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An Analysis of the Meaning, Barriers, and Value of Developmental Education for First-Generation Minority Students at a Community College

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An Analysis of the Meaning, Barriers, and Value of Developmental

Education for First-Generation Minority Students at a Community College

(TITLE)

BY

Molly Murphy

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
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IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
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2018

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
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ABSTRACT

This qualitative, phenomenological study was designed to learn more about how first-generation, minority community college students perceive the meaning, barriers, and value of developmental education. Five participants were interviewed in a semi-structured format. The results provided nuanced and personal accounts from students who revealed that developmental education affects their feelings of self-efficacy, that systemic financial challenges are consistent barriers to success, and that the connections between teachers and their students, or lack thereof, are perceived to have an impact on the usefulness of developmental education. Finally, results indicated the importance of working with students individually to understand how their ethnic identity may influence their experiences, as well as the usefulness of a practical model like Schlossberg's transition theory in providing support for disadvantaged students in navigating developmental education. The findings present possible avenues for future research and suggest some recommendations that may be useful to administrators and professionals as they work to create better opportunities for academic success for students in developmental education.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my family. Bradley, your patience and support through many long days and nights of writing contributed immeasurably to this thing getting done. I would not have had the fortitude to pursue such a monumental task without having your help with all the other responsibilities that make up day-to-day life. Mom, Dad, and Megan – thank you for your constant encouragement and confidence in me. Every pep talk and commiserating phone call helped make another day of writing possible and bearable. I love you all.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Despite the continued efforts of federal, state, and local governments, as well as schools across the country, many students in the United States do not finish high school at an academic level sufficient for college levels studies (ACT, 2012; Breneman, Abraham, & Hoxby, 1998; Rothman, 2012; Sparks & Malkmus, 2013; Strayhorn, 2011). According to data from the testing organization, ACT, almost 75% of students failed to meet college-readiness benchmarks in at least one of the four subjects measured (ACT, 2015). Remediation rates in colleges and universities – approximately a quarter of first year students require some pre-college level work (Sparks & Malkus, 2013) – demonstrate that while intentions for college preparation in high school are good, many students are arriving underprepared for higher education.

Developmental education is the system, including not only remediation courses but a broad array of services such as tutoring and learning cohorts, which colleges and universities have designed to meet the needs of these students and ensure that their academic skills are at college level (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010). Though developmental education requirements can vary greatly between states and even institutions, the commonality is the focus on pre-college level coursework that will let students successfully transition to college courses. This could be in the form of pre-Freshman year summer bridge programs or one or more semesters of pre-college level classes. For example, sometimes all students may need is one pre-college algebra class as part of a full course load their first semester before transitioning seamlessly to college-level math

the following semester. In other cases, students will take a full semester, or more, of developmental coursework before being able to take any college-level classes.

Though developmental education is designed to help students, it can sometimes have the effect of creating barriers. From the perspective of a student with weak academic skills, developmental education requirements may appear to be a frustrating set of multiple assessments and sequences of courses that may require multiple semesters of study before a student is qualified for college-level work. Bailey et al. (2010) found that while the majority of individual developmental class enrollments do result in a course completion, less than half of students actually complete their entire developmental sequence. As remedial coursework does not contribute to the numbers of hours necessary to graduate, taking developmental courses can mean that it takes longer and is more expensive to earn a degree, which may be a deterrent to persistence and completion.

Unsurprisingly, this may be especially true for students who are already at-risk for dropping out of college due to first-generation, minority, or socioeconomic status, or lack of social support. Studies show that minority students are overrepresented among underprepared students entering college (Breneman, Abraham, & Hoxby, 1998; Strayhorn, 2011). In addition to minority and low-income students being more likely to attend low-resource primary and secondary schools (Frankenberg, Lee, and Orfield, 2003), African-Americans and Hispanics attend schools with fewer of the resources that promote college enrollment (Perna & Titus, 2005). These factors likely contribute to the finding that Black or Hispanic students had consistently higher percentages of remedial course-taking than White students (Sparks & Malkus, 2013). First-generation students are more likely to come from low socioeconomic status families, and are likelier to be

enrolled in institutions that are less academically selective than the institutions attended by students whose parents had a high level of postsecondary education (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). They are also more likely to be Hispanic, to have weaker cognitive skills, have lower degree aspirations, and report receiving less encouragement from their parents to attend college (Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996).

Though community colleges and traditional universities are both institutions of higher education, they serve different needs of the community and have different student bodies. Community colleges tend to serve students with less privilege, who are working class, and whose parents have little or no post-secondary education than traditional university students (Horn & Nevil, 2006; Snyder, Dillow, & Hoffman, 2009; Voorhees & Zhou, 2000; Whitaker & Pascarella, 1994). The community college student population has higher percentages of every non-White ethnic group (Horn & Nevil, 2006; Snyder, Dillow, & Hoffman, 2009). Additionally, community college students are more likely to be employed in part- and full-time jobs than traditional university students (Horn & Nevil, 2006). According to data from the National Center for Education Statistics (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2003), public 2-year colleges were more likely than other types of institutions to provide remedial education and offer a greater number of types of remedial courses. Community colleges enrolled more of their entering freshmen in remedial courses and reported longer average time periods that students spent in remediation (NCES, 2003).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to interpretively analyze how first-generation, minority community college students perceive the meaning, barriers, and value of developmental education.

Research Questions

Therefore, the following questions guided this study to analyze how first-generation, minority students at community colleges perceive their time in developmental education from a holistic perspective. This research addressed the following questions:

1. How do first-generation, minority students construct meaning of developmental education?
2. What perceived barriers do developmental education cause for first-generation, minority students?
3. What value do first-generation, minority students ascribe to developmental education?

Significance of the Study

Developmental education is a consistent concern in higher education, especially at community colleges (Bailey, 2009; Crisp & Delgado, 2014). While there are significant numbers of quantitative studies regarding the success or lack thereof of developmental education, there are few qualitative examinations of the students who are required to participate in these programs. By studying the impact on students holistically, from both the academic and student affairs perspective, colleges and universities can better understand how to structure remedial courses and developmental programs to help first-generation, minority students persist and be successful.

Limitations and Delimitations

While this study adds to the body of knowledge around students' experiences in developmental education there were some conditions that limited its conclusions. First, the study participation was voluntary. Students who did not volunteer may have had attitudes and behaviors that would have added to the data. Another limitation was that the research was conducted at one community college campus, which limits the transferability of the data. Replication at other colleges and in other areas of the country would be ideal.

By its nature, qualitative research presents limitations that are not present in quantitative studies. Because the aim of qualitative analysis is a complete, detailed description of a small population, findings cannot be extended to wider populations with the same degree of certainty that quantitative analyses can. The findings of qualitative research are meant to help explore and interpret the underlying assumptions of quantitative studies (Atieno, 2009).

Definitions of Terms

At-risk students. Students who, based on characteristics such as race, socioeconomic status, first-generation status, or lack of social support, are likelier to drop out of college (Strayhorn, 2013).

Developmental education. The broad array of services provided to students with poor academic skills (Bailey et al., 2010). This research will focus on the classes in the developmental sequence.

First-generation students. Students who have no parent with any college or university experience (Terenzini et al., 1996, p. 5).

Remedial education. The courses offered to students with poor academic skills (Bailey et al., 2010).

Summary

Developmental education is a significant part of the landscape of community colleges (NCES, 2003), and minority, first-generation students are more likely to have to take developmental coursework than their majority peers (Sparks & Malkus, 2013). A qualitative examination of the experiences of these students allows a deeper understanding of how developmental education both helps and hinders success in higher education.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

This section explores the need for developmental education, what developmental education is, the characteristics of students requiring developmental education, and the institutions that primarily serve them, community colleges. This exploration served to create a context for the current study.

Need for Developmental Education

As studies continue to indicate, large numbers of students in the United States graduate high school without the basic academic skills to succeed in college (ACT, 2012; Breneman, Abraham, & Hoxby, 1998; Rothman, 2012; Sparks & Malkmus, 2013; Strayhorn, 2011). For example, in 2015, just 28% of students who took the ACT test met the benchmark scores in all four subjects: English, mathematics, reading, and science (ACT, 2015). And because these data represent only scores for students who had taken the test—an indication of the intention to go to college—it is possible that the preparation of high school students overall is even lower (Rothman, 2012).

The findings from ACT are consistent with the relatively high remediation rates in colleges and universities. Though the requirements for developmental education differ by state and by institution, remedial education courses can be defined as courses in reading, writing, or mathematics for college-level students lacking the skills to perform work at the level required by the institution (Parsad & Lewis, 2003). According to an analysis of the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), 21% of students entering a four-year public university and 24% of students entering a public two-year college reported being required to take at least one remedial course (Sparks & Malkus,

2013). Though Sparks and Malkus (2013) did find a drop in remediation rates between 1999-2000 and 2007-08 NPSAS studies, the fact that almost a quarter of students entering a two-year college required some developmental education demonstrates the need is still present. Ideally, although all students who choose to go to college should be ready to succeed independently, many students have not had that preparation in high school.

At-risk Factors

At-risk students are those who, based on characteristics such as race, socioeconomic status, first-generation status, or lack of social support, are likelier to drop out of college (Strayhorn, 2013).

Minority status. According to Harry and Klinger (2014), minority students are defined as non-White students who reported as Black or African-American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and Hispanic or Latin. As Breneman et al. (1998) and Strayhorn (2011) noted, minority students are overrepresented among underprepared students entering college. In Sparks and Malkus's (2013) analysis of NPSAS data, they found that White students had consistently lower percentages of remedial course-taking than Black or Hispanic students in all three years of NPSAS surveys.

