods in the curriculum of developmental courses to increase engagement and literacy.

I interviewed the first eight faculty members who self-identified as fitting these criteria and volunteered to participate in my study and stopped after the first eight when I found that I have reached saturation. Saturation is reached in a study when looking at additional data, such as additional interviews, would not produce more information than what the researcher already has (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2015).

To encourage faculty to volunteer, I offered a $25 Visa gift card as a thank-you for participating. If more participants were still needed, I would have used a snowball sampling by asking the individuals who I already interviewed if they knew of any colleagues who might like to participate and give them a copy of the flyer and my contact information.

Instrumentation

For the purpose of this study, I created an interview protocol (see Appendix) in consultation with my committee with questions based on the conceptual framework and the research question. I completed one trial interview to practice the interview questions and facilitate communication. The interview protocol contains several probes as follow-ups to individual interview questions to allow for more elaboration during an interview, as suggested by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) and Patton (2015). I began each interview by providing background information on me as well as the purpose of the study. I then asked the participants to give their own brief background to create an atmosphere of ease and establish a rapport with them, as suggested by Rubin and Rubin (2012).

Interview questions included some that were specific, such as what they have experienced using certain innovative methods over others in the classroom and what do they see as the advantages or disadvantages. The final question of the interview was broad to allow participants to share any other information or insights that they may not have had a chance to share during the interview and feel is applicable.

Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

There are five community colleges in the southwestern U.S. district that I used to recruit participants. The first eight participants that responded were all from one of the five colleges. I asked the heads of each English department at the five community colleges for permission to post a flyer on the community college's bulletin board. I also used my personal LinkedIn and Facebook accounts to post the recruitment flyer as my social media pages are connected to the colleges in question. Patton (2015) noted that the use of social media allows for not only a diverse range but also a wider range of participants, which can be beneficial to reach all colleges in question rather than just the ones where I used to teach. My social media accounts included current and former colleagues, alumni, and former students in my former place of employment, and people with whom I have an ongoing relationship.

Once participants contacted me, I sent an informed consent form for them to review and consent to before scheduling the interview. The informed consent included requirement details about the study and participant requirements. After they returned the informed consent, I arranged a convenient time to set up an online interview through the videoconferencing platform Zoom (https://zoom.us/).

After I received Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (#04-13-20-0339252) I started recruiting participants and collecting data. Each interview took approximately 60 minutes. I audio recorded the Zoom interviews using both my MacBook and an iPhone app, as a backup recording device to assure I had a complete

copy. After completion of the interview, participants received a $25 Visa gift card as compensation for their time.

I kept a researcher's journal during interviews to note any observational details during them that may help provide context for the transcriptions of the interview. I used a transcription software app called Wreally (https://transcribe.wreally.com/) to transcribe the audio recordings. After the transcripts were completed, I emailed the transcripts of each person's interview and asked them to review and return within 5 days noting any changes or additions they would like to include, if any. Only pseudonyms were used in the final publication to protect the identity of the participants. I saved interviews using my personal password-protected computer to securely store them.

Data Analysis Plan

I analyzed the transcribed interviews to obtain an understanding of the experiences of faculty teaching community college developmental English composition. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) provided a process for analyzing data, that I used as follows. With the transcribed interviews, I conducted an open coding process by reading the transcripts and listening to the tapes to seek out similar phrases, statements, words, and experiences in the classroom. I then created themes based on similar codes that I found. I reviewed the research question and refined and revised the themes, renaming them if necessary.

Issues of Trustworthiness

I created trustworthiness by addressing the following: the credibility of the study, transferability of the work, the dependability of myself as the researcher, and the

confirmability established by taking notes and recording my thoughts and observations after every interview. I kept a researcher's journal for every interview and took notes throughout and after the interview process.

Credibility is an important aspect of qualitative research. According to Patton (2015), credibility must first be reached before trustworthiness is established. If a researcher has established that the research study's findings are grounded in reality, then credibility can be determined (Patton, 2015). I used triangulation by including several interviewees and my researcher's journal and requesting transcript reviews by participants to increase the consistency of my work.

In order to establish transferability, I included ample details and descriptions of the process for the study as well as providing the results for others to consider using the process. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) argued that providing vivid descriptions and details allows readers to visualize their own experience of the content, thereby making the findings potentially more transferrable. Patton (2015) noted that small sample size may lead to general findings if the findings are thick enough for the reader to consider transferability.

I created dependability by discussing my progress and findings with my doctoral committee. Additionally, the researcher's journal of my notes and procedures, coding, and findings helped me view the data as dependable and note any discrepancies. Doing these steps with my journal led to confirmability, as well. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated that it is a best practice to log findings throughout a study for analysis and data collection purposes.

The importance of keeping a reflexive journal, according to Patton (2015) is that it steadily grows while progressing in your study or learning. The reflexive journal is not meant as a summary of what was just done but as a record of the steps taken during a research process. Additionally, I also established confirmability through my own assumptions and beliefs. As I am a graduate of the community college system from which I recruited the participants and had previously taught there, I was careful to not allow this personal bias in the study by not imposing my personal experiences with developmental classes I taught. The reflexive journal was an ideal place to record and reflect on any assumptions or beliefs I had in connection with my study.

Ethical Procedures

This study was conducted under the ethics review of Walden University's IRB. After I received IRB approval at Walden University, I started recruiting participants and collecting data while following the guidelines discussed previously in data collection and on the IRB application. I discussed the confidentiality of the study with the participants before interviewing them and obtaining an informed consent agreement. This agreement form outlines the voluntary consent to participate in the study, the confidentiality of the participants' information, and that if so desired, they can withdraw from the study at any time. Another section of the informed consent agreement states that the participants' identifying names will remain confidential and pseudonyms will be used in their place. A $25 Visa gift card was offered to each participant. The reason for this is that compensation may attract possible participants than if no compensation was offered.

Every file and audio recording, transcriptions, researcher's journal, and any preliminary trial interviews will be kept in a locked cabinet in my house. All data that is kept digitally or electronically will be kept on my MacBook, a personal password protected laptop. I will keep the data safe for 5 years and then properly destroy it.

Summary

For Chapter 3, I have presented my research design intentions for a basic qualitative study on faculty experiences in developmental English community college classrooms. After I received approval from Walden University's IRB, I recruited and interviewed eight selected faculty members who met the requirements I laid out for my study. After I have collected my data, I used the data analysis plan and ethical procedures established here in Chapter 3.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand how community college developmental course faculty are using innovative teaching methods in their classrooms to increase student engagement and literacy. I was interested in faculty experience with the use of various popular culture materials in their classroom and what roles they play, if any, in adult learning. In this chapter, after reviewing the research question that guided the study, I describe the setting for the study, the demographics of the participants, the methods for data collection and analysis, the strategies to ensure trustworthiness, and the findings discovered from analyzing the data.

Research Question

What are the experiences of community college faculty using innovative methods to increase student engagement and improve literacy in reading and writing in freshman developmental composition courses?

