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FACULTY MEMBERS' PERCEPTIONS REGARDING THE ROLE OF ASSESSMENT IN
DEVELOPMENTAL WRITING COURSES

By

Doreen Danielson

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Department of Education at the University of New England

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Education

Portland & Biddeford, Maine

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2015

Faculty Members' Perceptions Regarding the Role of Assessment in
Developmental Writing Courses

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore teaching faculty members' perceptions regarding how they design and implement writing assessments to evaluate Student Learning Outcomes in developmental English/writing courses. The study identified teaching faculty members' pedagogical beliefs about the purposes of writing assessment and instructors' attention to Student Learning Outcomes when designing assessment plans in developmental English/writing courses at a California community college. Using Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological approach, the study drew data from interviews with full-time faculty members at a Central Valley community college in California. Focusing on the participants' experiences and perceptions about the purposes of assessment in developmental English/writing courses, the analysis of data suggested that frequent writing assessments and integrated assessment were vital for evaluating Student Learning Outcomes. Even though the participants noted that their academic department did not enforce an integrated approach to writing assessment, they recognized its importance in evaluating Student Learning Outcomes. The participants believed that their institutional placement exam's lack of customization to developmental English/writing courses' Student Learning Outcomes caused students to be misplaced in courses. Faculty in one community college English department strived to provide productive assessment for students in developmental English/writing courses.

University of New England

Doctor of Education
Educational Leadership

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Chapter 1: Introduction

As a Critical Thinking, Literature, and Composition teaching faculty member at a community college in California, I delved into learning about the unique basic skills student population that California community colleges serve after attending to my own basic skills students' concerns regarding their lack of academic preparation when placed into developmental writing courses or even the first transferrable English course: College Reading and Writing. In addition to listening to my students' regular concerns, awareness of the lack of a consistent, coherent set of composition, research, and critical thinking skills among students enrolled in developmental writing courses and English 1A/101 (College Reading and Writing) sections led to the current research emphasis. The present inconsistency among developmental/basic skills students' composition, research, and critical thinking skill level stimulated me to question how learning, as the primary goal, is measured and enhanced by placement exams and writing assessments within developmental courses at California community colleges. To begin with, it is essential to learn about the types of student population enrolled at a California community college developmental/basic skills courses and explore their completion and success rates concerning meeting courses' Student Learning Outcomes (SLO).

California College Demographics

With 5.3% of the state of California residents living in poverty, a couple of counties within the Central Valley are among the poorest in the state with one of the highest unemployment rates and lowest levels of education acquisition in California. The 2012-2013 report of *The National Center for Education Statistics* (NCES) showed that 54.9% of the population of the Central Valley counties is comprised of the Hispanic or Latino race that is considered the poorest in the state. Therefore, from the 12,438 students attending a Community

College within the Central Valley, 7,577 (74%) receive a form of Federal grant and/or scholarship aid, 4,861 (47%) receive Federal Pell grants and no students receive Federal student loans (*The National Center for Education Statistics*, 2014). The California Community College Chancellor's Office reported the majority of the institution's enrolled students to be of Hispanic race in 2012: 51.3% (*California Community College Chancellor's Office*, 2012). During this period, the Student Success Initiative under the state of *California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office* tracked the college's student population for 6 years through the 2012-2013 academic year to report on the percentage of students completing developmental/remedial English courses, meaning courses that fall below the first transferable English course, English 1A/101: College Composition and Reading. The report indicated that 36% of the total number of students were enrolled in developmental English courses; of the noted percentage, 49.5% were Asian, 46.7% Filipino and 33.7% Hispanic. The mentioned report showcased that the majority of the students enrolled in remedial English courses were basic skills, English Language Learners (ELL), and/or English As a Second Language Learners (ESL) (*California Community College Chancellor's Office*, 2014).

Central Valley community college developmental courses' rates

Additionally, the California Office of the Chancellor published the survey results obtained from 2008-2011, conveying findings that, from the total number of students enrolled in developmental English courses at a Central Valley community college, only 28% assessed at transfer level, English 1A/101: College Composition and Reading, concerning writing and critical thinking skills (*California Community College Chancellor's Office*, 2008-2011). In addition, the majority of the assessed students enrolled in, for instance, one level below English 1A/101, scored at two levels below transfer, and only 38% of the same assessed students

successfully completed English 1A/101 with an average of C (Skinner, 2012, pp. 4-5). The published data from the *Accountability Reporting for the Community Colleges: College Level Indicators Self-Assessment 2012* noted that the percentage of student completion rate in all the college's basic skills courses indicated that 56.9% of all enrolled students were able to pass developmental courses with a grade of C or higher from 2008-2011. The Central Valley community colleges recognize an average grade of C as successfully completing an undergraduate course. In addition, the college's "Basic Skills Accountability Study" in 2012 reported students' progress in the developmental writing course one level below transfer that contains the largest number of basic skills students in a degree-applicable program from the 2003-2004 academic year to the 2010-2011 academic year to be 56%. This result indicated that, from a total of 12,431 students in the mentioned academic years, 7,051 completed the developmental course one level below transfer with a C average (Skinner, 2012, p. 23). The total number of students who did not pass developmental courses that were two and three levels below transfer increased from the 2003-2004 academic year to 2010-2011, presenting the need to change the approach towards writing placement assessments used in placing basic skills students into one, two, and three level below English 1A/101: College Composition and Reading.

Writing assessment at a Central Valley community college

As vital procedures, writing placement assessment and writing assessment within developmental courses at a Central Valley community college must document their attempt to address students' learning needs while measuring their performance level in developmental writing courses. Writing placement assessment and writing assessment in developmental courses should place a substantial amount of weight and value on the concept of testing the accuracy of one's level of knowledge. Bruner's (1970) dictum affirmed that "learning depends on knowledge

of results, at a time when, and at a place where, the knowledge can be used for development” (p. 120). The process of assessing how one’s knowledge level is prepared to meet a set of curricular objectives is not one of the main priorities within a community college, and the value of formally testing knowledge for the sake of establishing development faces a large bulk of disparagement. One of leadership’s main tasks is to be aware of its organization’s identity and how this identity reflects specific approaches to address students’ academic learning needs at the institution (Wheatley, 2010, para. 14). Therefore, Bruner’s (1970) ideology inspired me to explore faculty members’ perception about the purposes of assessment and using assessment to evaluating Student Learning Outcomes and enhancing learning.

Problem statement

In *The State of Basic Skills Instruction in California Community Colleges*, the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges (ASCCC) wanted to understand what causes the low success rate for basic skills students in the English/composition course one, two and three levels below transfer and in the first transfer level English/composition course. It noted that 76% of all the California Community Colleges that submitted annual success reports to the *Chancellor’s Office* specified that they had not gathered any data on why basic skills students did not perform well in developmental writing courses or why they dropped the courses; only 15% of the reporting California colleges indicated that they had minimal research on passing or retention rates among basic skills students in writing courses. Also, 29% of California colleges specified that they had no recorded data on the matter. Therefore, the “Academic Senate for California Community Colleges” (“Basic Skills Ad Hoc Committee,” 2000, pp. 9-11) concluded that there was urgent need for research and reliable data to determine why basic skills students are not succeeding in the noted courses. Because of the lack of data and direction described above, it is

crucial to explore how instructors provide appropriate levels of instruction to address basic skills students' learning needs through approaches toward assessment of writing.