Minority and low-income students are more likely to attend low-resource primary and secondary schools. Family income often dictates where students attend school, with more affluent families able to afford to live in areas with schools that are perceived to be better. Frankenberg, Lee, and Orfield (2003) examined the NCES Common Core of Data for 2000-01 to explore racial segregation in primary and secondary schools. The data

showed the emergence of a substantial group of American schools that are virtually all non-White. These schools educate one-sixth of Black students nationwide and a quarter of Black students in the Northeast and Midwest (Frankenberg, Lee, and Orfield, 2003). Latino students are also affected by this de-facto segregation - one-ninth of Latino students attend schools where 99-100% of the student body is composed of minority students (Frankenberg, Lee, and Orfield, 2003). These are often schools where enormous poverty, limited resources, and social and health problems of many types are concentrated. In addition to the growth of schools with predominantly minority populations, Frankenberg, Lee, and Orfield (2003) found that during the 1990s, the proportion of Black students attending majority White schools decreased by 13 percentage points, to a level lower than any year since 1968.

According to Perna and Titus (2005), African-Americans and Hispanics attend schools with fewer of the resources that promote college enrollment. Their descriptive analyses showed that African-Americans and Hispanics not only average lower levels of family income, parental education, and math coursework than Whites and Asian-Americans average, but also are relatively concentrated in schools in the lowest quartiles of average family income and parental education. For example, 37% of African Americans and 49% of Hispanics attend schools in the lowest quartile of parental education compared with 17% of Whites and 16% of Asian-Americans (Perna & Titus, 2005). They concluded that these findings suggest that the lower observed college enrollment rates for African-Americans and Hispanics are due in part to lower levels of resources that are available through the social networks at the schools they attend.

Schools in more affluent areas tend to have better teachers, as measured by degrees held and student test scores (Gandara, 2002). McDonough (1997) observed that schools serving affluent areas are more likely to have a culture in which students, parents, and teachers expect students to attend college and prepare them accordingly. Conversely, in primarily poor and working class areas, schools are more concerned with high school graduation and workforce preparation (McDonough, 1997). As a consequence, a significant majority of historically underrepresented students perform modestly, at best, on entrance exams, feel less confident in their ability to earn a college degree, and lack sufficient preparation for college-level work (Strayhorn, 2011).

First-generation status. Though minority status is often linked with first-generation status – racial and ethnic minority students are more likely than other students to be the first in their family to attend college (Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996) – first-generation status on its own contributes to a student being at-risk. In their study, Terenzini et al. (1996) found that, compared to their traditional peers, first-generation students are more likely to come from low-income families, to be Hispanic, to have weaker cognitive skills (in reading, math, and critical thinking), to have lower degree aspirations, and to have been less involved with peers and teachers in high school. First-generation students also tend to have more dependent children, expect to take longer to complete their degree programs, and report receiving less encouragement from their parents to attend college (Terenzini et al., 1996).

Additionally, first-generation differed from traditional students in their curricular, instructional, and out-of-class experiences, as well as in their perceptions of the environments of the institutions they were attending. Academically, as compared to

traditional students, first-generation students took fewer courses in the humanities and fine arts and completed fewer total hours during their first year; they were also less likely to be in an honors program, and they reported studying for fewer hours (Terenzini et al., 1996). Outside of class, first-generation students were less likely than traditional students to be engaged with their institution – they worked more hours off-campus and were less likely to perceive faculty members as concerned with student development and teaching (Terenzini et al., 1996). The two groups also differed in their perceptions of the climate of the institutions they attended - first-generation students were more likely than traditional students to report experiencing racial/ethnic or gender discrimination (Terenzini et al., 1996).

Off-campus pressures can create even more obstacles for first-generation college students. Research suggests these students come with more nonacademic demands on them - first-generation students tend to have more dependent children, to come from families with lower annual incomes, and to work more hours off-campus than traditional students (Terenzini et al., 1996). Students from cultural backgrounds emphasizing family interdependence may be expected to fulfill obligations to the family, including caregiving or contributing financially, that conflict with college responsibilities (Tseng, 2004). Furthermore, first-generation students may be at a disadvantage because their parents lack first-hand knowledge of the college experience and may not be able to help them directly with college tasks like applying for financial aid and registering for classes or with encouraging success strategies such as regularly meeting with faculty members and advisors (Pascarella et al., 2004; York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991). This absence of experience means that first generation college students are also likely to have unrealistic

expectations about college and lack knowledge of the university system (York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991).

Social support. For both minority and first-generation students, social support from family and/or peers is a predictor for college success. For example, in Dennis, Phinney, and Chuateco's (2005) study of the role of parental and peer support in the success of minority first-generation college students found that a lack of needed support from peers is an important predictor of college GPA, adjustment, and, possibly, commitment to college, even when the strong effects of academic aptitude as indicated by high school GPA are controlled. Their research suggested that "those who are experiencing academic and adjustment problems feel the need for someone to provide help, guidance, or emotional support, whereas those who are doing well are less likely to feel a lack of support. When it is not needed, the support of others may be taken for granted and hence be less salient and less predictive of other factors in one's life" (Dennis et al., 2005, p. 234).

Perna and Titus (2005) found that parental involvement is a form of social capital that promotes college enrollment by conveying norms and standards regarding higher education through their interactions with the student, the school, and other parents. They also found that parent-student discussions about education-related issues were associated with a greater likelihood of enrolling in both two-year and four-year colleges (Perna and Titus, 2005). Additionally, Perna and Titus (2005) observed that regardless of an individual student's social, economic, and cultural capital, the likelihood of enrolling in college after graduating from high school appears to be related to the volume of resources or level of active parental participation at the school he or she attended. For example,

students who attended high schools in which a high share of parents contact the school about academic matters were more likely than not to enroll in college.

Perna and Titus (2005) also showed a positive relationship between college enrollment and variables measuring peers' plans to attend college. According to their research, students who attended high schools in which most or all of their peers planned to attend a two-year college were more likely to enroll in a two-year college, whereas students who attend high schools in which most or all of their peers plan to attend a four-year college were more likely to enroll in a four-year college (Perna and Titus, 2005). Increasing the level of educational aspirations among peer groups may be particularly important for raising the college enrollment rates of African-Americans and Hispanics. Analyses show that only 9% of Hispanics and 12% of African-Americans reported that all of their friends planned to attend a four-year institution compared with 14% of whites and 22% of Asian-Americans (Perna and Titus, 2005). Perna and Titus suggested that the correspondence between a student's friends' college plans and a student's actual enrollment may reflect not only the benefits of peer support but also the ways in which parents subtly structure their child's peer group, echoing the research of Frankenberg, Lee, and Orfield (2003), Gandara, (2002), and McDonough (1997) on racial segregation, socioeconomic status and academic performance.

Because first-generation students are less likely to receive encouragement from friends to continue their enrollment (Terenzini et al., 1996) and the negative impact of lack of peer support on academic outcomes (Dennis, Phinney, and Chuateco, 2005), it is important to consider social support as a risk factor for college success.

Developmental Education

Developmental education is designed to provide students entering college with weak academic skills the opportunity to strengthen those skills enough to prepare them for college-level coursework. Most educators prefer the term “developmental” rather than “remedial” education, as “remedial” often carries a negative connotation. An additional difference is that developmental education is taken to refer to the broad array of services provided to students with poor academic skills, while remediation is taken to refer specifically to the courses offered to such students (Bailey et al., 2010).

Though the concept of developmental education is straightforward - unprepared students are provided instruction to bring them up to college level - in practice, developmental education can be complicated and confusing. First, there is no consensus on what it means to be “college ready.” Policies and regulations regarding assessment, placement, pedagogy, and eligibility for enrollment in college-level credit-bearing courses vary between states, colleges, and sometimes even at the program level (Bailey et al., 2010). Second, from the point of view of the student, especially a student with weak academic skills who has not had much previous success in school, developmental education requirements appear to be a frustrating set of unanticipated obstacles involving multiple assessments and sequences of courses that may require two, three, or more semesters of study before a student is qualified for college-level work (Bailey et al., 2010).

Bailey et al. (2010) found that while the majority of individual developmental class enrollments do result in a course completion, only one-third to two-fifths of students actually complete their entire developmental sequence. The numbers are worse for

students referred to a sequence three or more levels below college level - only one fifth or fewer of those students actually complete it. Most surprisingly, about two thirds of students who fail to complete their sequence do so even though they have passed all of the developmental courses in which they enrolled.

Boylan (2009) argued that this lack of persistence can be blamed at least partially on the reliance on using cognitive assessment instruments like COMPASS® and ACCUPLACER™ as the sole way of determining a student's placement in college level or developmental classes. Though these instruments may be accurate in assessing cognitive skills, they do not measure non-cognitive factors that are equally important to student success such as attitude toward learning, motivation, autonomy, willingness to seek and accept help, desire to affiliate with peers or instructors, or willingness to expend effort on academic tasks (Sedlacek, 2004). If a student possesses these non-cognitive resiliency traits, he or she may be successful in college level coursework with the appropriate support (Boylan, 2009).

Boylan (2009) suggested that the Targeted Intervention for Developmental Education Students (T.I.D.E.S.) Model provides a framework for including factors beyond cognitive assessment when placing students in developmental coursework. The T.I.D.E.S. method uses a variety of assessment information to help academic advisors place students in courses as well as place them in experiences that will either supplement or replace developmental courses. The T.I.D.E.S. model advantages include placing as many students as possible directly into college-level courses with appropriate learning assistance and support services, insuring that the students most in need of particular

services receive them as part of an integrated package of assessment, advising, and intervention (Boylan, 2009).