Setting

Originally, the setting was to be face-to-face interviewing on one of the campuses of a southwest Texas community college of 16,000 students. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the campuses were closed at the time I started to collect data and my strategy had to change. Out of five campuses that I sent recruitment information to, I received returned interest from one campus and decided to move forward with data collection using participants at the one campus. Instead of face-to-face interviews, I asked participants to engage in an audio-recorded Zoom meeting. I interviewed eight participants using Zoom. Participants were able to choose a time and date that was

convenient for them. During the course of the interviews, there were no identifiable negative experiences with the process of interviewing; however, during Evan's (pseudonym) interview, the setting included a noisy background with his dog barking and partner interrupting. He lost his train of thought during distractions and asked for questions to be repeated. Toward the middle of the interview, he moved to a different location of his house where it was quieter. Evan's interview was the longest lasting.

My recruitment initially extended to faculty at several community colleges in Texas; however, my participants all came from one community college. All eight participants were current English faculty at Texas Community College (TCC; pseudonym) having taught in higher education in what they indicated as developmental English for at least 5 years, although in my initial recruitment I had only asked for at least 2 years. In Table 1, I provide the pseudonyms and faculty role for the participants and the number of years they had been teaching developmental composition courses while using what they would describe as innovative methods.

Table 1

Pseudonyms and Description of Participants

Participant pseudonyms	Participant roles	Years teaching
Ava	Full-time faculty	5
Brad	Full-time faculty	14
Cindy	Adjunct faculty	15
Doris	Full-time faculty	20
Evan	Full time faculty	14
Fran	Adjunct faculty	12
Gloria	Adjunct faculty	8
Harry	Adjunct faculty	12

I used several platforms to recruit participants: my LinkedIn page, TCC's website, and departmental bulletin boards, as well as snowball sampling from participants already recruited. I received immediate feedback from several individuals wanting to participate in the study and stopped recruiting after receiving expressions of interest from 10 people. I turned down two as they had no experience teaching developmental English. The participants I selected (setting up interviews with the first people to have responded to my recruitment efforts) seemed eager to assist in my study of faculty experiences of teaching reading and writing in developmental English at a community college. Some of the participants were concerned about the elimination of developmental courses at their campus due to state regulation at the time. My expressed interest in their innovative methods used in those courses might have been a source of their eagerness to participate. I reached saturation after I heard several repeated themes from multiple prior interviews and no new information related to my research question was provided.

As a researcher, I wanted to ensure the interview process was comfortable for the participants. I was able to conduct the interviews with participants on their own time and in their own personal environment, which may be an explanation for why they seemed to shared their experiences openly and freely, as the climate appeared relaxed. Two participants expressed interest in seeing the final results of the study, suggesting they were motivated to understand the research problem and results better.

Data Collection

Once Walden University IRB approval was obtained, I immediately began recruiting my approved number of 8-10 participants. I came to this number of

participants based on Patton's (2015) recommendation that small sample sizes can leave a researcher with valuable but concise material. After the eighth interview, I believed I had reached saturation and discontinued the search for participants. I used the planned semistructured set of interview questions (see Appendix), which were based on the research question, as the data collection tool. The conceptual framework of Knowles's adult learning theory and Hirsch's cultural literacy theories acted as a guide in constructing the interview questions. Each participant was interviewed once with the option to provide additional information if something came to them after the initial interview. Each interview was audio-recorded using Zoom and saved on my personal computer that is password protected. I began data collection at the end of April 2020 and finished at the beginning of June 2020. The majority of the interviews fell in the 50- to 58-minute range, one went a few minutes over an hour, and two interviews were 40 and 46 minutes. After I finished transcribing the interviews, I sent each participant a $25 Visa gift card, as promised on their agreed-to informed consent, and a copy of their transcripts for review with a request that they share with me any corrections or additions. Half of the participants returned the gift card with a note saying they were glad to assist, and no compensation was necessary. None of the participants specified changes to be made to their transcripts.

Data Analysis

To get an overall sense of each participant's responses, I listened to each recording twice before I started transcription. This was an important step for me before beginning to analyze the data. I intended to understand any overarching concerns or

responses before focusing on particular quotes. While listening, I took notes in my researcher's journal whenever I heard vocal inflections or emphasis on a word or phrase, and I noted the overall tone of the participant.

I used Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) six-step system of data analysis. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, this particular type of method included a form of manual coding of the transcript from the first interview conducted. Manual coding allows for accuracy and consistency during the data collection process (Patton, 2015). Using the transcript, I made themes by highlighting words, comparable statements, and related experiences found in the document. I used a transcription app called Wreally to transcribe the audio recordings. I made categories to organize them, first in my researcher's journal and then on a file on my password protected computer. As I read each interview, I searched for identical or similar codes from my first interviews and for new codes. The themes emerged as I reviewed interviews for new codes with those themes in mind. I started to fuse or alter codes and combine them into similar themes. Once I went back to my interview questions and research question to make sure my themes were aligned, I reduced them even more. After this process, I finalized the final themes. At the end of my data analysis, I was determined there were six themes.

As noted in Patton (2015), it is important to identify themes and patterns from the data analysis that may fall into negative cases. Recognizing outliers in a study that could negatively impact the credibility of a study should be acknowledged. While reviewing the themes, I noted areas for discrepant cases, feelings, events, and particular words that

did not connect with the previously noted themes. All of the results appeared to relate to one of the six themes that emerged, leaving no discrepant cases.

Themes Related to the Research Question

Before presenting the findings in detail, here I provide a summary of the themes and their related codes from my data analysis related to the research question for my study. In later sections, I discuss and explain the themes in greater detail, along with discrepant cases. In Table 2, I present codes and themes derived from my analysis of the interviews.

Table 2

Themes and Codes

Themes	Codes
Meaningful dialogue	active learning learner-centered student ideas
Lack of college readiness	removal of developmental course teamwork/collaboration trial and error
Development of voice through engagement	increase engagement increase participation
Cultural variety of material	use of various cultural materials-film, music, newspapers, social media diversity of materials materials from family background
Student-centered learning	student experiences self-aware critical thinking student choice
Lack of funding and faculty support	government funding funding for adjuncts vs full-time support for adjuncts vs full-time administrative support

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in a study should be evident. Creswell (2009) argued that in order to increase the validity and trustworthiness of a study, the process of strong qualitative research should be practiced by the researcher. I followed strict protocols to certify the dependability of the study results, final data credibility, transferability of findings, and research bias confirmability.

Dependability

To preserve the dependability of the study results, I reviewed my study with my doctoral committee members. I transcribed interviews and sent them to my committee for review. Additionally, I maintained a researcher's journal to note procedures of the study and coding processes, as well as the findings mirroring an audit trail. The reason for an audit trail was to provide transparent details of the steps the researcher takes while conducting a study (Creswell, 2009). Notes were taken before and after an interview, as well as during an interview to note fluctuation of words, emphasis on words, or expressions of feelings. Notes were also audio recorded to ensure the study protocol was observed. Some of the notes involved questions I had while thinking about the analysis of my data and repetitive themes.

Credibility

To establish the credibility of the study, I maintained a researcher's journal to record thoughts after each interview. After transcribing the interviews, I also made notes in my researcher's journal. Reflexivity was used to establish credibility. Reflexivity is a method of reflection on the researcher's part through understanding the roles of not only

the researcher but also the research (Patton, 2015). I allowed the participants to review their transcriptions to provide the opportunity to make necessary adjustments—add or take away—information. None of the participants made changes to their interview transcripts.