Writing placement assessment

Currently, the standardized English placement assessment at a Central Valley Community College uses the popular exam software, ACCUPLACER, as a self-paced, ungraded assessment of reading and writing to place students in developmental courses one, two, three levels before transfer or in the first transferrable composition course, English 1A/101: College Reading and Writing. Though the ACCUPLACER software manual suggests that each community college seek their expert assistance in designing a personalized writing exam that best serves the college's student population, the community college uses the general assessment that ACCUPLACER provides without any modifications. Without a more comprehensive assessment, the use of cutoff scores in ranking developmental students' ACCUPLACER results continually misplace students in remedial writing courses or English 1A/101 in which some students then experience poor performance.

Writing assessment in developmental courses

The concept of writing assessment in a community college's developmental courses in the Central Valley is vaguely addressed in remedial writing courses' curricula; the curricular requirements do not emphasize how learning should be addressed or enhanced during writing assessments. The developmental courses' curricula do not include detailed suggestions for how Student Learning Outcomes and students' particular learning needs should be met through writing assessment methodology. Therefore, all the developmental courses' teaching faculty members use a variety of writing assessment methods and approaches of their choosing; Their approaches are based on professional knowledge, but there is little research regarding what

writing assessment they use, how the assessments they design enhance students' learning experience and how the overall curricular Student Learning Outcomes are improved. Overall, the developmental courses' faculty members possess the freedom to evaluate the enrolled students based on their own assessment methodologies and on their teaching philosophy.

Purpose of the study

Data about low student success rates in developmental/remedial writing courses one, two and three levels below English 1A/101 suggested the need for research about the particular role of writing assessment in learning, the probability of Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) achievement through assessment, and the current forms of assessment used by California community colleges. The published data from the *California Chancellor's Office* further demonstrated that basic skills students enrolled in developmental English/composition courses do not appear to be academically ready to successfully complete research, writing and critical thinking tasks in the first transferable course, English 1A/101: College Reading and Writing (Skinner, 2012, p. 5). Though all the instructors who teach developmental writing courses focus on every course's teaching and learning objectives as they design various coursework, they do not follow a uniform assessment system that can systematically demonstrate how Student Learning Outcomes are evaluated through their choice of writing assessment; the faculty members possess autonomy to evaluate students based on their own individually chosen assessment methodologies and that reflect their pedagogical beliefs.

The study identifies teaching faculty members' pedagogical beliefs about the purposes of writing assessment in developmental writing courses. More specifically, this study documents the instructors' attention to Student Learning Outcomes when designing assessment plans in developmental English/writing courses at California community colleges.

Research Questions

This study explored how faculty members' pedagogical beliefs influence the way they design and implement assessments and evaluate Student Learning Outcomes that would best serve basic skills students' learning needs in developmental writing courses. The national and California community colleges' data regarding how Student Learning Outcomes are evaluated in writing placement exams and developmental writing courses are presented in the literature review. The literature centers on understanding various writing assessment standards that might strengthen the evaluation of Student Learning Outcomes in developmental writing courses, along with the approaches that the instructors might use in developmental English/writing courses to address specific, curriculum-focused Student Learning Outcomes. To understand how faculty in one community college currently reconcile assessment decisions, the research questions explored are:

1. What are teaching faculty members' perceptions about the purposes of assessment in developmental writing courses?
2. How do teaching faculty members evaluate Student Learning Outcomes in developmental writing courses?

Definition of Terms

- *Assessment for Learning (AfL)*: This form of assessment attempts to improve students' learning experience by making students active creators of meaning and active critics during their learning processes. The focus of this method is on students' understanding of their own learning performance.

- *Assessment of Learning (AoL)*: This is a style of assessment that focuses on students' retention of learned material without aiming towards the quality of students' learning experience.
- *Basic Skills*: According to Title 5, '55502(d), Basic Skills refers to Community College courses in reading, writing, computation, and English as a Second Language that are designated by local the community college district as non-degree credit courses.
- *Collaborative Learning*: This process involves an instruction method that encourages students to work in groups to accomplish a common, academic goal.
- *Connecting*: It is a process that occurs in an integrated writing assessment that requires writers to link ideas from their composition, connecting them with thoughts from their assigned readings.
- *Critical Thinking*: It is a process that involves analysis, synthesis and evaluation of various concepts.
- *Cutoff Scores*: The lowest possible score received on any integrated/standardized exam that a student must receive in order to pass the test or successfully fulfill the set requirements for the exam is considered a cutoff score.
- *Discourse Synthesis*: This term is used in reading to write assessment methods that use/enhance meaning making processes during an integrated assessment.
- *Formative Assessment*: Formative assessments are formal or informal task-based, curriculum-focused projects and/or exams that provide students with precise directions concerning completion.

- *Integrated Assessment*: This assessment method is linked to the institution's mission and curricular objectives, emphasizing specific Student Learning Outcomes enforced by a course curriculum and creating a mission-focused learning experience for all students enrolled in all sections of one academic course.
- *Organizational Change*: Individuals who would participate in leading the proposal in every phase of its change process by combined, ardent effort toward continuous collaboration and communication would enforce the newly established vision, driving away any confusion.
- *Organizing*: It is when writers think about the fundamental structure of their writing and readings.
- *Remedial*: The United States Department of Education defines Remedial education courses as composition and mathematics courses for college students who lack the needed skills to successfully meet all the courses' curricular objectives set by the institution. The term does not specify if students have been exposed to course material or have been given the opportunity to respond to any set curricular objectives. Also, due to the term's negative connotation, the term, Developmental or Basic Skills are preferred by teaching faculty members within many Community Colleges.
- *Selecting*: Reading and choosing various ideas from the read excerpts are involved in this process.
- *Student Learning Outcomes (SLO)*: The set of skills that are developed and lead to knowledge, attitudes and abilities that are gained at the end of an academic course

is known as Student Learning Outcomes (SLO). These outcomes are commonly addressed directly in an academic course's curriculum and are expected to be adopted by the teaching faculty members and enforced by those in academic leadership.

- *Summative Assessment*: This form of assessment is a formal evaluation plan that produces a score and gives students the chance to observe their own level of achievement based on a standardized set of principles that are addressed by an instructor in a specific course for the purpose of meeting the course learning objectives.

Conceptual Framework

This study evaluates the characteristics of the currently used writing placement assessment at California community colleges, learning about possible indicators that impact students' performance in developmental writing courses. It is vital to explore the methodologies and approaches that instructors incorporate in developmental English/writing courses that enhance Student Learning Outcomes. Understanding instructors' beliefs about the concept of assessment in developmental writing courses may show alignment between approaches to assessment and attention to supporting students' attainment of Student Learning Outcomes.