Community Colleges

While both community colleges and traditional universities are collegiate institutions, they serve different needs of the community and have different student bodies. Increased access to postsecondary education, along with specific objectives, such as technical training, for attending a community college, contribute to significant differences between community college and traditional university student populations (Voorhees & Zhou, 2000; Whitaker & Pascarella, 1994). Ethnically, when compared to the traditional university population, the community college population consists of higher percentages of every non-White ethnic group (Horn & Nevil, 2006; Snyder, Dillow, & Hoffman, 2009). With regard to socioeconomic status, community college students are more likely to come from a lower socioeconomic background and are more likely to be employed in part- and full-time jobs than are traditional university students (Horn & Nevil, 2006). Community colleges provide opportunities for access to higher education for students with less privilege, who are working class, ethnic minorities, and from less educated families than traditional university students (Horn & Nevil, 2006; Snyder, Dillow, & Hoffman, 2009; Voorhees & Zhou, 2000; Whitaker & Pascarella, 1994).

According to the most recent available data from the National Center for Education Statistics (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2003), public 2-year colleges were more likely than other types of institutions to provide remedial education. In fall 2000, 98% of public two-year institutions offered one or more college-level remedial reading, writing, or mathematics

courses, versus 63% of private two-year institutions and 80% of public four-year institutions. Public two-year colleges also offered a greater number of types of remedial courses (NCES, 2003). This is likely due to the greater number of minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged students represented at two-year colleges (Horn & Nevil, 2006; Snyder, Dillow, & Hoffman, 2009).

Public two-year colleges enrolled more of their entering freshmen in remedial courses and they reported longer average time periods that students spent in remediation, compared with other types of institutions. Forty-two percent of freshmen at public two-year colleges enrolled in at least one remedial reading, writing, or mathematics course versus 12% to 24% of freshmen at other types of institutions (NCES, 2003).

Additionally, time spent in developmental sequences was generally longer at public two-year colleges than at other types of institutions (NCES, 2003). In fall 2000, public two-year colleges were more likely than other types of institutions to indicate that students spent an average of one or more years on remedial coursework (NCES, 2003).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical models chosen to frame this research are Schlossberg's transition theory (1995) and Phinney's model of ethnic identity (1993). Schlossberg's theory was chosen to examine the usefulness of a model that emphasizes practical strategies in providing support for disadvantaged students. Phinney's model was selected as a lens to understand the importance of working with each student individually to recognize how their ethnic identity may influence their experiences as a student.

Transition theory. The transition to college poses many challenges and opportunities to students, whether traditionally or nontraditionally aged, minority or

majority, prepared or underprepared. A transition, as defined in transition theory, is an event or non-event that produces changes in relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006). For many students, the decision to come to college is based on an event – graduation from high school, a job loss, or changes in personal relationships. These events mark the ending of roles and routines and the beginnings of new ones with new responsibilities. Another marker for transition is the non-event, something that is desired and anticipated but does not happen. For example, a student who planned to go to a four-year institution but did not have the GPA or test scores to be accepted. For that student, attending a community college and being required to take remedial classes requires rethinking assumptions about his or her educational path.

It is important to note that though transitions provide opportunities for growth and development, not all transitions will lead to positive outcomes. Schlossberg's transition theory asserts that adaptation to transition depends on three sets of variables: the perception of the transition, characteristics of the environment, and characteristics of the individual experiencing the transition (Schlossberg, 1981). In an updated edition of Schlossberg's work, Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) noted that understanding the meaning of a transition for an individual requires considering the type, context, and impact of the transition. Transitions can be categorized into three main types: anticipated, those which occur predictably; unanticipated, those which are unpredictable; and non-events, those which are expected to occur but do not. Context refers to the setting of the transition as well as the individual's relationship to the transition, and impact is judged by how much the transition affects the individual's daily life (Goodman

et al., 2006). For many students, the experience of coming to college encompasses multiple transitions at once, which may compound the stress for an individual. How a student manages that stress depends on the strengths and liabilities he or she brings into the situation.

Coping is generally referred to as the style in which an individual responds to a stressful situation (Morris, Brooks, & May, 2003). Pearlin and Schooler (1978) regarded coping as a behavior that an individual exhibits to avoid being harmed by life strains and stress. Transition Theory is a system that is often referred to as “taking stock” (Schlossberg, 1995; Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998, p. 214). According to this theory, to take stock is to determine an individual’s resources – a set of four factors that influence a person’s ability to cope with transition: situation, self, support, and strategies (Goodman et al., 2006). A person’s effectiveness in dealing with transition depends on his or her resources, positive and negative, in each of these areas. According to Schlossberg (1995), the balance of these resources helps to explain why different people cope differently with same type of transition and why the same person copes differently at different times.

- Situation (Schlossberg, 1995; Goodman, et al., 2006) refers to how an individual views the transition. Is the transition viewed as positive, negative, expected, unexpected, desired or dreaded? What is the timing of the transition? Is the transition perceived as voluntary or imposed?
- Self (Schlossberg, 1995; Goodman, et al., 2006) refers to the strengths and weaknesses an individual brings to the transition. “Self” considers the individual’s previous experience, as well as the perception of his or her options, sense of

control, and whether the person considers himself or herself to be an optimist and resilient.

- Support (Schlossberg, 1995; Goodman, et al., 2006) considers the sources of support available to the person in transition. Support could come from places such as family members, friends, colleagues, organizations, or institutions. Sources of support may be both positive and negative. For example, is the individual getting what she or he “needs” from the source of support, or is the source of support more of a hindrance during the transition?
- Strategies (Schlossberg, 1995; Goodman, et al., 2006) involve questions such as whether an individual is able to access more than one coping strategy, can an individual cope by changing the way he or she views the situation, and can the individual manage his or her emotions/reactions to the stress of the transition?

According to Schlossberg (1995), the transition theory system rests on several assumptions; first, there is not one single factor that determines an individual’s ability to cope with change. Second, each individual has a balance of resources and deficits for facing transitions - an individual’s ability to adapt to transitions depends on the balance of assets and liabilities the individual has in his or her coping resources (Schlossberg, 1995). Next, the individual’s potential resources and deficits are not permanent, but change over time (Schlossberg, 1995). Finally, there are things that the individual can do to turn deficits into resources (Schlossberg, 1995).

In an exploratory study of nontraditional males who dropped out of college before completing a bachelor’s degree, Powers (2010) used transition theory to examine the perceptions of their situation, self, support, and strategies while moving in, moving

through, and moving out of the college process. She found the transitional model useful in describing the recurring themes in their stories, including those of a personal nature and those related to the institution. Common themes included family, time management, employment, money, and being caught off guard by expectations associated with postsecondary education (Powers, 2010).

Transition theory's emphasis on coping strategies, especially the assertion that an individual's ability to adapt to transitions depends the strengths and weaknesses of her coping resources (Schlossberg, 1995), ties into Bandura's (1977) research on self-efficacy. Bandura (1977) defines self-efficacy as the ability to initiate coping behavior, expend effort, and sustain effort in the face of obstacles and adverse experiences. Students' self-efficacy attitudes towards learning, motivation, willingness to seek and accept help, and interaction with peers are all influenced by the contextual factors included in Schlossberg's model.

With its consideration of the importance of multiple contextual factors in dealing with transition, Schlossberg's Transition Model provides a theoretical framework for understanding how students perceive and experience developmental education. Because students in developmental courses are underprepared, and are often of first generation status and from underprivileged backgrounds, it is necessary to consider all of the factors that may influence their ability to stay in college and be successful in moving through the developmental sequence. Using Schlossberg's model provided a practical framework with which to examine the barriers to achievement that need to be navigated, as well as the existing beneficial supports and strategies that can be built upon to support success.

Phinney's Model of Ethnic Identity Development. Ethnic identity develops from sharing culture, religion, geography, and language with individuals connected by family and community (Evans et al., 2010). Theories of ethnic identity formation examine how students “understand the implications of their ethnicity and make decisions about its role in their lives, regardless of the extent of their ethnic involvement” (Phinney, 1990, p. 64). Young adults in minority populations face the challenge of resolving the conflicts of stereotyping and prejudice from the majority White population, and the sometimes clashing value systems between majority and minority groups. This necessitates navigating two cultural systems and influences both self-concept and sense of identity (Evans et al., 2010).

Phinney (1990) believed that ethnic identity is central to the development of a positive self-concept in minority adolescents. Phinney examined the commonalities across ethnic groups to describe a three-stage model of ethnic identity formation for exploring the meaning and implications of their ethnicity (Phinney, 1993). The first stage, unexamined ethnic identity, is marked by unexplored feelings and attitudes regarding ethnicity (Phinney, 1993). In the second stage, ethnic identity search, adolescents become increasingly aware of ethnic identity issues and are faced with situations that cause them to examine the significance of their ethnic identity (Phinney, 1993). The third and final stage, ethnic identity achievement, is reached when a young person is able to gain a positive sense of ethnic identification and healthy bicultural identity with the majority culture (Phinney, 1993).

Kuh and Love (2000) provided eight cultural propositions to frame minority students' experiences in college. These propositions provide a more in-depth way to

examine Phinney's identity theory and the ways that ethnic and cultural identity impact college success. Their eight propositions were: (a) Students' college experiences and decisions are mediated by a student's cultural meaning-making system; (b) Students' precollege cultures determine the importance they associate with attending or graduating from college; (c) Knowledge of both students' precollege cultures and campus cultures is necessary to understand their abilities to navigate the campus cultural milieu; (d) The likelihood of persistence is inversely related to the incongruence between students' precollege and campus cultures; (e) Students who travel a long cultural distance must either acclimate to the dominant campus culture or join one or more cultural enclaves (i.e., subcultures) to succeed; (f) The amount of time students spend in their cultures of origin during their college career is positively associated with cultural stress and eventual student departure; (g) The extent and intensity of students' connections with their academic program and affinity groups are positively related to persistence; and (h) Students are more likely to persist if they belong to one or more cultural enclaves, especially if those enclaves value achievement and persistence (Kuh and Love, 2000).

As potentially powerful drivers in shaping the experiences of minority college students, cultural and ethnic identity is an important framework for examining students' experiences. A nuanced understanding of the various ways in which campus cultures and pre-college experiences either contribute to or impede minority students' success will lead to better understand of how to help these students succeed and persist (Museus & Quaye, 2009).