Transferability

With the use of a set list of 12 interview questions and already established probes of the questions, I set out to better enable the transferability of the study. With the use of pre-planned questions and probes, the majority of the participants were able to deliver descriptive accounts of classroom experiences. Creswell (2009) noted that rich, thick descriptions can allow readers to decide transferability.

Confirmability

To ensure confirmability, I kept a researcher's journal where I recorded my own personal reflections on the participants I interviewed, the dates of the interviews, reviewing transcripts of the interviews, and questioning of my interpretation as well as the analysis of data. To avoid bias, I also included records of questions responses to my role as a researcher. Finally, I maintained a record of questions, assumptions, and beliefs that I had while researching to warrant that they would not influence the objective nature of my study.

Results

The final results were obtained from my analysis of the eight interviews with participants who identified as community college faculty members of developmental English for 5 or more years, and who had indicated they were trying innovative

approaches to increase student engagement and improve literacy. I, then, developed these responses into themes to answer the research question of the study. Results were organized with the research question in mind. The following section describes the themes derived from the interview data.

The six themes were generated: (a) meaningful dialogue, (b) lack of college readiness, (c) development of voice through engagement, (d) cultural variety of material, (e) student-centered learning, and (f) lack of funding and faculty support. Participant responses were very similar in connection with the interview question. The reflection of the participants regarding the interview questions each revealed their own practice on an individual level, but analysis of the interviews led me to similar themes.

Theme 1: Meaningful Dialogue

The first theme explored reflects the eight participants' perceptions that students developed questions for themselves that led to meaningful dialogue. The idea of students engaging in classroom dialogue was described by several participants as being an important factor in developmental English because it allowed for autonomy. Each participant made a comment about how allowing students to write their own material, choose their own topics, or select their own reading material allowed them to feel as though they were in control of their learning. The participants indicated that student participation and engagement increased when the students had the opportunity to express themselves as an individual. For instance, five out of eight participants mentioned that by assigning a text and then having students watch a related film or listen to music and then reviewing the written text, a meaningful dialogue was possible. Each participant,

however, explored ideas that fit into this theme that explored dialogue in the classroom. Doris commented on students being able to develop questions about the material in a collaborative environment. In the interview, Doris described a setting where students create projects and asked to critique one another, and peers grade their project members to hold them accountable. “I ask students to create questions that they think I would ask based on their project and more often than not, the questions are really good.” Doris also added that students grade harder. “They give each other a low C, when I think it should a B, they are hard on one another, but if their reason for the grade is sound, I let it stick.” Doris and Gloria used journals to allow students to brainstorm ideas for their own questions for discussions. Gloria mentioned having students use pen and paper instead of computers because she thought it led to more accountability of their own ideas.

> When they handwrite things, they have to figure out on their own if there are spelling errors, grammar errors, etc., whereas a computer often tells them there is an error that needs to be fixed. After students read and review the text, they would then summarize the article and create questions that would formulate a meaningful discussion.

Gloria also commented that creating questions for meaningful dialogue can be a sign of developing critical thinking, though not every student developed essential critical thinking skills within the term. “Critical thinking is a staple of a college outcome,” Gloria suggested, “because it allows students to bring forth their own ideas. Of course, some students have trouble formulating those ideas and that’s where developmental classes come in.”

In order to help students, get over the fear of speaking in front of others, Brad used teamwork as a means of students generating meaningful questions and talking in the classroom to formulate dialogue. While the participants did not specifically mention the phrase "meaningful dialogue" the contents provided could be filtered into that thematic section as many discussed created questions and assisting students to speak up in the class on their own terms. "I look at it this way," Brad commented, "students need *x* and for them to discover that sometimes they have to work in teams." Brad further noted that *x* could be knowledge, help, authority, power, or anything to assist them to get to the answer they are searching for but can't do it alone. Brad went on to say that students are surprised when he used their work on tests or used to lead class discussions. "I think they are shocked when they realize that I use their stuff because they often tell me that they didn't think their work is good enough."

Evan and Ava promote active learning that creates meaningful dialogue in their classrooms. Ava explains that active learning works by students getting material prior to being in the class, but having the material already completed. In her view, students should already have the material completed so the lesson can be conducted instead of taking the time to go over the material. Ava further noted that teaching active learning needs to be done:

> Active learning holds students accountable for their actions as scholars. I expect students to have read the material prior to class but if I don't tell them that, then they won't do it. There are plenty that don't, but I love to do team assignments so if there is a weak link (of the group), they let me know. During the team

assignments, they come up with some really great stuff. Sometimes I give them a starting off point, but often, they do the work and come up with their own discussion topics. I always learn something new.

Harry and Fran mentioned that allowing students to use their own ideas gives the classroom environment a family setting. "It's in my syllabus," Harry noted, "when you're here, you're family. I know that's been said before, but I want my students to believe it." Fran also said something similar. "When my students enter the classroom, I welcome them to their home away from home. I want them to be comfortable and be able to talk about topics that may be taboo or controversial."

Theme 2: Lack of College Readiness

Cindy said that whether in developmental or college level courses, "many community college students just aren't prepared for big universities." The second theme that emerged from interviews with participants was if students were considered "college ready" in community colleges. Each of the eight participants discussed how the Texas government was transitioning from a developmental to a "college ready" course. Brad discussed how many students express "anxieties about universities and not being able to 'make it' when they do go to a larger school." Brad tells students that what they are feeling is normal. "I remind [my students] that they are not alone, that the majority of their peers are going to college for the first time and it can be a scary thing."

Participants also said that not every student is "college ready." Doris said based on her thinking, "Being college ready means that you've mastered the core subjects of math or English. Both of these subjects seem to give students the hardest of times."

Other participants also discussed how the majority of the students in their developmental courses tested low in both subjects of math and English. "It's hard when students want to be completed with their course work quickly, but then have to take several developmental classes in math and English," Evan said. Brad pointed to a particular problem in English, when students are asked to draw on information they have learned in previous classes. Brad mentioned:

> It's not easy for students who have no prior knowledge of creating works on their own and then [are] told to it. They get intimidated and I have to stop and think about what my own experience in college was like.

Harry discussed how bringing in a variety of material assists students who aren't college ready. "My students are definitely not ready for college-level English. Of course, I'm not going to tell them that. I bring in graphic novels or short stories because they are easy, short, and accessible." Using those different learning methods allows him to connect with his students. His response of learning students' needs "real quick" can also sum up the necessity of learning student reading and writing methods because this allows for the curriculum to be changed before the course is too far along.

"We have conversations about what the text is saying; if there are images, then what are the images saying—do they help or distract?" He also added, "When it's something short and quick and they finish, then they feel accomplished. It makes me feel pretty good, too." Harry further went on to say:

> Our developmental classes are new now, students are learning, and we are learning along the way with them. It's interesting. I miss the old structure, but I

think good things will come out of the new classes. It just might take time and patience. A lot of patience.