Limitations of the Study

Since the placement exam at one California community college consists of two parts, Writing and Mathematics, it is essential to note that this study targets the writing portion of the assessment and the overall writing assessments used in developmental English/writing courses at a California community college without generalizing the research study emphasis, connecting it to any other courses at the institution. The data about the students' performance level in the

institution's writing placement assessment only refers to the particular student population that participate in the exam without linking the results to other community colleges within the state of California or any other state. Certainly, the integrated writing assessment viewpoint that supports assessment to enhance student learning can be applied to other remedial English courses at other community colleges within the same district, giving instructors the opportunity to create a standardized manner of ensuring that all students who take the same developmental writing courses are able to successfully respond to all the courses' curricular learning objectives before moving forward to more advanced composition courses.

Significance

Documenting teaching faculty members' beliefs about assessment use in developmental writing courses provides an understanding of how they establish and implement Student Learning Outcomes in developmental English/writing courses in community colleges. The current writing placement assessment and writing assessments in developmental English/composition courses at a California community college would benefit from a student learning-focused assessment system that prioritizes learning enhancement. An integrated writing system can effectively evaluate students' composition, research and critical thinking skills in developmental writing courses, guiding them toward improving their learning outcomes as they move into the first transferrable course, English 1A, along with raising departmental success rates in English 1A. While studying the concept of assessment through learning, Harlen and James (1997) described the proper role of assessment in the learning process and confirmed that the summative rationale of assessment has become disordered in higher education, and this form of assessment no longer targets the improvement in Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) as the primary goal. The purpose of a formative-summative, integrated assessment system is to require

students to reflect on their learning journey in a language and/or Composition course, attempting to list the evolutionary improvement of specific Composition, Critical Thinking and Research skills (Knoch and Sitajalabhorn, 2013, pp. 302-303). Reedy (1995) and McEwen (2008) further suggested that the establishment of a summative assessment plan can further support educators to systematically provide feedback that can help students focus on their own learning without concentrating on the threat that the final grade produces; this process would reduce students' anxiety level while bringing attention to how the learning process evolves.

By devoting time and effort to instill an ever-developing learning attitude in students, faculty members can bring the focus back to the learning process in developmental writing courses. If faculty do not direct their educational effort on the students' learning process, their pedagogical view should either be replaced by a viewpoint that infuses a longing for knowledge, or completely deserted for the sake of addressing the students' academic learning needs (Wheatley, 2010, para. 11). Of course, the term *summative* refers to a formal evaluation plan that gives students the chance to evaluate their own level of achievement based on a standardized set of principles that are addressed by an instructor in a specific course for the purpose of meeting the course's learning objectives (Bloom et al., 1971). Similarly, the term *formative* refers to task-based and curriculum-focused projects and exams that generate collaboration among students (Yorke, 2003, 480).

Conclusion

Conveying the current institutional reality regarding writing placement assessment and writing assessment in developmental English/writing courses at a California community college, along with Student Learning Outcomes and student demographics is essential in exploring assessment methodologies that might address students' learning needs more effectively.

Therefore, the review of literature in Chapter 2 will evaluate published data from all the community colleges within the United States, focusing on California community colleges' use of writing placement assessments. A key focus is potential misuse of cutoff scores, resulting in students who are misplaced in English/composition courses. The Literature Review will further report data from California community college *Chancellor's Office* concerning student demographics and Student Learning Outcomes, and it will stress the significance and usefulness of a learning-focused, formative-summative, integrated writing assessment approach that may enhance Student Learning Outcomes in developmental writing courses. This approach would allow the basic skills' student population to actively participate in its own learning process and would prepare students for critical thinking, research and composition curricular objectives in English 1A while exploring founding and recent theoretical studies in higher education about writing assessment rationales.

The review of literature will also explore the rationale behind an integrated form of writing assessment in remedial English courses, focusing on enhancing students' involvement in their learning process and understanding how students' critical thinking skills can also be strengthened through the process of an integrated writing assessment. This literature further investigates the way(s) the various members of the Community College districts within California incorporate the concept of a writing assessment in order to address curricular objectives and enhance Student Learning Outcomes in remedial composition courses. It is vital to understand how such writing assessment would or would not reinforce and strengthen learning along with writing, research and critical thinking skills that the community college's English department wishes each student to demonstrate upon the completion of developmental writing courses and English 1A/101, directly impacting ongoing accreditation and accountability at the

institution by enhancing regular assessment results that emphasize Student Learning Outcomes (Elizabeth, 2010, p. 419).

In addition, the review of literature will report on the relationship and difference between “assessment of learning” and “assessment for learning” (Hernandez, 2012, p. 2), which helps distinguish between assessment approaches that directly target the students’ learning process and methodologies that only focus on rating. While “assessment of learning” (Hernandez, 2012, p. 2) mainly targets the level of students’ mastery of curricular learning objectives of a course, “assessment for learning” (Hernandez, 2012, p. 2) emphasizes enforcing a productive learning experience and, therefore, outcome; the latter is an essential part of the learning process. Brown and Knight (1994) along with Gibbs (2006) confirmed that generating and incorporating an assessment plan for learning is not only essential to support students’ learning experience, but it establishes a solid structure for the process of learning. “The concept of learning-oriented assessment provides a more satisfactory perspective when considering the links between assessment and learning” (Hernandez, 2012, p. 5), so adopting an integrated assessment approach may enhance the attainment of SLO at community colleges as it will encourage and support students’ involvement in their learning.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

To support exploration of the research questions in Chapter 1, the Literature Review describes the state of writing assessments in developmental courses at American community colleges and faculty perceptions of the purpose of assessment. The literature review contains the following major headings that inform focus of the research questions: *Writing Assessment and Student Placement in Basic Skills Courses*, *Enhancing Learning Through Writing Assessment*, *Effective Writing Assessment Criteria*, and *Faculty's Pedagogical Beliefs About Assessment*. The literature contains a section about successful, learning-focused, integrated writing assessment approaches in developmental writing courses in American community colleges. This chapter explores research evidence about the types of writing assessment used in developmental writing courses at community colleges in the United States of America, to evaluate what types of assessment the studies support and whether those forms of assessments directly improve the learning process. The Literature Review also considers the impact of discourse synthesis and critical thinking skills on the learning process, leading to successful writing assessment criteria that undergird Assessment for Learning. Assessment that focuses ranking as the main rationale by stating how an overall application of Assessment of Learning within developmental writing courses' assessments in American community colleges may have little impact on Student Learning Outcomes. Furthermore, evidence is presented for a specific set of writing assessment criteria that positively impact required skills, such as composition, reading, research, and critical thinking in developmental writing courses at a community college level. Considering the role of assessment in student learning, the final segment of the chapter discusses faculty members' involvement in the process of integrated assessment in order to learn if their engagement impacts the assessment process and its outcome. Elwood & Klenowski (2002) concurred that a writing

assessment that enhances Student Learning Outcomes by considering students' learning needs as the main set of priorities must be "formative in function and purpose" to allow students to be the center of the evaluation process (p. 244).

To understand how a writing assessment can enhance the learning process and, ultimately, improve Student Learning Outcomes, a number of studies in the review of literature explore differences between Assessment of Learning and Assessment for Learning. Assessment of Learning, as an evaluation task for the purpose of grading and ranking, has received the most attention in American community colleges, producing scores rather than enhancing learning. However, the collection of studies in the review of literature evaluate the widespread emphasis on scoring along with how the method of Assessment for Learning fulfills the objective of equipping students with skills, providing feedback and encouraging student involvement in their learning process and goals.