Summary

As the research indicates, there is a need for strengthening academic skills through developmental education in community colleges, especially among minority and first-generation populations. The approach of developmental education is complicated by the fact that many students do not complete their developmental sequence, a situation impacted by complex factors that require further investigation. Using Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1981, 1995, 2006) and Phinney's Model of Ethnic Identity Development (1990, 1993) will allow an examination of students' experiences with developmental education and the factors that contribute to both successful and unsuccessful attempts to navigate it.

CHAPTER III

Method

This chapter outlines the methodological framework that was used to conduct the proposed qualitative study. Interviews were conducted with five first-generation minority students taking developmental classes to understand their perceptions of developmental education as well as the sociocultural context in which they experience it. The research was conducted at a mid-size Midwestern community college. Individual interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format and the data obtained was transcribed by the researcher. The data was coded and analyzed in accordance with Yin's (2011) guidelines.

Design of the Study

The study analyzed how first-generation, minority community college students perceive the meaning, barriers, and value of developmental education using a qualitative approach. Specifically, the researcher used a phenomenological approach that provided the opportunity to attend to the sociocultural context of developmental education and the unique experiences of students who need it (Hays & Singh, 2012; Yin, 2011). Individual interviews with first-generation, minority developmental students were conducted. To gain access to the target population, the researcher contacted the staff of the Center for Academic Success as well as several developmental education professors and provided information about the study. The researcher asked the faculty and staff to pass the study information on to first-generation, minority students and to send the names and contact information of any interested students to her, or ask the interested students to contact her directly. The researcher then contacted the students via email and provided them with

information to ensure they understood the scope of the study. Students interested in participating set up an interview with the researcher.

In order to ensure the validity of this study, strategies described by Maxwell (2013), Pyrczak (2007), and Krefting (1991) were used. Member checking, in which the researcher solicits feedback from participants regarding their interviews, was used to ensure the researcher correctly understood what the participants wanted to communicate (Krefting, 1991). Transcribed interviews were sent to the participants so each participant could validate what was said in his or her interview. The researcher enhanced credibility within the interview process by reframing questions, repeating questions, and expanding upon answers with indirect questions about the participants' experiences (Krefting, 1991). Due to the interactive nature of qualitative research, the researcher conducted an assessment of how her background, perceptions, and interests might influence data gathering and analysis. (Krefting, 1991; Pyrcyk, 2007)

Participants/Sample

The researcher attempted to secure interviews with six first-generation, minority community college students selected to participate in the study. As Marshall (1996) noted, there was an element of convenience sampling used, as the researcher recruited participants from students who use the Center for Academic Success [CAS] at the research site. CAS is a tutoring center and writing lab used by a large number of students at least once during their time at the college.

All participants who completed interviews were given a fifteen dollar gift card to the retailer of their choice. All participants selected agreed to participate in one-on-one interviews and signed informed consent paperwork. The participants were informed that

participation in the interview is voluntary and that each could withdraw from the research at any point. The sample, ultimately, consisted of five first or second year first-generation, minority community college students.

Five students were interviewed during the course of the study, though the initial proposal was for six interviews. Multiple attempts were made to recruit participants, including contacting faculty members, advisers, and students through email and fliers, but a sixth participant did not emerge. Each of the five interviews provided relevant and interesting data from which answers to the research questions may be drawn.

Description of Participants

Thick descriptions give both a more intimate view and a deeper understanding of the context in which qualitative research occurs as well as provide context, either culturally or ethnically, that may help an outside observer to better comprehend the thoughts and feelings of those participating in the research (Geertz, 1994; Hays & Singh, 2012). Therefore, I have included thick descriptions of the participants of this study.

Aaron. Aaron is a 19-year-old African-American male and a first year student at the institution. At the time of the interview, he was pursuing a criminal justice major. He took one developmental class his first semester, CCS 099, a reading class, and is taking two his second semester, English 099 and Math 059. He also took FYE 101, a First Year Experience class during his first semester. Aaron grew up in Chicago and was currently living under the guardianship of his aunt in the institution's town. He has several younger siblings and cousins living in the same house with him. Aaron was not a strong student academically, but was enthusiastic about his education and had a positive outlook.

Brittany. Brittany is an 18-year-old female of mixed racial heritage in her first year at the institution. At the time of her interview she was pursuing a nursing major but was not completely set on that path. She took two developmental classes her first semester, CCS 099 and English 099, and was taking and Math 060 in her second semester. Brittany also grew up in Chicago and was currently living in her own apartment in the institution's town. She has multiple siblings but is not close with them. Brittany was intelligent and articulate but an inconsistent student with a negative attitude towards school.

Carlos. Carlos is a 19-year-old Hispanic male in his second year at college. He took Math 072 in his third semester. At the time of his interview, Carlos was majoring in political science and planned to transfer to a university for his bachelor's degree and go on for a master's in law. He grew up in a small town not far from the institution and still lived with his family while attending school. He has one younger brother. Carlos's family is undocumented and he is a beneficiary of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. He was on the Dean's List for one semester and demonstrated an unusual level of focus for his age.

Denise. Denise, a first-year student, is a 22-year-old African-American female from Chicago. At the time of her interview, Denise was majoring in criminal justice. She took CCS 098 in her first semester of college and was taking English 099 at the time of her interview. She was living in an apartment with two roommates and their children. She did not seem to be a strong student, but was very dedicated to her goal of graduating from college.

Elisa. Elisa is a 19-year-old Latina-American in her second semester of a nursing major at the time of her interview. In her first semester, she took Math 072 and FYE 101. Elisa is from the same town as the institution and still lived with her family. She is the middle child in a family of four brothers and one sister (and three dogs). She was active in both the Pride group (LGBTQ) and Club Latino on campus. Elisa appeared to be a hardworking and dedicated student.

Research Site

This research was conducted at a community college in the Midwest with a population of both terminal vocational degree students and those who will transfer to four-year institutions. The college enrolls approximately 20,000 students annually for credit classes. Students are primarily white (58%) with about 75% of students living and working within the college's district, which covers most of multiple, mostly rural counties (College Simply, n.d.). The college is located in a town less than 200 miles from three major cities, with a population of about 232,000 (Data USA, n.d.). The college shares the town with a large, land-grant research university that draws students from around the world, which creates a more diverse community than is the case in many towns of similar size and geography.

Researcher as the Instrument

Due to the nature of qualitative study, it is important to consider how the researcher's background and experiences may have affected the collection and interpretation of data. The researcher is a white, female graduate student, who has worked as a staff member at a community college for more than a decade. The researcher's career has included working with community members in non-credit classes

and employees of the college, not students enrolled in credit-bearing courses. The researcher became interested in this topic as she coordinated training related to developmental courses and at-risk students for faculty and staff as well as programming related to social justice.

Data Collection

Data was collected through individual, semi-structured interviews with the participants in the college's Center for Academic Success. An interview format was selected due to its ability to reveal a deep perspective on participants' experiences. The interview protocol, (Appendix A), a framework of open-ended questions rather than a structured question-and-answer session, was developed to guide the interviews (Pyrzczak, 2007; Yin, 2011). Using the protocol as a framework allowed the researcher and participants to engage in conversation in an effort to elicit personal and honest responses from participants. Participants were also encouraged to add any additional comments about their experience in association with the questions asked following the last interview question. The researcher transcribed each recorded interview.

In line with best practices to increase the trustworthiness of the study, transcriptions were returned to participants to verify accuracy (Krefting, 1991). As a supplement to the interviews, the researcher maintained a field journal containing a methods log and reflections on the researcher's thoughts, feelings, ideas, and hypotheses generated by contact with the participants for later analysis (Krefting, 1991).

Treatment of the Data

Interviews were audio and video recorded. Audio files were deleted after transcription and video files were kept on a flash drive that is only accessible to the

researcher and the thesis advisor. To maintain confidentiality, no identifying information was kept with the flash drive, and identifying information that appears in the interview was removed from the interview transcriptions. Signed informed consent forms were stored separately from the transcriptions and video files to maintain confidentiality. The researcher's field journal was kept on a flash drive that was accessible to only the researcher and thesis advisor. All data and audio recordings will be deleted after three years, in compliance with IRB policy.

Data Analysis

The researcher pursued several strategies to analyze the data based on best practices for qualitative studies. Prior to coding the data, the researcher watched the interviews and made rough observation notes. As the interviews were transcribed, the researcher continued to make notes and organize the initial observations to develop early ideas for categories and relationships to further develop the important themes (Maxwell, 2013). The data was then coded in accordance with Yin's (2011) guidelines. The data was first assigned open codes, which described each piece of data specifically. The open codes were then grouped into category codes, and when the data were coded at this level, it was reorganized in a hierarchical format so that the researcher was able to identify themes that describe the participants' experiences with developmental education. Field journal observations were organized into a more consistent form, and any inconsistent terminology used by the researcher was addressed (Yin, 2011).

Summary

The qualitative phenomenological study consisted of interviews with first-generation, minority community college students. The interview design was well-suited

to explore the perceptions of developmental education with the intention of allowing participants to discuss their feelings and personal experiences. Interviews were conducted at a community college with students who have taken or were currently taking developmental classes. Participants were interviewed individually in a semi-structured format. The data obtained was coded and analyzed by the researcher in accordance with Yin's (2011) guidelines.

Chapter IV

Results

This chapter examines the research findings through the presentation of participants' answers to the following qualitative research questions: How do first-generation, minority students construct meaning of developmental education, what barriers do these students perceive, and what value do they ascribe to developmental education? Each participant was interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix A) in which they were asked to describe their experiences with developmental classes and college so far. The chapter concludes with an overview of the different themes found through analysis of the data.

Research question 1: How do first-generation, minority students construct meaning of developmental education?