Community colleges serve as a gap between high schools and universities. They fill the gap, Brad went on to say, because "a good chunk of our students are not prepared for what a university expects. Many students are not ready to be in lecture classes with 150-300 peers." Brad's narrative spoke of being a number in a university but a name in a community college. "Classes are small at [TCC], 30 tops. You learn your students' names, their likes, and dislikes, about their families, but knowing that stuff doesn't help you get more instructors to teach freshman comp." Brad laughed at the end of this statement but followed up by saying freshman composition was typically given to adjuncts, few full-time ask for freshman composition. "I like teaching freshman comp. Yes, they can be immature and irresponsible in terms of writing and responsibility, but they are also open-minded, many are willing to learn if given the chance."

Harry later commented:

> They just aren't ready for college level work. So I think the state is trying to make these programs available for students who need extra time…but extra time for students means extra work for teachers, and frankly, there is just not enough teachers who are willing to teach 5-hour courses a few times a day, a few days a week, weekends included. It's unfortunate for adjuncts who have their hours capped, so if they teach these courses, which many do, they can only teach two.

In some cases, students who were placed in developmental courses expressed worry that they did not belong. Ava mentioned, "I have a very open class, there's no

judgment or bullying tolerated, and opinions are respected. I think, because of this, students feel like they can tell me anything. I have had several students who felt like they didn't belong in college or in developmental classes." Ava mentioned that some of her students did not feel like they deserved to be in college because of how poorly they did in high school and other students who did well in high school did not realize how hard college would be until they started. Fran also shared a similar moment in her teaching career:

> I had a student once told me that he didn't belong in the 'dumb class.' I didn't want to tell him that he wasn't just in a developmental course, he was in the first of three courses to take before college level. He tested low, but he was intelligent. He just needed extra time and some direction, and my developmental course was able to provide that.

Theme 3: Development of Voice through Engagement

All the participants commented about students being able to find their own voice increased engagement. "I think it is critical," Evan said about students being able to recognize they have a unique voice. "I don't want them to write how they think I want them to write," Evan said that this happens often, "they figure out my political views and then figure that's what I want. But it's not." Cindy also said something similar:

> When students try to write for the teacher and not for themselves, I think the work is unsuccessful. I like to integrate fairy tales in my class, which is not for everyone, but they are short, understandable, and relatable. I will use a lesser-

> known fairy tale, don't give them the ending, and let them come with their own ending. I'm generally surprised most of the time at what they come up with.

When asked how students develop voice, Brad jokingly started by stating, "I get (students) to write essays." After a few seconds of laughter, Brad seriously said:

> I'm always trying to find something different. I'm always trying to get them to do certain assignments beyond just 'hey, read this and underline the topic sentence.' So what I found that really works for me is incorporating song—lyrics—bringing in music of their choice. I model a sample song for them, like Blue October's "Hate Me" and so we read through the lyrics and I'm like 'hey, what does this mean?' and we start breaking it down. Then it's their turn with their song.

In some contrast, Harry admitted that for students to develop their own voice by saying:

> I don't think I have done anything special for them, aside from trying to establish a classroom dynamic where most of the groups that sit together like each other. When they enjoy the class and want to be there, that ramps up the engagement level a lot. They also get influenced by seeing how much work other students are doing and what [is needed] to maintain that same level.

Fran commented that "In the summer, I like to let students find a short novel of their choice, or I use excerpts from graphic novels or more current short stories." Fran said that alternating reading every few weeks or so but allow students to choose what they want to read, and in turn, she feels that this improves engagement.

Allowing students to decide what to write about or read about assisted in the development of their voice, claimed five of the participants. One of Evan's first writing

assignments is a diagnostic essay. Developmental teachers use diagnostic essays as a tool to see where a students' knowledge of syntax, grammar, sentence structure, and other processes may be. "It's the first day of class and I tell them to write me a story. I tell them at least three paragraphs, typed, double spaced, edit and revise it." When asked what they are supposed to write about Evan said the response is typically a shrug and, "I don't care. Just make sure it is as grammatically correct as possible." In the past, Evan had received science fiction short stories, brief biographical narratives, and *Twilight* fanfiction.

> I'll tell them that it should be something they are willing to share because that's what we do, we share it. It's the first paper so I have them exchange their papers and someone else reads the work aloud. It scares them a little, but it also gets the fear of writing out early.

An increase in student engagement and participation were results Cindy perceived in her experiences with students generating questions for discussion from their own work. "I latch on to their good ideas immediately," in order to create class discussions. "I'm more like a facilitator. My students run the show, as they should." Cindy took a minute and reflected on past experiences.

> There are teachers that I have had and teachers that I know who still do this: lecture. I'm sorry but lecturing doesn't work for my class and for most of the students I work with. Those veteran teachers who don't change or won't change are missing an opportunity to learn themselves. It's not easy to change, but our

students are constantly changing, so I know I need to keep up with them. I think they appreciate that.

Ava said that allowing students to have their own choice on writing subjects, that can lead to critical thinking and development. The freedom of choice and allow students to decide their own topics is not entirely without limitation, Ava explained. A common technique faculty use to assist students with learning how to develop their own questions through reading and watching and listening is through collaborative settings, Ava mentioned.

Participants such as Fran and Gloria discussed writing workshops as helping generate an open atmosphere where sharing their writing voices was engaging. Ava and Brad commented on how collaborative pedagogical methods work best for their courses. The best use of collaborative methods, in developmental courses is described by Ava as it being "…much like tutoring within the class with more time for guided reading, modeling of reading, for practicing syntax, for practicing paragraphs for drafting essays, and just for getting feedback right then."

Theme 4: Cultural Variety of Material

The fourth theme reflects participants' descriptions of students analyzing material and providing cultural context to their work. However, three of the participants complained about the lack of funding to provide culturally diverse materials. Four of the participants noted that they do not require students to use the required textbook because of the cost. To start with, Ava provided students with a variety of texts or allowed students to choose a text that speaks to them, with her approval first. Ava said that

sometimes, by allowing students to choose texts from their cultural background, "they embrace the work and, most of the time, end up as strong writers."

When Brad wanted students to write essays, he used music from the students' culture to spur writing. For example, "I modeled some lyrics for content and meaning, and then we'd watch the music video and see if there are connections between what was read to what was watched." In order for faculty to understand what type of method—film, video, or text—works best in the class, faculty should get to know their students as soon as possible, Brad asserted. The majority of the participants indicated that by weeks 2-4 in a term, they had a general idea of where each students' reading and writing level fell.

Cindy mentioned that she no longer uses the assigned text, due to the lack of funding provided, in the classroom and instead brings in supplemental materials:

> I have students e-mail me weeks before class asking about the text and I tell them flat-out, "don't buy it." It's not worth it, especially when the majority of the students are not English majors and textbooks are expensive. I'll use fairytales, like Little Red Riding Hood. Most of the students really dig this approach. I find older students have a harder time because they were used to the traditional styles of learning, but most open up when they see the exploratory approach to argument.

Evan's experience suggested that it is not until about week 6 or 8 that student needs are discovered. Evan explained that in shorter terms, like 5 or 8-week courses, instructors will need to know what will or will not work for their students as soon as

possible. The longest course offered at TCC is a 16-week course and these are the only ones Evan teaches, which he said allows for more time for ice breakers and just "getting to know students on an individual level first before an educational, which I think helps them realize that I care about their wellbeing first."