Writing assessment and student placement in basic skills courses

As Knoch and Sitajalabhorn (2013) explained, the only way that educators can ensure that all students enrolled in a multi-section writing course experience a mutual level of learning through a formative-summative assessment form is by using integration. Integration is defined as an approach that chooses a collection of Student Learning Outcomes noted in a course's curriculum and warrants the use of skills other than mere writing to specifically address various learning objectives. Integration enforces the use of reading and critical thinking skills in order to address interaction, collaboration and project-based learning tasks within a formative-summative method on a larger scale, providing the opportunity for students in all the offered sections of the same course in an academic semester/quarter to be exposed to an approach that encourages them to establish long-term skills rather than only focusing on passing a formative exam at the end of

a course that may differ in each section of the same writing course (Knoch and Sitajalabhorn, 2013, p. 301-303).

However, by considering ranking before the construct of composition, a non-formative, integrated writing assessment focuses on assessment products that are inadequate concerning the quality of academic composition: the score (Condon, 2012, p. 142). As a means to enhance test takers' participation in their own writing learning processes, the method of integration in assessing academic composition has been successfully utilized in higher education over the past 30 years; with assessment in higher education researchers such as Feak & Dobson (1996), Gebril (2006), Hamp-Lyons & Kroll (1996), Watanabe (2001), and Weigle (2002 & 2004) echo the benefits of an integrated assessment method in higher education, the compilation of their case studies' results suggests that university-level students obtained higher scores on integrated writing tasks rather than independent, formative exams (Plakans, 2009, pp. 561-563). Wolpert-Gawron (2015) concluded her research results on the impact of assessment on learning by noting that regardless of what the "trendy standard or curriculum package du jour," an integrated, formative-summative assessment that is focused on Assessment for Learning (AfL) "knows that students are not standardized, they don't learn in a standardized way, and that our clientele can't be assessed in a standardized manner if we are looking to foster innovation" (para. 21) through learning. Through the results of her research, Wolpert-Gawron (2015) also emphasized that integrated assessment does not necessarily generate a standardized system; it provides the opportunity for a larger group of students to be involved in learning-based projects that promote various learning skills (para. 10-13).

Emphasis on scoring

Timed writing assessments have fulfilled the requirement of producing a score or a ranking by focusing on performance goals rather than encouraging learning goals in developmental writing courses at American community colleges. Though the actual definition of the term, *formative*, sets forth the criteria for task-based, curriculum-focused projects, exams and collaborative assignments that allow students to interact during the learning process, the practice of using the formative style of assessment has shifted toward score generation (Yorke, 2003, p. 480). A basic skills student pressured to generate a performance goal may have a thought such as the following: “Is what I am producing correct?” However, the same student who is encouraged to develop a learning goal would focus on a different idea: “how can I improve my skills to meet these requirements?” As the performance-based thought only focuses on the assessment task at hand, the learning-based approach motivates the development of various learning skills without emphasis on a final assessment score. By noting the difference between performance goals and learning goals, Yorke (2003) explained that because performance goals have received the most attention in higher education, the focus on learning goals and students’ experience within their own learning processes have faded in higher education (p. 488). Regarding emphasis on formative assessment’s performance goals, William Condon (2009) noted that composition faculty members have reduced the criteria for good writing to simple, measurable parts that seem obvious during the assessment process. Formative, timed, test generators train graders and readers to notice only the set measurable criteria, believing that good composition should fulfill a few items listed on a rubric. Yorke (2003) warned educators that this notion produces learned dependence when “the student relies on the teacher to say what has to be done and does not seek to go beyond the boundaries that he or she believes to be circumscribing the task” (p. 489). By

encouraging students to depend on the examiners to make decisions about what they actually know, test generators shift the focus from Assessment for Learning to Assessment of Learning, not considering students' involvement in their own learning processes as priority (Yorke, 2003, p. 488).

Integrated placement assessment: National context

Within the American community college system, the concept of integration and emphasis on scoring are first utilized in standardized placement exams for developmental courses. In order to be placed in a developmental/Basic Skills English and Mathematics course at a community college, students participate in a standardized placement exam; the results of the placement test determine the English and Mathematics courses in which students are allowed to enroll (Prince, 2005, p. 42). Researchers such as Shults (2000), Jenkins and Boswell (2002), Prince (2005), and Collins (2008), along with researchers for the California Community Colleges *Chancellor's Office*, have explored and studied the initial assessment method used in placing students in English and Mathematics courses at community colleges. They concluded that a higher percentage of students are misplaced and do not academically belong in the English or Mathematics courses where they are placed. They noticed that the approach in grading placement exams might have direct impact on students being misplaced in English and Mathematics courses. The most current evaluation results of all 50 states are from the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems Transitions Study of 2008. Ewell, Boeke and Zis (2008) reported that out of the 50 states that were surveyed, 17 states maintained a statewide college placement assessment policy for their community colleges. Fourteen states confirmed that they were using a common set of placement exams in their community colleges (Ewell, Boeke & Zis, 2008). The cumulative results of the report suggested that there are unplanned negative

consequences of current assessment policies at community colleges, such as the use of cutoff scores during the standardized grading process.

Common placement exam structure and scoring

Parsad, Lewis and Greene's (2003) national survey results indicated that 92% of two-year community colleges in America use popular software such as ACCUPLACER, PREP2TEST and COMPASS to place students into developmental English and Mathematics courses (Parsad, Lewis and Greene, 2003, p. 5). Used by 62% of community colleges, the ACCUPLACER suite, for instance, determines students' academic level based on cutoff scores. Regarding the use of cutoff scores, 12 states reported that they had a strict policy for their community colleges, enforcing the use of cutoff scores in all their placement exams (pp. 13-16). Hughes and Scott-Clayton (2010) expressed that incorporating cutoff scores within integrated assessments only weakens the standardized system and directly places students in courses where they do not belong academically (p. 9). Rather than taking advantage of the expert support provided by the noted popular software to redesign and align each placement exam with specific English and/or Mathematics set of course learning objectives and thoroughly editing the placement exam to serve the learning needs of a specific student population, the majority of community colleges use the originally-designed placement test that is included in a purchased software without modifying the exam. This approach generates test results that may align with a few academic learning objectives in general, but the results' validity and compatibility with actual courses offered at a given community college are questionable (Morgan & Michaelides [College Board], 2005, p. 10).

In their 2008 national level data, Ewell, Boeke and Zis (2008) further added that cutoff scores have been producing negative results on a national level, disrupting a state's budget by

changing the bottom line. The study focused on a few states, for instance, Connecticut, where cutoff scores caused a radical increase in the number of basic skills students in developmental courses, directly increasing the costs to the state and the enrolled students (p. 18). The negative results led Hughes and Scott-Clayton (2010) to conclude that “while standardization of a fundamentally effective strategy may improve” Student Learning Outcomes, “standardization of an ineffective strategy,” such as the use of cutoff scores without any correlation to any particular developmental course curricular objective, “may worsen the situation” (p. 8) of student success rates and Student Learning Outcomes in developmental courses.