The first research question addressed how first-generation, minority students construct meaning of developmental education. To answer that question, this section examines participants' attitudes about first learning they were required to take developmental education classes and whether they thought they could be successful in college level classes without taking developmental classes. Specifically, participants were asked, "How did you feel when you were first told you needed to take developmental classes?", "Were you surprised to learn that there were gaps between what you learned in high school and what you need to know for college?", and, "Do you think you could be successful without taking developmental classes?" (Appendix A).

The major theme that emerged from this line of questions was that of the effects on self-efficacy engendered by placement and participation in developmental classes.

Bandura (1977) defines self-efficacy as the ability to initiate coping behavior, expend effort, and sustain effort in the face of obstacles and adverse experiences. Developmental education assessments and requirements can be a frustrating set of hurdles that may affect students' attitudes towards learning, motivation, willingness to seek and accept help, desire to affiliate with peers or instructors, or willingness to expend effort on academic tasks (Sodlcek, 2004).

Self-efficacy – building up or tearing down. Understanding students' attitudes about the meaning of developmental classes in their education relied on a combination of the questions from the interview protocol formulated for this portion of the study. Answers to these questions varied, as did the feelings discussed by the participants in the interviews, but a common thread was shared among the five. This commonality regarded participants' self-efficacy beliefs. Interestingly, three participants expressed relief or unconcern about taking developmental classes as they felt unprepared to take on college level courses and welcomed the review. Two participants, however, felt that being placed at the developmental level was a blow to their confidence and feelings of self-efficacy.

Of the participants who expressed feelings of relief or unconcern about taking developmental classes, they all felt underprepared for college. Aaron highlighted this when asked about learning he had to take developmental classes he said, "it was a relief, I didn't just want to jump into my major, I just wanted to slowly start into it." For Aaron, his hesitation initially seemed less about academics and more about anxiety around starting college. He had not initially planned to come to college right after high school, wanting to take a gap year, but decided not to after he said he learned that most people

who take a year off do not return to school. He said that he prepared himself as best he could over the summer but still expressed a lot of anxiety about first starting college.

Later, Aaron also spoke about continuing to feel relieved about taking developmental classes after beginning his coursework. When asked if he felt that he could have been successful in college level courses without taking developmental education, he emphatically replied no, saying that the review had been good,

because I have a friend that is in English 101 and he said there is a paper at least every three days, and I can't handle that right now. I'm barely learning how to, you know, write formal, so it's a relief. You know, practice is good for me.

Aaron also mentioned that in his philosophy class – not developmental level – his teacher,

used a lot of big words and on the first day of class I did not understand anything he said, but then when I got the book and opened it and got to the reading material... I understood what he was talking about.

Aaron believed that taking both developmental and college level courses at the same time was beneficial because the skills he is developing overlap:

There's some things we do in my philosophy class helps me in my criminal justice class, some things we do in math classes help me in my CCS class, some things in my CCS class help me in my philosophy class, so everything is like together.

Unlike the relief expressed by Aaron, Denise said that while it was unexpected that she was placed into developmental courses, she did not mind. She said that she believed that though it had been several years since she graduated high school, she was

prepared for college and that she could have been successful in college level courses without taking developmental classes because the developmental classes are not difficult and not much work. In our interview, however, Denise seemed to have difficulty in comprehending some of the questions and often hesitated or talked circularly when answering, which resulted in having to repeat or reframe questions multiple times. This left me with the impression that it was likely that Denise would struggle in college level courses and that, in fact, she benefited from taking developmental education, both academically and in her feelings of self-efficacy.

Carlos was similarly unconcerned about having to take developmental math. He felt unprepared for college math because:

In high school I didn't really put too much effort into math because I had to go to class only the second semester and basically most of the students, we didn't like the teacher, we didn't do any of the homework.

He said that although it was frustrating to know that the developmental math class would not count towards his major, "I deserved it, I guess." Like Aaron, Carlos said that after he started the class, "once I put effort into this math class, I realized I could actually do it and I wasn't really disappointed. I did really well in that class." And when asked if he thought he could have been successful without taking the developmental class, he replied:

Probably not, because like I said I didn't put much effort in high school and when I took that class it basically brought me back into the math. Like I hadn't practiced math that much and I feel like it helped me mostly just remembering everything.

Though Aaron's, Denise's, and Carlos's feelings about their developmental courses are positive, the other participants felt much more frustrated and dejected by the experience. When asked about being placed in developmental classes, Brittany said that she was "very upset" and that it "makes you feel really slow." Elisa said learning about her developmental placement made her upset - "I was kind of bummed about it. Like honestly, it's kind of like I didn't meet standards and that for me that's kind of like a down." Brittany is taking her developmental math class for the second time because, she says,

First semester... I wouldn't necessarily put a hundred percent into learning the material again. It was just so embarrassing to ask those types of questions because it's basic math and it's like 'why am I in this?'... Last semester I was really frustrated and I didn't want to do anything. So I didn't do well and I wasn't going to leave that as my GPA so I just took the class over."

At the time of our interview she had an A in the class.

Both Brittany and Elisa were especially frustrated by the assessment process.

Elisa said,

When you're a senior in high school and you get good grades, you're like 'oh, I'm gonna be fine.' Then you take this placement test and they say if you fail then you have to take all these classes and if you succeed then you get to go on. But you know like how does one test reflect that?

She went on to say that she has test anxiety and that she felt confident she would have been qualified to move directly into college level courses if placement was not based solely on the initial tests. In our conversation, Elisa was articulate and thoughtful in her

answers, and presented herself as a diligent student. Based on her stated positive self-efficacy and demeanor, she was believable in her self-assessment.

Brittany had similar concerns, saying that the placement test had higher level math than what she learned in high school and was well beyond what was covered in her developmental class. Brittany was placed especially low, math 060, meaning that she will have to take at least one more developmental class before moving on to college level classes. Brittany was quite animated and articulate in her interview, and expressed a lot of negativity about her classes and the institution. Given her demeanor in our conversation and her clearly stated feelings about her placement, it seems likely that she gave little significance to the initial placement test and may have been able to be successful if placed in higher level classes.

Research question 2: What perceived barriers does developmental education create for first-generation minority students?

Developing a richer understanding of the challenges students in developmental education face is important to finding ways to help them persist and be successful in college. The literature shows that students who face financial pressures, experience discrimination, or lack support from family or other networks are likelier to drop out of college (Dennis et al., 2005; Strayhorn, 2011; Terenzini et al., 1996; Tseng, 2004). In the second research question I sought to understand how first-generation, minority students perceive the barriers to being successful in both developmental and college level classes. Participants were asked the following questions, “Within the college, what barriers do you face in being successful? Difficult coursework? Problems with financial aid? Scheduling or sequencing of classes? Other?”, “Outside of school what barriers do you

face in being successful? Family? Work? Money? Other?”, and, “What do you tell yourself about being in developmental classes?” (Appendix A).

Several themes emerged from this line of questions: the impact of systemic barriers to economic stability, ways of finding support in an unfamiliar environment, and the motivation to persist. Similar to their answers about constructing meaning of developmental education, participants expressed feelings that varied along a spectrum relating to each theme. The one consistent challenge was related to how the systemic processes and policies around financial aid created unanticipated roadblocks for these students. These hurdles ended up backing already underprivileged students into situations in which they must work long hours outside of school and squeeze in homework wherever possible, whereas students with more economic stability have more time for school work and fewer pressures impeding their ability to be successful. Interestingly, the questions about barriers often led to more conversation about how they overcome the challenges they face. In this vein, the other themes that emerged concerned the students' support systems and motivation.

Systemic barriers to economic stability. Each participant expressed some degree of challenge due to either financial aid processes, balancing work and school obligations, or financial hardship, and sometimes all three. It is no secret that the process for obtaining financial aid is a complicated one for any student, made more difficult with academic and governmental jargon and piles of paperwork. For students lacking systemic privilege and who must navigate the system with little to no family knowledge or support, it is even more challenging. Aaron, for example, had an extremely difficult

time obtaining financial aid due partly to a lack of knowledge about the process and a complicated family situation:

I was late because I didn't know how to fill out my FAFSA or what the due date was. Apparently, it's every October 1 that you're supposed to fill out your FAFSA. Did not know that. And so before, like a month before school had started I filled it out, I believe August 8th of 2017, and that was a couple of weeks before school had started. I was just rushing around, meeting with the administrative office upstairs and the FAFSA office, you know trying to get things done... And it was not an easy process because we were learning from what other people had done. And so, I live with my aunt, she's my guardian, and was told you're supposed to use her tax information... We got the application together, we got the loan and the grants, and everything was alright in the financial aid office. Financial aid was done, and then, a week later, right before school had started, I was told they had dropped my classes because the financial aid didn't go through on time. So I had to come back and re-sign up for classes and I didn't get all the classes I needed the first semester. That's why I'm taking some classes that I was supposed to take first semester this semester.

Aaron said now that his financial aid is worked out he does not have to work but chooses to do so to help with his family's economy:

it's easier to have my own money because again, I take the bus, and that's a dollar to get there and a dollar to get back, and that's Monday through Friday. And like that's enough asking my aunt for two dollars a day to get back and forth to school so I decided to get my own job.

Denise had similar financial aid challenges due to her family situation, “I had to do mine independent, like my own student financial aid now that my mom and them passed.” She had to go to the IRS office to sort out the paperwork and it took longer than usual to receive her aid. Denise’s interview was about a month into the semester and she had just received her aid and thus just bought her books. Up until that time, she had relied on taking notes in class and borrowing others’ books to verify her notes.

At the time of her interview, Denise worked a regular overnight shift at a shipping company. A normal day consisted of classes starting at 10:00 a.m. and, when I get out of school it’s like around 12:00 or 1:00 p.m., and I don’t go to work til like 9:00 at nighttime, so it’s like I got things to get set up and do before I go to work. I do my homework before I go to work.