During three interviews, Ava, Doris, and Brad discussed the lack of funding for their attempts to provide a variety of cultural curricular sources. Ava said, "Because Texas is removing developmental courses, you'd think this would allow for more financial support to be available for students," there was a brief pause, "but it seems to be the opposite." Ava explained that the creation of college courses with embedded support, such as a lab extension, is meant to encourage students who would normally be placed in courses that do not count for college credit, known as remedial or development classes. But, with the developmental courses, Ava said students can receive college credit and have extra support, commonly referred to as lab, which can act as tutoring. Doris noted, "Labs are a great concept, but when they are mixed with [developmental] classes…. this can really tire students out. A 5-hour English class, twice a week, can really take its toll."

Six participants commented on using their students' family backgrounds and experiences as a source of material for their classroom. Gloria indicated that people need to be "active citizens in their society, they need to have a sense of cultural literacy." Learning to engage as active participants in-class around cultural materials they were familiar with came up a few times during the various interviews with Ava, Brad, and Evan.

Ava commented that removing the developmental courses could be detrimental to the incoming population because many of their reading and writing scores are not considered to be college level. Ava pointed out:

> If a student is placed in developmental but the teacher feels can be moved to college level, then that is an easy transition. But, if a student is in a college level course, but should really be in developmental, there is no backtracking system we have. Unfortunately, we have seen many students fail because of this issue. I'm worried that removing developmental courses will make it worse because that'll open up more college level classes and more students who might not be ready to take them, will be shuffled in.

Harry also said, "While we have eliminated some of the 'developmental only' courses, we have expanded courses for Freshman Composition, and now have two classes designed to support students whose reading and writing skills may not be at the college level."

Because their students have diverse cultural histories, instructors' understanding of cultural literacy appears to be part of their classrooms. Doris mentioned that cultural literacy is a students' "experiences with reading and writing throughout basically their life and family history…cultural literacy is the experiences that have helped shape who they are." While Brad suggested that family background leads to cultural literacy as "the knowledge and understanding of all things culture." Brad later connected to classroom strategies by adding:

> It's more than race, ethnicity, it's the understanding the needs of the society, based off certain populations…for me, culture is gender, people with disabilities…a number of different factors. With my…course, that is how I approach the class, with trying to figure out what categories we can make up to define society and what makes it a community. I bring in stand-up comics and other different things, I'm always quick to make sure we are talking about these categories of culture.

Cindy thought about cultural literacy for a moment, took a deep breath, and began with this statement:

> My understanding of cultural literacy is almost as much about literacy as it is illiteracy. In many cultures, literacy is just not valued, and students come in who are first-gen and are really fighting against cultural illiteracy because their family hasn't valued education, reading, learning, and not just to get ahead in life, but to better yourself.

Evan brings social media, such as Instagram, into the classroom as a means to bridge the gap between teacher and student dynamics. "I think social media is a part of our current generation of students' history. If we don't recognize that, then we are missing an opportunity to connect with them." Evan commented about using Instagram by saying:

> I act like I have no idea what Instagram is. I'll call it InstaChat or Facegram, just for some laughs. Then, I have the students "teach" me about Instagram. They walk me through the process of what it is and what it is used for. They talk about

> the positives and negatives of it without even really knowing they are doing that. We talk about how we can use Instagram productively and not just for a time-killer. I think using Instagram is cool because it's pictures and (students) are less intimidated by pictures than they are by words. I blatantly ask them: "What can Instagram really do for us?" I don't know how many other colleges allow their faculty to have pretty much free reign as we do…I mean sure, we have guidelines to follow, but we can pretty much teach whatever, as long as we are meeting certain standards.

Evan was not the only participant to mention bringing in material to try to relate to students. Fran and Doris both use current events to discuss real-time scenarios and have students write about it. Fran said, "The Internet is an endless supply of information. I love using articles from the Internet because this is a great way of teaching students that not everything you read on the Internet is factual." She mentioned doing a "fake news" project that always generates conversation. "I started using fake news a few semesters ago and no matter what political affiliation a student has, everyone gets involved because every student uses the Internet." Doris uses newspaper articles to find current events. "Even though newspapers are seen as outdated by students, I have my students cut out similar articles from different newspaper sources. Then, they have to create new headlines that are accurate, specific, and showcase action verbs."

Theme 5: Student-Centered Learning

The fifth theme related to faculty understanding that their nontraditional students were realizing that they are in control of their education. All participants had responses

that led to the development of this theme. Harry said that from motivation to taking charge, the ability for adults to take control of their education is a reflection and reminder that they are in college. Harry begins the course by telling students to rely on the syllabus and create calendars. Considering his adult learners:

> I believe that self-directed learning is something students need to learn on their own—I tell them the first day of class that they need to be responsible for their own learning (keep a calendar, read the syllabus daily, make time in their day to do their work, etc.), and if they do, they will see results. Because I believe this is the student's responsibility, I do not adjust my teaching or curriculum—I simply pose questions to the students when they ask what they can do to be more successful in the class (do you have a calendar marked with due dates? Do you have a set time in your day to work on homework and read? Do you read the syllabus to be prepared for class? etc.).

Doris said, "For the most part, students who persist do really well—feel more confident" when coming up with their own ideas. Harry said that allowing students' choice has been successful in his classroom.

> Based on years of experience, I have learned that the process method helps students understand their papers the best. By showing them that we can move from topics to thesis statements, to research (just reading, not citing, yet), and then to paragraphs, and so on, they don't see assignments as, "Oh crap, I have to write a 6-page paper," and then the paper isn't as daunting. I know students have different learning styles, but this one seems to be the most efficient for my

> classes. And thankfully, we are allowed liberty to select material and teach our own way. Of course, it's frowned upon to lecture for hours, but if that's what you want to do, no one will stop you.

Cindy reported that because a large group of students in developmental classes is coming from high school, that they are not used to having a choice. "Students are timid when it comes to writing what they want to write," Cindy said. "I try to give them as much encouragement as I can but there are always a handful, not many and it seems less and less as the years go on, that still want prompts handed to them."

In contrast, Fran said that allowing students to decide what is right for them can backfire. "Giving too much freedom can be destructive. There has to be limitations. Students have to be monitored." For students to decide what they want to research, Fran gives them guidelines, structure, and sources. "Students won't always seek out the resources they need, so we need to embed them into the course." That way they can easily access the library and supplemental sources that they may not normally go to on their own. Fran also commented on lecturing in the classroom:

> Sometimes I get tongue-tied in front of students, even though I've been doing this for ages! I eventually gave up on lecturing years ago because I saw that the students were not paying attention or were just bored. I find that doing hands-on work, teamwork, and even mini-projects that get the students out of the chairs and moving around the classroom works wonders.

Collaborative learning and active learning play key roles in student development, Brad said. "Students value the time to practice on developing their own skills and

discussion questions," Evan stated that adult learners realizing that it is their educational learning is "critical" because in high school many are forced to work while in college, it is a choice. "Sometimes they come into my college course and they just don't know how to learn," Evan stated and that sometimes the class has to be re-structured completely to add in basics of grammar, sentence structure, etc. While Evan added that taking this approach may seem extreme, that is one of the many benefits of developmental courses is the integrated support for reading and writing strategies that are embedded in the course.