Certainly, the use of well-known placement exam software is more than common, and Parsad, Lewis and Greene’s (2003) national survey outcome showed that 92% of two-year community colleges in the country use widely accepted software such as ACCUPLACER, PREP2TEST and COMPASS to place students into developmental English and Mathematics courses (Parsad, Lewis and Greene, 2003, pp. 5-6). The ACCUPLACER suite, which is used by 62% of all the two-year community colleges, categorizes the written exam in the following areas: sentence skills and reading comprehension; the test also includes a second portion: a short essay. The exam is not timed, but on average, students complete each portion of the exam in 30 minutes. Even though the ACCUPLACER exams (and all the noted testing software) incorporate the use of cutoff scores, The College Board, as the publisher, specifically recommends that each community college perform test reliability and validity in order to generate its very own score range interpretation criteria appropriate for the college’s particular student population and developmental course curricular objectives. The published manual further states that student placement determination should not be solely based on cutoff test scores. It must include multiple measures ranging from considering developmental course and curricular content and/or

criteria to students' characteristics. The College Board specifically noted that it provides its member colleges extensive support services, helping them in generating and, therefore, conducting their own test reliability, validity, scoring measures, and final analyses. However, taking advantage of the extended services for creating individualized scoring measures is a voluntary task (Morgan & Michaelides [College Board], 2005, pp. 10-11).

Integrated placement assessment: California context

Noticing the commonality of the cutoff score's consequences of low student success rates and Student Learning Outcomes in developmental courses, many states have been funding research projects to inform assessment policy change consideration. In California, the Task Force on Assessment was founded to begin and sustain a statewide dialogue about improving integrated assessment systems for all the 109 community colleges. However, when the survey results of California community colleges were published, it appeared that very few integrated exams were being used (Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2010, pp. 9-12). Collins' (2008) community college survey showed that community colleges are under constant pressure to adopt a statewide assessment system, staying away from adopting assessment plans that serve their particular student population. The survey results reported that there were many internal and external pressures on the colleges to "devise a coherent placement assessment policy framework" that produce more accurate and beneficial results (p. 4). Varying integrated assessment scoring measures and standards and low student success rates are considered alarming internal pressures; influential external pressures include, for instance, the reports from the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (NCPPE) and the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), noting "statewide adoption of common assessment practices across board-access

colleges and universities” instead of encouraging the use of individually-chosen scoring measures by each community college (Shulock, 2010, p. 9).

California developmental courses’ learning success rates

Even though integrated placement assessments provide community colleges with uniformity and consistency of set standards that are adopted by 92% of community colleges in America, they also produce unconstructive consequences that impact students who are placed in developmental English and Mathematics courses at community colleges. California is among the states that have incorporated the use of cutoff scores in their integrated placement assessments in community colleges, leading to academically misplaced students. Commonly used integrated assessment software in California such as ACCUPLACER and PREP2TEST produce results based on cutoff scores and often do not place students in appropriate developmental courses. Hughes and Scott-Clayton (2010) explained that this is the direct result of community colleges not taking advantage of the software publisher’s offered services that assist and train academic leaders in generating integrated test scoring measures and standards based on their college’s student population and developmental course curricular objectives (p. 13). There is a vast gap between the standardized placement testing policies and the curriculum contents that are developed by those in academic departmental leadership positions in individual community colleges; the standards for creating the rationale of the cutoff scores within integrated assessments do not align with the curricular objectives of the courses that students are placed in after participating in the integrated assessments used in California community colleges (Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2010, pp. 7-8). According to the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office Basic Skills Accountability report on “Basic Skills Workload,” only 28% of basic skills students enrolled in developmental English/composition credit courses assessed at the first

transfer level English/Composition course within the California Community College system within the 2008-2011 academic years; the Workload assessment system concentrated on Basic Skills students' learning needs in developmental English/Composition courses. On a similar note, *The Accountability Report on Student Progress in Remedial English/Composition* credit courses below transfer level measured students' success rates on a long-term basis, focusing on course completion above developmental English/Composition courses—especially the first transferable English/Composition course. These data revealed that students enrolled in one level below a transfer level course assessed at 2 levels below transfer level, and within the assessed student group, only 38% were able to pass the first transfer level English/Composition course with a C average (Skinner, 2012, p. 4-7).

Furthermore, in *The State of Basic Skills Instructions in California Community Colleges*, The Basic Skills Ad Hoc Committee conducted a study on Basic Skills students enrolled in developmental courses and reported a 25% success rate in the period of three academic years and began investigating the reason for such a low pass rate. After reviewing the Academic Senate Survey results, the committee indicated that even after enrolling in developmental courses, a large percentage of students choose to not enroll in transferrable college courses, or they decide to not pursue enrolling in them after their first attempt in passing them; “perhaps they are disturbed by their placement and decide they are unsuited for college,” but researched data “to confirm or contradict” this reasoning is not available (“The State of Basic Skills Instructions in California Community Colleges,” 2000, p. 7). On a similar note, 76% of California colleges reported that they did not learn about why some students dropped-out of developmental courses or others contributed toward the noted 25% success rate. Considering the lack of substantial data from California community colleges about the reasoning behind students' course withdrawal

rates and their low success rates in developmental courses, The State of Basic Skills Instructions in California Community Colleges (2000) identified the following possible factors that may contribute to low student success rates in developmental courses:

1. Providing no advising or follow-up upon integrated assessment completion
2. No data regarding students who may benefit from academic support services upon receiving the integrated assessment results
3. Student demographic variation
4. Lack of an established, institutional definition of student success (pp. 7-8)

Though the Partnership for Excellence requires California colleges to collect and report data regarding reasoning behind student success rates, there is little research regarding why student success rates are low in developmental courses. The committee further added that one of the contributing problems is that community colleges do not always have researchers on staff; many teaching faculty members reported that they had to decide to dedicate time for research tasks, incorporating it, by choice, alongside their teaching duties. These research projects, if mandated by academic departments, become a required task added to faculty members' workload without additional compensation. The results of individually conducted research projects, if completed successfully, are not always officially reported to the institution and, therefore, to the Partnership for Excellence committee (p. 8).

Integrated writing assessment learning impact in California basic skills courses

Considering that the reported percentage of basic skills students assessed 1-2 levels below transfer level in English/Composition courses and, at the same time, the students produced a low success rate because of the initial use of cutoff scores by the community colleges' integrated placement assessment software, the California Community College Research Center

(CCCRC) focused on understanding how the assessment of writing impacts Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) within the Community College system in California. Understanding the role of writing assessment in Basic Skills English/writing courses may provide insight into how students' performance level and instruction methodologies impact the Writing assessment criteria and approaches that teaching faculty members choose to incorporate. Researchers such as Hughes and Scott-Clayton (2010) and Martorell and McFarlin (2009) argued that writing assessment currently used in community colleges do not impact students' learning and performance, and they do not enhance success rates in developmental Writing courses. On behalf of the CCCRC, Hughes and Scott-Clayton (2010) reported in *Assessing Developmental Assessment in Community Colleges* that most integrated writing assessments used for Basic Skills students are only focused on producing a score, and their rationale is similar to a placement test (Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2010, pp. 1-3). Even though the use of a few integrated writing assessments were reported by California Community Colleges, after using a very broad student result sample from a variety of California Community Colleges, Calcagno and Long (2008) and Martorell and McFarlin (2009) indicated that the Writing assessments did not impact SLO or even degree completion (Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2010, pp. 14-19).