Her shift at work would end at 3:00 a.m., so “as soon as I get off work I get in the shower, go right to sleep and then wake up around like 7:00 a.m.” to catch the bus and get to school early enough to finish up any lingering homework.

Elisa also expressed that the financial aid process was “hard” but that she did not rely on help from the school to complete her application, instead relying on her family, “I feel like we just navigated it with the family because I mean maybe we feel more comfortable if it’s just us.” Elisa also worked in addition to attending class. She described a schedule of mostly working on weekends but often picking up weekday shifts from 3:00– 10:00 p.m. after her 8:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. class schedule. She fit in homework right before bed or would wake up early to do it.

Carlos’s difficulty with financial aid stemmed from not being able to apply for it due to his status as a DACA recipient. In high school he “never actually thought I was

gonna go to college” because of the “financial barrier,” but changed his mind after taking a debate class and enjoying it so much he thought he may be suited for a career in law. His work schedule at the time of our interview was 20-25 hours a week during school, with 60 hours per week in the summers. He planned to take six months off of school after graduation before starting at a university to work and save as much money as possible. Carlos’s major frustration with having to take a developmental class is that he had to pay for it even though it would not count towards his major.

Brittany, though more financially stable than the other participants, was similarly frustrated with the financial burden of trying to save money to ultimately attend university while paying for developmental classes that would not count towards her major and would keep her at the community college longer:

Because I can’t transfer it, you have to have like college credits in order to transfer. So I’m gonna be here longer because I have to do three more classes before I’m actually in college level math.... And then that’s more money that I’m spending on classes here when I’m trying to go out of state.

Though each participant’s situation is different, they share the weight of financial responsibility for college, whether it is paid for by financial aid or the students themselves. As first generation students from minority backgrounds, they often have little knowledge of institutional systems or the governmental and academic jargon necessary to competently navigate the processes, therefore not benefitting from the supports that are currently in place. Since many of these students are also from low socioeconomic backgrounds, they are challenged to find a balance between keeping up with school and working to help support themselves as well as contributing to their

family's household economy, or at least not to be a drain on it. Added to that, the burden of paying for classes that will neither count towards a degree nor transfer is a frustration that may become a barrier to successful persistence and completion.

Finding support in an unfamiliar environment. Of the five participants, four talked about where they found support for the barriers they encountered. The exception was Brittany, the participant who had the most negative views about both developmental education and the institution. She is cut off from her family and did not use any of the support services at the institution. She expressed a frustration with the perceived lack of institutional support for social connection. For example, she compared the orientation process to that at a university and bemoaned the lack of opportunity to meet other students like her - young people from out of town who were academically focused and interested in a more traditional college experience with activities, sports, etc. She was disappointed in the other students in her classes, saying that she wants,

to be at a university so there will be so many other people I can meet and not just one group of people. Because the people that go here are either townies – which is fine but it's just like [shrugs], I don't know – and then it's just like old people... Or it'll just be like those people that don't want to be here, just came here because it was something to do... I haven't met someone – I don't mean to sound conceited – but I've never, I haven't met anyone that's like me.

The other participants were able to find positive support both within and outside the college. Within the college, participants utilized both institutional supports and social connection to navigate challenges. Both Aaron and Elisa mentioned TRiO Student Support Services as being a useful resource for academic help and as a quiet study space

outside their crowded living situations. Aaron and Elisa also talked about the benefits of the FYE 101 class in helping to learn time management, develop study skills, and build confidence in talking to their teachers. Aaron described his experience with FYE 101:

When I first got there it was like I have this class and I don't know what it's for, like I don't need this class, I'm ready to start and just get it over with. I don't want to be here, that type of attitude. Then I got here and you know started going to classes, started finding my way around, making friends, like wow, this is nothing like what I've been told. This is so much easier than I thought! And then I got the homework load, so it hit me... But FYE has helped me a lot with the time management, studying... [It] teaches you time management, so that's why for every hour that you're in class to study, you times that times two to study at home... My grades improved so much. I was like, 'I don't know how to do all this, I have so much homework, I don't have a social life anymore, this is just horrible.' And then the next day I went to that class and I was like 'that makes so much sense.'

Elisa said about FYE that:

I feel like it was a good stepping stone. It kind of like made me focus and with that assignment where I had to meet with my teachers and stuff, I felt like that kind of brought me out of my shell a little bit.

Denise spoke about her adviser as her primary support on campus, saying that "she's a good person to talk to when you need help" and that they talk not just about academics but other challenges as well. She also mentioned a friend that she often rides

with to school and that they studied together before class. Aaron, too, credited having friends on campus to study and hang out with as something that helped him be successful.

Aaron and Carlos talked about the encouragement and support they receive from their families as being important to their success as well. When Aaron experienced problems with his financial aid, his “aunt calmed me down and told me we just have to call up there and see what’s going on.” When he had a problem with one of his teachers in his first semester, he “got through it, talking with [his] aunt.” He said she also creates an environment at home that supports good academic habits:

We have a rule in my house – if you have homework that is the first thing you do. You don’t go watch TV, don’t even step foot in the kitchen to get anything to eat. Do your homework first and then you get to relax.

Carlos said that despite the hardships surrounding his family’s undocumented status and the financial strain of paying for college:

My dad always encouraged me, like ‘oh, I don’t want you to be a factory worker like me’ and that we’ve suffered enough through migrating here... We want you to be different and not make your future generation suffer... My dad has been very encouraging and he supported me financially and everything.”

Motivation to persist. When participants were asked what they tell themselves about being in developmental education, they all talked about what motivates them to persist. Some responses were based in negative motivation, telling themselves they had to make it through to move on, while some were centered on being role models for family members. Denise spoke about having a dream to finish college, and that dream is what kept her motivated. Brittany, on the other hand, worked through her frustration regarding

her developmental classes by telling herself, “the closer I am to being done here, the faster I can get out of [the state].”

Aaron talked about his developmental classes as, an opportunity to further my education. My mom has five boys and I’m the oldest of all of them. My mom didn’t go to college and neither did my dad, so I was thinking if I don’t go to college what’s the example I’m setting for my brothers. So I buckled up buttercup and I dealt with it... It’s just so much sometimes, and it just hits you, I don’t want to go to school. But you know you can’t do that. So I give myself a little pep talk: ‘If you don’t go to school you can’t graduate. And if you can’t graduate, what are you doing? What type of example are you setting for your brothers?’ I say that a couple of times, and I was ok, I can do it.

Both Elisa and Carlos expressed the double-sided nature of their motivation. Like Aaron, they both felt strongly about setting a positive example for younger siblings.

Carlos said that his younger brother often mimicked what he did and that he hoped his brother would go to college. Elisa responded that she both wanted a good grade and to set a good example for her siblings. Alternately, each of them also expressed the feeling that developmental education was a kind of necessary evil that had to be gotten through to move on to a larger goal. As Carlos said, “I just accepted it and got the work done.”

Research question 3: What value do first-generation minority students ascribe to developmental education?

The third research question addressed the value that first-generation, minority students ascribe to developmental education. To learn more about how students perceived the usefulness and relevance of developmental educations, participants were

asked the following questions: “Do you think developmental education has been helpful to you?”; “Do developmental requirements feel useful or burdensome?”; “What is your relationship like with your teachers and your advisers?”; and “How will it feel to move on to college-level classes?” (Appendix A). Participants’ answers to these questions varied significantly and none of the questions produced the same theme from all five participants. There was, however, one theme that emerged from a majority of the participants – the importance of forming a connection with their professor to being successful in a course.

“He’s not just the person giving me a grade, he’s more than that.” When asked what their relationships with teachers were like, participants overwhelmingly talked about the importance of feeling a personal connection. They described a lack of connection as being a potential barrier to success in a particular class while feeling that when they could find a personal connection, they were much more likely to be invested in the class and ask for help when needed. The exception to this was Carlos, who said that his relationships with faculty have “just mainly been like formal business, like no small talk or anything like that... I don’t get into a personal level really with professors.” This seemed unsurprising given his academic strength, focus on future goals, and that his family support system is strong.

The other participants were more affected by their feelings about relationships with their professors. Elisa described this particularly well, saying:

My first semester bio teacher, he was very introverted so it’s kind of hard to talk to him. I went to his office hours because I had to for FYE and talking to him he just seemed kind of straightforward so it was kind of like eh [shrugs]. But this bio

teacher that I have this semester, he's really nice. Because he had an ice-breaker – I think teachers were told that it helps to build a bond with students – so he had like this Power Point and told us about his life, like how he didn't want kids so he has a lot of pugs. It was just great.

When asked why she thought this was helpful she said:

For me, I've always had this distance between teachers because I don't really know what to ask or how to ask a good question or like how to comprehend what they're explaining to me sometimes. You know when you ask the question and they explain it and you're like okay, this isn't working. But I feel like with the icebreaker it helps because I can feel like he's not just the person that's giving me that grade, he's more than that.

Aaron's experience was similar, saying that, "my first semester I didn't really have a relationship with my teachers only because I was super shy," but that, "there was one teacher, Mr. B... he helped me a lot." He went on to describe how in Mr. B's class he was encouraged to ask questions and attend office hours which helped him to be comfortable not just with Mr. B, but all of his professors.

Denise spoke more generally about her teachers, saying that she liked her teachers and, "if they're teaching, you know, I'm willing to be there and I'll participate in the class." She contrasted this with teachers who are less available for help outside of class, "sometimes you can't even talk to some teachers because some teachers be like 'there's something I got to do, I got things going on.'"