Theme 6: Lack of Funding and Faculty Support

The final theme involved the perceived lack of funding and faculty support for using innovative methods in addressing engagement and literacy in the community college's developmental English courses. Harry perceived that being an adjunct meant that the role of faculty was lesser than full-time members and therefore did not receive as much "attention" from the dean. "Support is there," Harry commented, "but not from higher-ups. And it seems impossible to make full-time faculty." Brad mentioned something similar. "As being a full-time faculty member, I am usually given first choice on classes, even if I haven't been at [TCC] as long as some adjuncts." All participants indicated that there was classroom support such as computers and tutoring available for students. Ava was an adjunct for several years before moving into a full time position. She sat on a committee to help structure funding for the courses. "I write grants," Ava mentioned, "and try to draw in community stakeholders for support. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. When it doesn't, I try again." She later mentioned, "I want adjuncts to know that [the English department] wants to support them and that we

couldn't work as a department without them." It would be interesting to see the graduation or passing rate of full time faculty members and adjuncts.

During their interviews, Ava, Doris, and Brad discussed the lack of funding for their attempts to provide a variety of curricular sources. Ava said, "Because [the state] is removing developmental courses, you'd think this would allow for more financial support to be available for students," there was a brief pause, "but it seems to be the opposite." Ava also commented that the creation of college courses with embedded support, such as a lab extension, was meant to encourage students who would normally be placed in courses that do not count for college credit, known as remedial or development classes. But, with the developmental courses, students can receive college credit and have extra support, commonly referred to as lab, which can act as tutoring. Doris noted, "Labs are a great concept, but when they are mixed with [developmental] classes….. this can really tire students out. A five-hour English class, twice a week, can really take its toll."

Brad also noted a lack of funding available, in particular to community colleges. "I taught at the university level before landing a spot [here]." Brad noted, "While [the community college] has some pretty cool facilities, it's just not up to par with the surrounding universities."

Summary

The research question for this basic qualitative study is: What are the experiences of community college faculty as they use innovative methods to increase student engagement and improve literacy in reading and writing in freshman developmental composition courses? The analysis of the data led to the discovery of the following six

themes, which reflect the research question: meaningful dialogue, lack of college readiness, development of voice through engagement, cultural variety of material, student-centered learning, and lack of funding and faculty support.

In Chapter 4, I have presented a description of the study as well as the setting used during the interview process. I provided a table that describes the participants' roles, years of experience in the classroom, and pseudonyms I used to maintain confidentiality. The data collection procedure and methods of data analysis were also included in this chapter. I included a report of the themes and codes discovered during the coding process. Discrepant cases and evidence of trustworthiness, such as dependability, credibility, and transferability were also explained. Finally, the results of the study and detail evidence from the participants of the themes described were recounted. These processes and procedures led to the final chapter of the study.

In Chapter 5, I will interpret these findings by looking at the empirical literature analyzed in Chapter 2 and the conceptual framework, implications for positive social change, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Interpretation of Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand how community college developmental course faculty are using innovative teaching methods in their classrooms to increase student engagement and literacy. The key findings that emerged from this study were based on the participants' insights regarding their personal experiences as community college faculty. The research question that guided the study was: What are the experiences of community college faculty as they use innovative methods to increase student engagement and improve literacy in reading and writing freshman developmental composition courses?

The findings for this study are indicated by six themes: meaningful dialogue, lack of college readiness, development of voice through engagement, cultural variety of material, student-centered learning, and lack of funding and faculty support. The analysis of participants' responses to the interview questions indicated that introducing a variety of text and media fostered student engagement and participation, which led to more productive writings from students. In this chapter, after interpreting the key findings in light of the conceptual framework and empirical literature review, I discuss recommendations for further research and the implications of positive social change.

Key Findings

The first theme that emerged was meaningful dialogue. The meaningful dialogue was perceived by the faculty to have developed among students participating in the community college courses when they used a variety of materials. Generating meaningful dialogue among students (MacArthur, et al., 2016; Tewell, 2013) indicates

that the work presented was accessible and interesting and sparked critical thinking, a stated learning objective of freshman composition at TCC. Participants shared positive experiences with students engaging in meaningful dialog with the assistance of a variety of media, such as film and music, and writing exercises, such as journaling and brainstorming.

The second theme, lack of college readiness, was expressed by the faculty participants in this study in the struggles between the community college system eliminating “developmental” classes and creating “college ready” ones. The participants saw not all of their students as “college ready” and expressed concern about this direction in the curriculum.

For the third theme, development of voice through engagement, all participants stressed the importance of students finding their own voice when it comes to writing. TCC has many standards: collaboration, social and personal responsibility, creativity, synergy, technical skills and knowledge, students first, and joy. One of the TCC standards is creativity. Participants noted that their classroom acts as a supportive environment for students to be able to write in their own voice and style.

The fourth theme was the cultural variety of material. Participants noted several different styles of texts, such as short stories, novels, essays, and poems as well as film, music, comic books, and graphic novels that they used in the teaching. Participants commented on student backgrounds and education as being a necessary consideration to promote learning. Understanding how cultural literacy is impacted by family background was discussed by several participants.

The fifth theme, student-centered learning, was discussed by all participants. Each noted the importance of students being in control of their learning, but also providing facilitation and guidance when necessary. The sixth theme was a lack of funding and support expressed by faculty instructors. Many of my participants felt that there are not enough resources available to serve their students to the best of their abilities. Faculty support varies from institution to institution and at TCC, the support by administrators is recognized by the faculty I interviewed. The faculty at TCC are given the liberty to teach what they want and how they want, according to Evan, but within moral and ethical bounds. Violating these rules can result in an instructor's dismissal. Adjuncts often feel left out of faculty social events and gatherings because those are typically reserved for full-time faculty members. Making full-time faculty status is the dream of many adjuncts, as mentioned by Harry.

Interpretation of Findings

In this section, I interpret the findings of this research study by reviewing the six themes in the context of the conceptual framework of the theories of Hirsch and Knowles as well as examining empirical literature discussed in Chapter 2. Hirsch's theory focuses on cultural literacy (Hirsch et al., 2002), whereas Knowles's theory centers on andragogy or adult learning (Knowles et al. 2012). This section is organized by the six themes discovered from the research question, which pertain to the experiences of faculty at community colleges in developmental English courses. The research question asked what the experiences of community college faculty were as they used innovative methods

to increase student engagement and improve literacy in reading and writing freshman developmental composition courses.

Meaningful Dialogue

Nontraditional students often need further guidance (Knowles et al., 2012). Guidance can come in a variety of forms, such as peer mentorship or instructor facilitation. One way an instructor can connect with students is by allowing them to lead classroom discussions. The experiences of motivation and engagement discussed in MacArthur et al. (2016) and Tewell (2013) resulted in a type of meaningful dialogue produced by students. MacArthur et al. noted that instructors should find ways to motivate students to encourage them to write. Strong writing skills benefit students in a variety of courses such as history, psychology, biology, and even math. Using different methods of technology can expose students to new means of approaching writing, such as digital platforms like social media (MacArthur et al., 2016). The eight participants noted varying degrees of students' expressions of meaningful dialogue. Instructors, according to Tewell, should attempt to draw out students and use collaborative techniques, like group projects to develop a meaningful dialogue.