In *The State of Basic Skills Instructions in California Community Colleges*, The Basic Skills Ad Hoc Committee reported that even though all California community colleges noted in a survey that they use some form of writing assessment, 81% of the colleges specified that students use the self-selection process to enter into developmental English/Composition courses. In fact, many colleges indicated that the concept of a formal writing assessment has been removed from developmental course curricula, so the courses lack content validity, and individual faculty members make the conscious choice of whether or not they need to use various forms of

assessment in their courses (“The State of Basic Skills Instructions in California Community Colleges,” 2000, p. 6). The committee further indicated that even though each writing assessment must contain several scoring measures, problem arise when assessing ESL students. It is common for colleges, which use cutoff scores without the incorporation of their own college’s individual measures appropriate for their student population and course curricula, to place ESL students in developmental, basic skills English/composition courses without realizing that many ESL students, because they have different linguistic learning needs, are not suited for developmental courses. The committee added that all writing assessments must contain multiple measures particular to the college’s unique student population and course curricula; though all California colleges reported using multiple measures when assessing students, there is no evidence for what those measures are, how they are met, and what criteria they fulfill. Due to a lack of response from California colleges regarding individually created scoring measures, the Basic Skills Ad Hoc Committee recommended colleges to incorporate detailed student surveys, focusing on students’ “educational background, attitudes toward reading, life experiences, and the amount of time students expect to allocate to their studies” (p. 7) in order to start designing a set of criteria for measuring students’ success rates on writing tests in developmental courses.

Enhancing learning through writing assessments

Test takers’ involvement in their language acquisition processes is enhanced by creating meaning-making tasks within integrated writing assessments and providing opportunities for the test takers to derive meaning from reading for writing tasks during integrated assessments, called “discourse synthesis” (p. 563). Reading ability is an essential skill for completing integrated writing tasks; it requires test takers to generate meaning from the assigned texts and sources and connect vocabularies to larger content rationales to, ultimately, apply their understanding in the

writing process (Plakans, 2009, p. 578). Spivey's (1984, 1990, 1997) research in academic writing assessment further developed the purpose of "discourse synthesis" as a concept used in integrated writing tasks, conveying that students who participated in integrated writing assessments experienced a significant level of transformation concerning "organizing, selecting and connecting" (Spivey, 1997, pp. 191-194) skills used in university-level writing; these results were possible because test takers participated in meaning-making reading tasks that developed their writing skills: a set of procedures for supporting meaning-making cannot be separated in an integrated writing assessment.

Assessment for learning rationale

Writing assessments possess the opportunity to directly and constructively impact the learning quality and experience of students enrolled in developmental writing courses in community colleges. An integrated writing assessment also encourages the use of an Assessment for Learning (AfL) instead of an Assessment of Learning (AoL). While AoL mainly serves the purpose of noting what curricular objectives are met by the participating students, AfL targets and directly improves student learning without interrupting the teaching flow, allowing students to fully engage in their own particular learning experience and motivating them to "improve their own learning performance" (Willis, 2007, p. 53). Elwood and Klenowski (2002) further explained the rationale behind AfL by noting that students exposed to an integrated assessment for learning are the center of a practice community where students are exposed to every aspect and procedure of the assessment process in order to comprehend how evaluation through learning functions successfully (Elwood and Klenowski, 2002, p. 245). After all, the purpose of focusing on student learning enhancement through formative-summative, integrated assessment within developmental writing courses is to promote a higher standard for Student Learning

Outcomes, successfully and masterfully preparing students for teaching and learning objectives projected in the first transferable course, English 1A. The Assessment Reform Group (1999) characterized an assessment for learning by using the following set of criteria:

1. It is embedded in a view of teaching and learning of which it is essential part;
2. It involves sharing learning goals with pupils;
3. It aims to help pupils to know and to recognize the standards they are aiming for;
4. It involves pupils in self-assessment;
5. It provides feedback which leads to pupils recognizing their next step and how to take them;
6. It is underpinned by confidence that every student can improve;
7. It involves both teacher and pupils reviewing and reflecting on assessment data.

(p. 200)

The noted measures magnify the purpose of implementing a formative-summative assessment plan that would focus on embedding a learning experience within assessment; the criteria enable both students and educators to have equal parts as participants in the suggested formative-summative, integrated assessment, allowing them to work toward a common goal: to stimulate learning through evaluative feedback. Willis (2007) expressed that the Assessment Reform Group (AFG) (2002) identified 10 very specific criteria to explain why it is significant and beneficial to incorporate Assessment for Learning (AfL) when thinking about an assessment approach that enhances Student Learning Outcomes (SLO). Alignment of students' learning goals with course learning objectives is evident in the following required criteria:

1. Assessment for learning should be part of effective planning of teaching and learning
2. Assessment for learning should focus on how students learn

3. Assessment for learning should be recognized as central to classroom practice
4. Assessment for learning should be regarded as a key professional skill for teachers
5. Assessment for learning should be sensitive and constructive because any assessment has an emotional impact
6. Assessment should take account of the importance of learner motivation
7. Assessment for learning should promote commitment to learning goals and shared understanding of the criteria by which they are assessed
8. Learners should receive constructive guidance about how to improve
9. Assessment for learning develops learners' capacity for self-assessment so that they can become reflective and self-managing
10. Assessment for learning should recognize the full range of achievements of all learners

(Assessment Reform Group, 2002, p. 2)

The ARG (2002) suggested that it is the duty of educators to seek detailed evidence about the level of learning their students have accomplished. Also, it is the responsibility of educators to recognize how they will lead students to the projected course learning objectives, enhancing students' comprehension and drive to improve their own performance to meet the course learning objectives (Willis, 2007, p. 53). Therefore, Wolpert-Gawron (2015), the author of the upcoming 2016 book on project-based, formative and summative assessment impacts on learning, confirmed that a formative assessment, on its own, cannot truly deliver the noted learning criteria by ARG (2002) because its conformation rejects the incorporation of a final evaluation of curricular objectives in general; a formative-summative assessment, however, creates the opportunity to experience learning as a procedural journey through interaction,

collaboration, and self and peer assessment that target a collection of learning objectives an academic course requires through AfL and an overall evaluation plan (para. 12).

Discourse synthesis' impact on learning

Studies of the composition processes in integrated writing assessment often refer to the concept of “discourse synthesis” as a procedure that must exist in an integrated assessment approach. According to researchers such as Ascencion (2005, 2008), Esmaili (2002), and Plakans (2008), discourse synthesis is considered a learning-enhancing method of test taking that provides test takers with read to write tasks that specifically focus on set learning objectives in an integrated assessment format; the purpose of discourse synthesis is to either incorporate previously learned concepts in an integrated assessment or to enhance the learning experience based on a set of learning objectives. Plakans (2008) noted that the integrated writing process, when compared with the formative, independent writing exam, prompted an interactive writing method, allowing students to actively engage in all the assessment's procedures (pp. 118-123). Both Ascencion (2005, 2008) and Esmaili (2002) conducted studies that provided university-level students with integrated writing exams that involved thematically relevant reading-to-writing tasks; both sets of results validated that reading and writing, in an integrated writing assessment, are not separate procedures because the existence of discourse synthesis improves the test takers' reflective skills in composition along with their planning and thought organizing abilities before and during the writing process (Plakans, 2009, p. 564).