Brittany strongly articulated how a lack of connection negatively impacted her experiences in the classroom as well as how different it can be with a professor that

connects with the class. She talked about her CCS 099 class, saying that though outside of class her teacher was a nice person, “her personality was not necessarily good for that class because no one in there wanted to be there and she didn’t make it motivating to come.” She also perceived that the white professor seemed to be judgmental of the students of color. She described difficulties with a particular student, an older African-American woman, to whom the professor would direct

smirking comments... if she had to deal with a situation with her kids or work, if she couldn’t get off. She just gave her a hard time and they’d go back and forth arguing because the professor didn’t agree with her choices in life.

Another class Brittany highlighted as being frustrating in terms of her relationship with her professor was English 101. She described consistent issues with grading and lack of feedback on papers, but more problematically, the unpredictable nature of her professor’s personality, “she was nice but then she had her moments when she was like an asshole.” She went on to say,

If I were to go up there to ask her a question it would be like a sarcastic answer. In front of people! Like why are you being sarcastic? She’s not the type of professor to just sit down and be calm and say, ‘okay, well you need to...’ or ‘this would be better if...’ You know she’s not like that and I’m used to professors like that.

Brittany contrasted these professors with her psychology professor, saying that, “she’s a really good teacher. It’s the only class that I actually learn.” She went on to say that, “I’m actually comfortable asking her questions” and that

she's more comforting. She just knows how to teach, she knows how to teach well. Like if you don't understand something that she's saying she'll pull up an example or try to connect it to your personal life so you can figure it out more. I don't know, she's just a friendly person. Not like all professors have to be friendly and whatnot but it's just like her vibe is that she wants to teach, she wants to be there, and she wants to give information.

Summary of Results

The results of this study reflect the complicated nature of developmental education. Participants construct meaning, experience barriers, and find value based on their prior experiences in and out of the classroom, as well as their cultural and personal characteristics. In practice, developmental education may help or harm a student's feelings of self-efficacy, and depending on a student's level of motivation, its impact may be significantly determined by the connections built between teachers and their students. Systemic financial challenges are substantial and consistent barriers. For first-generation, minority students taking developmental classes obtaining financial aid and the necessity of having a job outside of school, as well as finding helpful and appropriate support systems represent important considerations for increasing persistence and success in college. Chapter 5 discusses how these findings work within the theoretical framework of this study.

CHAPTER VI

Discussion and Conclusion

This qualitative study was designed to learn more about how first-generation, minority community college students perceive the meaning, barriers, and value of developmental education. Interviews with participants revealed that developmental education affects students' feelings of self-efficacy, that systemic financial challenges are consistent barriers to success, and that the connections between teachers and their students, or lack thereof, can have significant impact on the usefulness of developmental education. Though none of these results are unexpected, they do provide nuanced and personal accounts from students that underscore the importance of these issues in the ongoing, and sometimes contentious, conversations about best practices in developmental education. The results present possible avenues for future research and suggest some recommendations that may be useful to administrators and professionals alike as they work to create better opportunities for academic success for students in developmental education.

Discussion

The phenomenological approach to this study was meant to provide the opportunity to consider the sociocultural context of developmental education and the experiences of students who need it (Hays & Singh, 2012; Yin, 2011). Despite the existence of significant quantitative data regarding the success or lack thereof of students in developmental education, measured in terms of persistence and completion, there are few qualitative examinations of the experiences of students who are required to take these classes. The more nuanced data obtained in qualitative study may facilitate the creation

of more effective structures and supports for remedial courses and developmental programs to help first-generation, minority students persist and be successful. The research questions guiding this study follow, and are discussed in detail.

Constructing meaning of developmental education. For the first research question, it was thought that participants would describe their experiences with developmental education with a common negative thread that indicated surprise at having to take remedial level courses and the resulting frustration of learning that these classes do not count towards a degree program. As Bailey et al. (2010) demonstrated, developmental education requirements often appear to students as frustrating, unanticipated obstacles in which there are multiple assessments and sequences of courses over potentially several semesters before being able to take a math or English class at college level. These obstacles have been shown to impact students' attitudes towards learning, motivation, and willingness to expend effort on academics (Sedlacek, 2004).

While this study partially echoed the literature, the theme that came through most strongly with this research question was that of developmental education's impact on students' self-efficacy, both positively and negatively. More than half of the participants experienced increased self-efficacy because of their developmental education classes. They expressed that they had felt unprepared for college level courses in general or regarding a particular subject and welcomed the review that developmental classes provided. On the other hand, two participants who had previously considered themselves to be good students experienced a blow to their self-efficacy beliefs after being placed at the developmental level.

As Powers (2010) found in her study of nontraditional males who dropped out of college before completing a degree, the transition theory's model of examining participants' perceptions of their situation, self, support, and strategies was useful in describing the recurring themes in the stories of their college experiences, including time management and the unanticipated expectations associated with postsecondary education. With its emphasis on the importance of multiple, intersecting contextual factors in dealing with transition, Schlossberg's Transition Model provides a practical framework for understanding the meaning students make of developmental education.

For example, both Brittany and Elisa were good students in high school and approached college with high expectations of themselves and their academic performance. Being placed in developmental math – as well as English and reading for Brittany – caused dissonance between their previously conceived perceptions of self and situation and the new reality of having to take remedial level classes. Brittany expressed feeling “very upset” with the placement and that it made her “feel really slow.” Elisa said that it made her feel like she had failed to meet her own standards and felt depressed about it. These students' beliefs about their self-efficacy were damaged when a gap was exposed between their expectations for themselves – self – and their academic performance – situation – and what the assessments revealed.

On the other end of the spectrum, students coming in with weaker self-efficacy beliefs were strengthened through success in developmental courses. Aaron and Carlos, for example welcomed the review in their classes and, because they started off being unprepared for college level work in one or more subjects, their performance in school – situations – and academic skills – strategies – improved significantly through

developmental work. Aaron extolled the benefits of learning time management and the review of subjects he felt unprepared for, calling it a “relief.” Carlos looked at his developmental math class as an opportunity, saying that after putting effort into the class, “I realized I could actually do it... I did really well in that class.” Aaron also spoke about how requirements in his First Year Experience class allowed him to overcome his shyness with teachers and helped him to learn to study effectively.

Perceptions of barriers in developmental education. Given the prior research on the subject, it was expected that multiple barriers around minority (Breneman et al., 1998; Strayhorn, 2011) and first-generation (Terenzini et al., 1996; Tseng, 2004; York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991) status would emerge. Terenzini et al. (1996) found that these students worked more hours off-campus, were less likely to perceive faculty members as concerned with student development and teaching, were more likely to report experiencing racial/ethnic or gender discrimination, and to come from families with lower annual incomes. Additionally, their parents lack first-hand knowledge of the college experience and are less likely to be able to help students with tasks like applying for financial aid and registering for classes or with encouraging success strategies such as regularly meeting with faculty members and advisors (York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991). As Kuh and Love (2000) noted in their expansion of Phinney’s ethnic identity theory regarding the ways that ethnic and cultural identity impact college success, knowledge of both students’ pre-college cultures and campus cultures is necessary to understand their abilities to navigate the campus cultural milieu, students must either acclimate to the dominant campus culture or join one or more subcultures to succeed, and

the likelihood of persistence is inversely related to the incongruence between students' precollege and campus cultures.

Unsurprisingly, the most consistent challenge to emerge from this question was related to the systemic processes and policies around financial aid and how this created barriers for these students. Consistent with previous research (Pascarella et al., 2004; York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991), students lacked the necessary family support to navigate the financial aid process and experienced difficulties because of problems with securing financial aid. Denise's financial aid was delayed for more than a month, with the consequence of being unable to purchase the books for her classes and struggling to keep up as a result. Aaron's financial aid was delayed as well, resulting in him being dropped from his classes and having to re-register. As a result, he was unable to take all the classes he was supposed to in his first semester which likely means he will take longer than anticipated to graduate.

These systemic financial aid challenges also result in students having to work long hours outside of school. Similar to Terenzini et al.'s (1996) findings more than twenty years ago, the majority of participants worked outside of school, and more than half worked significantly more than part-time. For example, Denise worked overnight shifts from 9:00 p.m. to 3:00 a.m. every week day and had to fit in school work and sleep whenever possible. Carlos, who did not qualify for financial aid because of his DACA status, works as much as possible during school and up to 60 hours per week when he is not in school. In accordance with Tseng's (2004) research, most of the participants contributed to their family economy as well. Aaron specifically mentioned wanting to work so that he did not have to ask his aunt for bus fare every day.

Participants also spoke about the importance of finding support services or networks to their ability to be successful and motivated, as well as how a lack of support created challenges. According to Schlossberg (1995), having sources of support and strategies for coping are necessary to navigate transitions. Dennis et al. (2005) found that for both minority and first-generation students, a lack of needed support from peers is an important predictor of college GPA, adjustment, and, possibly, commitment to college, suggesting that “those who are experiencing academic and adjustment problems feel the need for someone to provide help, guidance, or emotional support, whereas those who are doing well are less likely to feel a lack of support” (p. 234). Brittany, for example, was struggling to find a support network on campus and had a strongly negative attitude regarding almost everything at the college. She spoke at length about her disappointment with most of her professors, her advisers, a lack of institutional support for social networking, and her inability to meet anyone like herself. Her obvious adjustment issues may be significantly linked to the perceived lack of opportunities for support.

Other participants, however, found that support services on campus like TRiO and First Year Experience classes, as well as friends, family, and advisers were helpful in adjusting to college life and creating good academic habits. These channels of support helped participants in creating and maintaining strategies to successfully motivate themselves and navigate college. The support that Aaron and Carlos receive from their families demonstrate Yosso's (2005) community of cultural wealth model. Although it was not addressed in the literature review, Yosso's (2005) model was helpful in highlighting various forms of cultural capital that are often unacknowledged but which provide strengths that build on each other to create community cultural wealth. For

example, in Aaron's case his aunt provides familial capital in which she models "lessons of caring, coping and providing [education]" (Yosso, 2005, p. 79), which informs his emotional, moral, and educational consciousness. In Carlos's case, his father offers aspirational capital, "the ability to hold onto hope in the face of structured inequality" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77), though the means to make such dreams a reality may be lacking or out of their control.