Booker (2016), Dawes (2017), and Tewell (2013) also argued that being present, whether in person or online, leads to an experience that can produce lasting engagement through conversation. It was also noted by Tewell that undergraduate students were not perceived to participate as much as graduate students even though collaboration was meant to be established in the class.

Lack of College Readiness

Increasing rates of illiteracy among college students have caused instructors to try different methods in the classroom, such as those used by faculty who volunteered to participate in this study, including implementing innovative methods of instruction such as bringing in film clips and music (Harbour & Smith, 2015; Makoon & Ratcliff, 2016; McGrath, 2009). McGrath (2009) and Taylor and Kroth (2009) argued that a lack of interest in reading and writing among college students has prompted instructors to alter the curriculum to try to connect to students.

In Tewell's (2013) study, faculty expressed concerns over students entering college because students lacked preparedness and experience in research and critical thinking skills. Wood and Newman (2017) also reported that students who did not meet regularly with instructors tended to perform poorly compared to students who met with instructors. Preparing students can be as simple as establishing a routine, such as having warm-ups ready when they enter the room or scheduling appointments with instructors.

Andragogy, the practice of teaching adults (Knowles et al., 2012), is suited for community colleges where the majority of the population are age 18 years or older. Adult learners differ from child learners in that they are tasked to be in control of their own learning. Many adult learners who enter community colleges, however, lack the skills to be in complete control of their education and may drop out or fail classes due to not being prepared (Royer, 2018). Giving adult learners the knowledge at the beginning of their courses, as suggested by the participants in this study, such as library connections, various technologies like computers and Internet assistance, and the proper

instruction on how to incorporate what they understand, can be the missing link adult students need (Hirsch et al., 2002). When students can make connections to what they know in the real world to course materials, they tend to be more successful learners because that personal bond becomes more of an investment instead of an assignment (Dolnicar et al., 2017; Loversidge & Demb, 2015). In my study, participants noted that students who were placed in developmental programs were not prepared for college-level courses. They also mentioned that allowing students to make decisions about class material helped provide a relaxing atmosphere that increased student retention in classes.

Development of Voice Through Engagement

Each participant noted an increase in student engagement and participation when students were able to use voice and were valued by faculty guidance and structure. Loversidge and Demb (2015) noted that whether an instructor is full-time or adjunct, they should make time available to mentor students. Mentoring students can help foster student confidence and engagement (Booker, 2016; Pruett & Absher, 2015; Tewell, 2013). Bringing in various types of technology can also help student engagement, as may be an educational tool they are familiar with (Finn & Avni, 2016; Paulson & Armstrong, 2010). Students who are familiar with what they are working with are more likely to be vocal in class (Finn & Avni, 2016).

Engagement can come in a matter of student validation as well. In Wood and Newman's (2017) study, faculty who acknowledged students' work through a variety of praise and assistance saw an increased outcome of college completion. This form of

open communication suggests instructors can and should talk with students inside and outside of the classroom to build a strong student-faculty rapport (Dolnicar et al., 2017).

Ownership of one's education can be linked to enhanced student outcomes (Knowles et al., 2012). Allowing students to choose what happens in the class can also increase student community (Thomas et al., 2018). Hirsch's theory of cultural literacy focuses on the ability to explore and develop different cultures and providing students an opportunity to add to classroom discussion can lead the way for diverse conversations to occur (Hirsch et al., 2002). Participants noted that in student-centered learning, students' voice is a focal point. Opportunities for students to grow in a variety of domains, such as behavioral and cognitive, may occur by allowing students to use their own voice (MacArthur et al., 2016).

Cultural Variety of Material

The ability to view media such as radio, television, and film through a close examination and share the meaning of the media is called information literacy (Hicks & Lloyd, 2016). Popular culture allows student experiences to be understood through the eyes of others (Parmegiani, 2014; Pierson, 2014). Students have been found to develop stronger writing skills by watching a film (Chadha, 2018; Dillion, 1992; Hawk & Hill, 2016). The analysis of the data led to the discovery of the faculty participants bringing in a wide range of methods from graphic novels to music, from video clips of comedians to current event articles, to try to increase engagement and participation in the classroom. Dune et al. (2016) noted that teaching with graphic novels and comic books can be an effective mode of instruction. Hirsch et al. (2002) noted that not every student would be

exposed to innovative methods, but those who were exposed were receptive to the material being delivered in a new way (Dune et al., 2016).

Hirsch et al. (2002) noted that, in the theory of cultural literacy, using a variety of texts from diverse authors adds to authenticity and credibility. If an instructor does not vary the reading material and only chooses texts on personal preference, then students can become resistant to the material (Lock et al., 2016). It was discovered in my study that faculty perceived that bringing in a variety of material that introduced students to a variety of perspectives and approaches of subjects that are often be viewed as difficult, such as math and writing, created an open environment, a judgment-free zone, where students could share and talk freely about opinions on a wide variety of topics that mattered to them, like politics, religion, and censorship.

Student-Centered Learning

Knowles et al. (2012) and Hirsch et al. (2002) argued that adult learners need assistance in the educational and social aspects of their lives. In community colleges, students are expected to develop skills that can be carried over into the real world (Roberts, 2018; Royer, 2018). Several factors contribute to a student being placed in developmental courses, from not doing well on a placement test to not having the necessary resources from their previous education (Bol et al., 2016). Allen et al.'s (2016) study showed the majority of students who took control of their education in developmental courses went on to be successful in college-level courses. Self-regulated learning may develop where a constant evaluation and re-evaluation of goals are established (Bol et al., 2016). Both Knowles et al. and Hirsch et al. argued that adults

often pursue an education for self-gratification or to better the lives of them and their families.

As a community college, TCC has an open-door policy to give every student a chance at an education. Following students along their academic path will show them that an interest in them has been established. Sometimes a community college is a student's only choice because of its affordability, but the education should still be just a rigorous as any other college or university. During the interviews with faculty, creating a student-centered community where learning in a healthy environment was brought up, in one form or fashion, by several participants. Whether in-person and doing hands-on collaborative projects or online and conducting and monitoring breakout rooms for team building assignments, centering on students makes them feel involved and responsible (Armstrong et al., 2015).

Lack of Funding and Faculty Support

Previous studies (Harbour & Smith, 2015; Paulson &Armstrong, 2010; Smith, 2019) indicated that supporting faculty, whether through instructional decisions or monetary assistance, is necessary to promote a stable environment for students. With the lack of adequate college budgets based on governmental support, during the interviews, faculty instructors at TCC reported bringing in materials that are low cost or free for students. In my interviews, the participants, who were adjuncts, tended to become more vocal about the lack of funding and faculty support than were the full-time faculty members. There are many ways for a community college to generate funds, but one way described by Ava is through grants. Ava mentioned that she writes grants and proposals

and submits them to various stakeholders, sometimes multiple times until she receives a response. Community colleges designate individuals to write grants based on the needs of faculty and students, but not every need will be met (Wu, 2019).