Rather than stressing the importance of incorporating discourse synthesis in the process of assessment, however, William Condon (2009) noted that the writing assessment has become extremely simplified; the process of assessing writing has been reduced to measurable tasks only. He further expressed his frustration about the change in assessment rationale emphasis in higher

education. Also, those grading the assessment are trained to focus only on the pre-assigned measurable tasks, and the assumption is that “the varied set of competencies that combine to produce good writing can be expressed in a single number” (Condon, 2009, p. 141). This simplified process emphasizes the least important and beneficial component of the assessment: the score and, therefore, the placement. Condon (2009) indicated that higher education institutions in the United States of America have chosen ranking and placement as the main priorities within a writing assessment system rather than focusing on the benefits that discourse synthesis would provide for Student Learning Outcomes.

Critical thinking’s impact on learning

As a method that instigates analysis, synthesis and evaluation of different concepts, critical thinking is a key element in active learning. Even though reading, lectures and other course material are essential parts of learning, comprehension does not occur until students gain meaning out of what they are supposed to accomplish (Duran & Waugh, 2006, p. 160). There are numerous definitions provided by theorists and researchers such as Norris (1985), Elder and Paul (1994) and Harris and Hodges (1995) who examined various characterizations of how critical thinking operates. The framework provided and thoroughly explained by Bloom (1956) created a solid focus for the term by identifying 6 levels in the cognitive domain that relate to various cognitive abilities (Duran & Waugh, 2006, p. 160). The first level is considered *knowledge* that is used in reciting information through gaining access to memory; *comprehension* organizes previously learned information through relevance and categorization. The process of *application* is used to align learned information with principles and set of criteria depending on a specific situation. *Analysis* occurs as an evaluative step after considering organized material; therefore, *synthesis* becomes possible by generating an original meaning or thought after looking back at

organized information and their analysis. Finally, *evaluation* occurs by making judgment after considering the relationship between analysis and synthesis (Duran and Waugh, 2006, p. 161).

Individually, the method of formative and summative assessments include only parts of the critical thinking process; whereas formative assessment is comprised of knowledge, comprehension, and application, the summative method includes levels of analysis, synthesis and evaluation (Knoch & Sitajalabhorn, 2013, pp. 303-304). Therefore, according to Duran and Waugh (2006) a constructive assessment plan should include all 6 levels of critical thinking in order to enhance Student Learning Outcomes and performance entirely (p. 163). Not only should educators implement the 6 levels of critical thinking in assessment in their various lesson plans, they should further collect student feedback to learn if students are able to confidently respond to every level of critical thinking, and if they are able to develop particular skills because of the entire process. By asking students to identify what they learned from task-based or comprehensive assessments, instructors would receive feedback that might result in the revision of an evaluation plan to improve critical thinking levels to, ultimately, promote active learning. In the same manner, educators' feedback is essential in the learning process as it incorporates the formative-summative assessment results to help students address their specific learning needs. When both formative and summative assessment formats are combined to enhance critical thinking levels, educators have the opportunity to compare and contrast curricular criteria, standards, student performance, student feedback on their own learning process, and the evaluation of the overall assessment structure for the purpose of prompting active learning and addressing students' learning needs more thoroughly (Fink, 2003, p. 156).

Considering Bloom's (1956) 6 levels of critical thinking, Spivey's (1997) transformational "organizing, selecting and connecting" skills play a vital part in the integrated

assessment task by requiring students to participate in the selecting and connecting processes by deciding which parts of the required texts and sources seem relevant to the rationale of their writing assessment and, therefore, finding relevance and relationships among a given topic, their own experience and the required sources (pp. 191-194). For instance, since 1991, Washington State University has incorporated a formative-summative, integrated assessment system for the purpose of providing students with the opportunity of being deliberately aware of their own learning during the writing process. In order to expose students to the critical thinking and composition curricular requirements of Washington State University's first transferable Composition course, English 101: College Writing, the institution's Assessment Design Committee agreed on designing prompts for the formative-summative, integrated assessment that directly pulled from the list of learning objectives noted in English 101 curriculum such as the following: "summarizing and analyzing a source, developing a position, constructing an essay that argues the student's own point of view, providing evidence for that view, and writing in standard American English" (Condon, 2009, p. 144). Students further respond to the prompt by completing a reflection process, looking back at their own composition and contemplating their decision making process as they announced their viewpoint(s) regarding the prompt rationale. Plakans (2009) added that an integrated writing assessment requires test takers to develop their critical thinking skills by organizing the content of their composition and choosing the structure that best suits their writing, using reading techniques to understand the required readings in order to apply them to their composition (p. 572). The writing rationale featured in Washington State University's formative-summative, integrated assessment system is intended to enforce direct awareness of one's own thought process as a step toward learning.

Effective writing assessment criteria

Current studies on understanding the role and impact of a writing assessment in developmental writing courses within the American community college system emphasize that an effective writing assessment is directly the cause of better learning when it targets specific learning objectives that can be associated with a particular developmental course. If educators use a writing assessment as one of the primary teaching tools, they would be able to enhance the learning process affectively (Black & William, 1998a; Broadfoot et al., 2001; Elwood & Klenowski, 2002; Shepard, 2000). Because assessment can directly impact the learning process, educators and researchers in the assessment field must showcase their interest in frequently evaluating their approaches toward assessment design and practice to learn if they align with current research that proves the practice's effectiveness at the classroom level (Elwood & Klenowski, 2002, p. 244).

Learner-focused writing assessment

Generating a writing assessment that possesses value means that it should serve a purpose other than mere ranking; the assessment should aim to promote learning (Condon, 2009, p. 149). In order to identify beneficial criteria for a learning-focused writing assessment, it is crucial to first understand that individual learning is a necessary part of an assessment plan. Gillet and Hammond (2009) confirmed this idea by stating that the emphasis on the product of assessment has shifted to the process of learning in writing assessment; learner-focused composition evaluations adopt their title by offering a wide range of task variety where the assessment completion process is concerned. Without a variety of composition tasks, a writing evaluation system cannot effectively respond to test takers' many preferences and learning styles (Gillet and Hammond, 2009, p. 122). Incorporating learning-oriented tasks within a writing assessment

system is the “key factor in the national drive to develop a student’s employability during a degree in higher education” (pp. 122-123) because a focused view on acquisition in writing assessment brings forth the emphasis on long term development and reflection during the learning process. To anticipate such lasting, sustainable outcome, learning-focused assessment tasks must be aligned with teaching methodologies and approaches, allowing students to go through the process of extracting meaning and, therefore, generating connections.