These findings support the argument that students' experiences and challenges in college are mediated by multiple factors, and that first-generation and minority statuses are key factors to be considered. The theoretical framework of this study asserts that Schlossberg's Transition Model provides a useful context for understanding how students perceive and experience developmental education. Additionally, because students in developmental courses are underprepared, and are often of first generation status and from underprivileged backgrounds, it is necessary to consider how their identity development influences their ability to stay in college and be successful in moving through the developmental sequence. These findings suggest that using a combination of Schlossberg's and Phinney's models can help provide a practical framework for examining, navigating, and breaking down the barriers created by developmental education and our existing systems. These models can also be used to help build on beneficial supports and strategies already in place to more effectively support success.

Value of developmental education. It was expected that the answers to this question would be similar to those for the first research question regarding the making meaning of developmental education. Significant differences appeared, however, due to the inclusion of the follow-up question, "What is your relationship like with your teachers

and your advisers?” This question provided an opportunity for participants to talk about the value and effects of feeling connection on a personal level to their instructors. As Terenzini et al. (1996) found, first-generation students were less likely to perceive faculty members as concerned with student development and teaching and were more likely than traditional students to report experiencing racial/ethnic or gender discrimination. These perceptions make sense when viewed through the lens of Schlossberg’s model in which the “self” resource encompasses an individual’s previous experience, as well as the perception of his or her options and sense of control (Schlossberg, 1995). Participants described a lack of connection as being a barrier to success and motivation in contrast to being much more likely to be invested and ask for help when needed when they made a personal connection with an instructor.

Elisa, for example, talked about avoiding interacting with one of her teachers because, “he was very introverted so it’s kind of hard to talk to him.” She went on to describe how the distance that creates increases her shyness and uncertainty, making her less likely to ask questions in class or take advantage of office hours. When teachers take the time to allow students to see who they are as a person, Elisa says, “I feel like... it helps because I can feel like he’s not just the person that’s giving me that grade, he’s more than that.” This type of connection may be especially important for students in minority populations because they face the challenge of resolving the conflicts of stereotyping and prejudice or the perceptions thereof from the majority white population (Evans et al., 2010).

That challenge was exemplified in Brittany’s classroom experiences. Although she had one teacher she described as wanting “to teach, she wants to be there, and she

wants to give information,” and that her class is the only one in which she actually learns and feels comfortable asking questions, her other experiences were not as positive. In her developmental reading class, for example, her professor, who was white, seemed to Brittany to discriminate against the students of color who made up the class. She described the professor making “smirking comments” to classmates and seeming to punish them for having to deal with situations arising from work commitments or issues with child care. She described another teacher as “sarcastic” and embarrassing her in front of the class. All of these experiences created classroom environments in which students were unmotivated and did not want to be there.

In the second stage of Phinney’s model of ethnic identity development, ethnic identity search, young people become increasingly aware of ethnic identity issues and are faced with situations that cause them to examine the significance of their ethnic identity (Phinney, 1993). The experiences students have with authority figures in the form of college teachers may help to shape their perception of their own racial and ethnic identity as well as that of their teacher. While a positive experience may help to create a personal connection that will contribute to self-efficacy and academic success, a negative one may cause a student to lose confidence and motivation. Again, the “self” and “support” factors, of Schlossberg’s four S’s become important in influencing a student’s ability to cope, both positively and negatively.

Implications for Research and Practice

The theoretical model guiding this study provides a few different avenues for future research, including expanded qualitative studies examining the ways ethnic identity development impacts how first-generation, minority students experience and

navigate the transition from high school to developmental education to college level work, through the practical lens Schlossberg's transition theory. This theoretical model could be used to gain a deeper understanding of the themes I have identified as well as learn more about factors that did not emerge in this research.

Recommendations

Administrators and policy-makers. Building a better and more complete understanding of both the academic and non-cognitive abilities students possess when starting college is an important consideration in placement testing. Research has shown that placement tests alone are limited in their ability to assess whether a student will be successful in college-level courses (Boylan, 2009). Incorporating ways to assess a student's non-cognitive abilities such as self-efficacy, as well as looking at factors such as high school GPA can provide a broader and more accurate picture of a student's likelihood of success. Therefore, I recommend that policy makers and administrators work to broaden placement assessments to include more historical academic data and non-cognitive assessments.

Another recommendation for administrators and policy makers involves incentivizing professional development for teachers that emphasize the importance of strategies to connect with and engage students, and training them to use those strategies. The results of the study indicated that first-generation, minority students are significantly more likely to be engaged, motivated, and successful in class if they are supported by and connected to their teachers. Faculty have many demands on their time, if professional development opportunities are mandated, or better, incentivized, by administration, they are more likely to participate and use what they learn to benefit students.

Finally, a long-shot recommendation for policy makers is to simplify and streamline the financial aid process. Too many students experience barriers with the current system, either by a failure to receive aid in a timely fashion, not receiving it at all, or are saddled with overwhelming debt when they leave school. Students are not able to commit fully to college if they have to work long hours outside of school to support themselves and possibly their families. Re-thinking our financial aid system would go a long way towards making higher education truly accessible to any student who wants to participate.

Future research. Because this study was undertaken with a small sample size from one institution, future research with larger sample sizes and including multiple sites would increase the generalizability of the data. It would be interesting and helpful to interview similar students at institutions across the country, particularly where the demographic makeup of the community, including racial and ethnic as well as socioeconomic statistics are different from the original study. Additionally, since first-generation, minority students makeup only a portion of developmental students, it will also be important to look at the experiences of other students in developmental education.

After reviewing the interviews and compiling the results of this research, more contextual information regarding the previous educational experiences and personal situations of the participants would have been helpful. While this study concentrated on the participants' experiences at the time of the interviews, to better understand their current circumstances, it would be helpful to learn more about their pre-college experiences both academically and socially. Future researchers should consider asking participants about their academic performance in high school, their relationships with

high school teachers, and how they experience the differences between high school and college. Additionally, it would be helpful to include questions about participants' families – their living situation growing up, if they have siblings, what those relationships are like, etc. – as well as what educational expectations existed in their family.

Lastly, future studies would benefit from having a more purposeful sample when researching this population. Though a purposeful sample was the intention in this study, the low response rate resulted in a convenience sample. The study ended up with a relatively diverse group of participants, but it would likely have been more representative had a purposeful sample been an option.

Limitations

At the conclusion on this study, a few limitations stood out and should be taken into consideration for future research. First, the small sample size of participants presented a limited picture of their perceptions of developmental education.

Non-response bias, or the lack of response and its impact on the data collected, is another limitation that may have threatened the validity of the study (Sax, Gilmartin, & Bryant, 2003). A related concern is that of sample selection bias, the exclusion of data due to non-random selection of participants (Berk, 1983). Finding participants proved to be more difficult than anticipated and while the offering of incentives to entice participants, a strategy that has been shown to positively impact response rates (Deehan, Templeton, Taylor, Drummond & Strang, 1997), was taken against non-response and sample selection biases, the limitation was still present. Recruitment through professors and advisers was another strategy implemented to try and compensate for these biases.

These limitations may have prevented data that could have changed the findings of this study from being analyzed and presented. Further, it may have contributed to a sample that was homogeneous in nature. This homogeneous sample may have not offered the most accurate view of either the sample being examined or the institutions' first-generation, minority population.

Conclusions

This research demonstrates that while first-generation, minority students in developmental education share many of the same experiences and challenges, no population can be entirely summarized with generalities. A developmental education placement impacted each participant's feelings of self-efficacy. Their reactions, positive or negative, depended on their previous academic performance and their own expectations of their performance. "Good" students in high school felt disappointed in themselves and upset about the college processes, while students who had less success in high school welcomed the review of developmental education and experienced increases in their feelings of self-efficacy through taking those classes. Although participants consistently experienced challenges with financial aid and finances in general, their situations differed in the specifics. And though the theme of finding connection with professors emerged when talking about the value of developmental education, that connection took several forms and was defined by both its existence as well as its lack.

The purpose of this research was to interpretively analyze the meaning, barriers, and value students find in developmental education to holistically understand, from both the academic and student affairs perspectives, how colleges and universities can better structure remedial courses and developmental programs to help first-generation, minority

students persist and be successful. The results, though unsurprising, emphasize some common factors that influence a first-generation, minority student's experience. The differences that emerged serve to demonstrate the importance of working with each student individually to understand how their ethnic identity may influence their experiences, as well as the usefulness of a practical model like Schlossberg's transition theory in providing support for disadvantaged students in navigating developmental education and beyond.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Demographic Questions

1. Age and year in school
2. Race
3. Gender
4. Developmental classes? Taking now?
 - Reading - CCS 098; CCS 099
 - English - ENG 098; ENG 099
 - Math - TRN 050; MAT 059; MAT 060; MAT 072; MAT 098

Research Question 1: How do first-generation, minority students construct meaning of developmental education?

1. How did you feel when you were told that you needed to take developmental classes?
2. Were you surprised to learn that there were gaps between what you learned in high school and what you need to know for college?
3. Do you think you could be successful without taking developmental classes?

Research Question 2: What perceived barriers does developmental education create for first-generation, minority students?

1. Within the college, what barriers do you face in being successful? Difficult coursework? Problems with financial aid? Scheduling or sequencing of classes? Other?
2. Outside of school what barriers do you face in being successful? Family? Work? Money? Other?
3. What do you tell yourself about being in developmental classes?

Research Question 3: What value do first-generation, minority students ascribe to developmental education?

1. Do you think developmental education has been helpful to you?
2. Do developmental requirements feel useful or burdensome?
3. What is your relationship like with your teachers? With your advisor?
4. How will it feel to move on to college-level classes?