Recommendations

I have several recommendations for further research. The first recommendation revolves around researching the effect of limiting developmental courses in any community college. The total elimination of developmental courses in Texas community colleges, for example, is expected within the next 5 years, leaving only courses with the college and developmental component combined for individuals with low or failed Texas Success Initiative scores, a test given to every incoming college student to assess math, reading, and writing skills. Research into literacy and student engagement rates among the varying curricula might provide important information.

The second recommendation is to research varying levels of support (or lack of support) for part-time or adjunct faculty in terms of professional development or enhancement of community college curriculum. It would be good to know more about how community colleges are using government funds or other community stakeholders to support community college faculty and provide a network of team-building and collaboration. By providing monetary support for instructors, the relief and burden of having to find alternative and low-cost materials could be avoided. Sometimes an alternative is not available or the best choice for the subject being taught, but instructors are often reluctant to ask for expensive class materials because of student economically disadvantaged demographics they often teach in the class (Armstrong et al., 2015).

The third research recommendation is to better understand the nature of differentiated learning for community college students. If personalized learning programs were established for students in developmental classes, it might be possible to provide evidence for the needs of those programs for all students. Following students along their academic path may show that when an interest in the student has been established, there is improved engagement and literacy. Despite whether or not students start at a community college or university, education can still be just as rigorous as any other college or university. With several scholarships, grants, and other financial assistance available to students to enter college, maintaining a relationship with students is vital for their success (Wood & Newman, 2017).

Finally, the research also could be conducted at the library regarding the value of differentiated materials, such as comic books, graphic novels, and films. While most community college libraries are equipped with standard equipment like computers and access to the Internet and print books and documentary-like films, a wider variety of materials' use should be studied to understand if it increases access of different students attending the college. The addition of more popular culture into community college libraries could provide students more engagement with political, socioeconomic, and cultural differences of an ever-evolving society, as suggested by Blick (2015). Lonergan and Ayers (2015) advocated for the incorporation of popular culture, such as graphic novels and film, to be placed in community college libraries.

Limitations

Limitations of the study could be the setting of the interviews. Because of COVID-19, I was unable to meet with the participants face-to-face to conduct interviews. Limited to eight participants in one community college system means that the generalizability is limited, but the design and interview protocol could be carried out by other researchers. One limitation considered at the beginning of this study was whether the participants would have adequate recall of experiences, but all were engaged and forthcoming.

Implications for Social Change

In terms of social change, education is the key (Knowles et al., 2012). Advancing in technology, in particular, has been a leading effort in improving lives (Booker, 2016). Faculty and staff can have opportunities for training and furthering their education on implementing new technologies in their classroom. Addressing new ways of approaching subjects like writing with different tools, such as a computer program and social media, can improve student engagement (Connors et al., 2017). Providing office space for adjunct instructors might improve communication and engagement with the college population. Every teacher should have a space that they can call their own, even if it is a shared space, in addition to the benefits of privacy for student conferences.

These steps at improving engagement and literacy through community college courses are important because their effect does not stop at the individual but expands to an entire community. Offering more opportunities and advancement, students can increase social progress (Phillipson et al., 2018). When literacy education is a means of

promoting recognition, it becomes a matter of self-worth to students (Latz, 2012). We are faced with new challenges every day. Experiencing the challenges through a critical lens allow viewpoints, perspectives, and ideologies that higher education can foster problem-solving and strengthen critical thinking skills (Russell et al., 2017).

Conclusion

This chapter included a report of the key findings related to developmental learning in community colleges. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to understand how community college developmental course faculty are using innovative teaching methods in their classrooms to increase student engagement and literacy. Also included in this chapter was student engagement and literacy. In the conclusion of this chapter, I discuss a summary of findings.

In this study, faculty discussed their experiences teaching English to developmental students at a community college. Throughout most of the interviews, the faculty commented on bringing in outside material aside from the required or recommended reading to generate class discussion. Some material faculty would share with students were film clips, songs, and graphic novels. Motivation and engagement were discussed by the faculty as being necessary for the success of students. There was no single factor regarding how to keep students engaged or motivated, but a common consensus was allowing students a choice did result in higher engagement with faculty when this method was practiced.

Engaging and motivating students is not a new concept. Engaging and motivating developmental adult learners is something that is not widely addressed. Faculty members

are trying to reach their students is through innovative methods, such as teaching with movies, music, comic books, and other forms of media to attempt to generate interest among their students. The results of this study suggest that instructors perceived using innovative methods do increase student engagement and literacy. The instructors saw that allowing students to have a voice in their choice of learning material helped them assist students in adapting to college. Participants described their classes as open and inviting and nonjudgmental, which can make students feel more welcome and safer.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Research Question: What are the experiences of community college faculty as they use innovative methods to increase student engagement and improve literacy in reading and writing in freshman developmental composition courses?

Interview Questions:

1. What role does developmental education play at your campus?
   a. Probe: Are you aware of any shifts towards expanding developmental courses?
   b. Probe: Can you tell me about your experiences with deciding how you approach teaching in your developmental course?
2. What pedagogical approaches do you use in developmental courses with adults?
   a. Probe: How do you determine which approaches are best based on the needs of your students?
   b. Probe: In what ways does your pedagogical approach involve innovative methods? By innovative methods, I am referring to technology, alternative media, film, comic books, graphic novels, or journaling
   c. Probe: As a result of using these innovations, have you seen increase or decrease in student learning (or participation) while teaching developmental courses? Any specific examples?
3. When do you begin to understand the needs of the students in each course?
4. What is your understanding of cultural literacy?

a. Probe: In what ways, if any does cultural literacy relate to what or how you are teaching in your classroom?
b. Probe: Is it important for cultural literacy to be established in your classroom? Why or why not?

5. Can you tell me about a few of the things that you have done to increase student engagement and improve literacy in reading and writing in your freshman developmental courses?
    a. Probe: Do you think there are ways that developmental students are lacking in cultural literacy? If so, can you describe what you've observed and how you've tried to further develop it?
6. How important is it for adult developmental learners to be self-directed in their education? In what ways do you like to see them self-directed?
    a. Probe: Can you tell me of times when you've seen a reaction from students when they realize that they are in control of their education?
    b. Probe: What is your experience with students' self-directed learning, and do you adjust your teaching or curriculum as a result?
7. What type of equipment (i.e. computers; projectors) is available in your classroom?
    a. Probe: How do you use it, if at all? Do you think it helps you meet any goals you have for improving cultural literacy or enhancing student engagement and literacy?

8. Can you walk me through a typical teaching day when you have a chance to use the teaching materials you prefer?
   a. Probe: Can you tell me more about your experience with x, y, z effort?
   b. Probe: Did you see the outcomes you desired from that effort? Can you tell me about them?
9. Are there any other innovative methods you are using or would like to use more?
10. Can you share a moment of your teaching career that did not work in terms of using innovative methods in the classroom?
    a. Probe: What did this experience mean to you?
    b. Probe: Would you want or require any additional support or training for using these kinds of innovative methods? Such as what?
11. Do you have any questions for me?
12. Reflecting back over your experiences teaching developmental English composition courses, is there anything you would like to add?