Measurable writing assessment criteria

Gillet and Hammond (2009) and Condon (2009) agreed that in order to attain sustainable, long-term results that stem from an ongoing process of learning, a writing assessment practice must endorse effective learning while offering measurable criteria for specific Student Learning Outcomes and achievement (Gillet and Hammond, 2009, p. 123). As noted in Appendix A, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) itemized specific assessment criteria in its *New Leadership Alliance for Student Learning and Accountability: Assuring Quality* tool, necessitating the direct impact of assessment on Student Learning Outcomes. The self-assessment tool, *Appendix A*, serves as confirmation that the concept of assessment and learning in higher education are not two separate items. Alongside the information noted in *Appendix A*, CHEA provided a detailed questionnaire, requiring institutions to directly demonstrate their commitment to achieving Student Learning Outcomes through designing assessment plans that address such outcomes one by one. By publishing the content in *Appendix A*, CHEA further demonstrated how vital it is for each assessment plan to be aligned with individual curricular learning objective along with teaching approaches that would address the required set of criteria. By creating a direct connection among teaching methodologies, Student Learning Outcomes and

assessment design rationale in *Appendix A*, CHEA generated a required sense of accountability by asking academic departments to attend to the following:

1. Closely oversee the level of commitment to the items mentioned in *Appendix A*
2. Communicate the established commitment among all department members
3. Make Student Learning Outcomes a pervasive topic within the regular culture of the academic department
4. Make attention and commitment to Student Learning Outcomes a collaborative process among all the academic department members and the wider circle of academic staff
5. Understand and specifically graph Student Learning Outcome expectations that need to be met in assessment design
6. Understand and specifically graph Student Learning Outcome expectations within each course curriculum
7. Establish a solid process for ensuring that Student Learning Outcome expectations are met through assessment design and implementation (“New Leadership Alliance Publication,” 2012, pp. 16-18, 24)

To understand whether a writing assessment plan fully incorporates the measures listed by the “New Leadership Alliance Publication,” Gillett and Hammond’s (2009) endorsed the idea of learning about every characteristic of the currently used writing assessment before comparing and contrasting it to the above list. By completely understanding the rationale of the assessment in use, the particular student population, who participates in the writing assessment, can benefit from the revised or redesigned form of learning-focused assessment in the future (Gillett & Hammond, p. 133).

Faculty's pedagogical beliefs about assessment

“Unfortunately, not all faculty view assessment as a productive endeavor” (Barron, Horst, Lazowski, MacDonald, and Williams, 2014, p. 75). Without teaching faculty's willingness and diligence towards incorporating the measurable criteria for what students gain from a writing assessment, college staff cannot assess Student Learning Outcomes accurately. Barron et al. (2014) explored ways for teaching faculty members to assess course related Student Learning Outcomes when designing assessment plans, and they noted that the evaluation process involves 4 procedures: the faculty members must be able to clearly define each and every Student Learning Outcome; they should create or modify course curriculum in order to enhance student learning during the assessment process. The faculty members must collect evidence about the quality and extent of student learning, and they should use such evidence to understand how to improve the overall Student Learning Outcomes requirements for a writing course (Barron et al, 2014, p. 74). Barron et al. confirmed that the most important procedure among the stated is the final one because it mainly focuses on making curricular and/or teaching approach changes with learning enhancement as the main objective (Barron at al., 2014, p. 75).

Faculty resistance to imposed integrated assessment

According to Barron et al. (2014), teaching faculty members often question the necessity and usefulness of assessment in developmental courses. “Faculty may even react with resistance, particularly when they perceive that assessment is being imposed upon them from external sources such as administration or from accrediting agencies” (Barron et al., 2014, p. 75). The authors suggested that the faculty's resistance becomes stronger when they often do not understand the purpose of assessment, assuming it an approach that limits their teaching independence and pedagogical beliefs (p. 76). A large number of studies reported very similar

results concerning faculty resistance towards the use of assessment in developmental courses and stated how faculty members feel that they lose their autonomy in deciding how student learning should be evaluated based on their own particular pedagogical beliefs (Barron et al., 2014; Ebersole, 2009; Kramer, 2008; Pintrich, 2003). Another higher education assessment theory scholar, Linkon (2005), regarded the faculty's viewpoint towards assessment as a game that they "cannot win" (Linkon, 2005, p. 3). She added that the faculty's resisting attitude stands in the way of colleges that must submit annual reports, showing if "they are doing their job" (Linkon, 2005, p. 2).

Linkon (2005) and Ebersole (2009) both noted that faculty members feel insulted because, as professionals, they expect to be trusted. When faculty opposes the incorporation of an integrated assessment system, they not only feel that their autonomy is at immediate risk, but they experience anxiety, frustration, and distrust because while it is true that the concept of assessment reflects genuine concern for student learning, it may also suggest that someone may not be doing his/her job well (Linkon, 2005, p. 3). Linkon (2005) also added that regardless of seeing the concept of assessment as intervention and constant supervision, the faculty members believe that their profession directly contributes to societal progress and expansion (p. 4). They should not be seen as mere professionals with educational qualifications; they should be considered as social workers that guide future citizens towards better social responsibility and individual progress (p. 4). However, she concluded that faculty members "might be willing to invest the time" to incorporate needed assessment if they see "significant benefits for" their students and their own profession, but they do not because the difference it creates in instruction and in the institution is minor (Linkon, 2005, p. 5).

According to Barron et al. (2014), Ebersole (2009), and Kramer (2008), the main reasons that many faculty members believe assessment has little impact on instruction and the institution is their lack of direct involvement in integrated assessment, and that engaging in the process is yet another additional task alongside their many responsibilities because many institutions do not incentivize assessment engagement (Barron et al., 2014, p. 75). Kuh and Banta (2000) expressed that “if collaboration on assessment and other educational activities is an institutional priority, it must be completely acknowledged in reward systems” (Kuh and Banta, 2000, p. 10). The authors concluded that, if compensated and/or rewarded, the faculty members would not categorize assessment implementation as an obligatory, reward-less task that is added to their usual work assignment. Barron et al. (2014) and Grunwald and Peterson (2003) explained “when assessment is conducted by the institution without much faculty input, faculty may fail to find the meaning or connection to their own classroom” (Barron et al., 2014, p. 76). Therefore, lack of faculty engagement may contribute towards resistance to the incorporation of an integrated assessment plan in developmental courses (Grunwald and Peterson, 2003, p. 177).

Faculty involvement in designing and implementing assessment

Barron et al., (2014) claimed that not all faculty members show resistance towards integrated assessment (p. 76). When faculty engage in the assessment process and gain experience in designing, revising, administering, and evaluating assessment components, they often express that they find the assessment process very valuable in regards to student learning (Barron et al., 2014, p. 76). When integrated assessments are designed with Assessment for Learning (AfL) in mind rather than Assessment of Learning (AoL), faculty members tend to respond more positively, agreeing to engage in the process. When linked to accountability or Assessment of Learning, faculty members tend to withdraw from any form of engagement in the

process due to sensing constant supervision and a threat to their pedagogical beliefs (Grunwald and Peterson, 2003, p. 175).

Higher education assessment researchers such as Barron et al. (2014), Eccles et al. (1998) Grunwald and Peterson (2003), and Kramer (2008) discussed the importance of time dedication in assessment implementation. They suggested that faculty members should realize that the time spent on assessment design/implementation improves their accomplishments and professional expertise. In order to show that assessment implementation generates positive outcomes, the administrators should provide faculty members with evidence of sustained impact on student learning and teaching methodology (Grunwald and Peterson, 2003, p. 176). If administrators expect faculty members to engage in assessment implementation, they should establish a relationship of trust and direct communication that suggests the institutional goal of student learning improvement without undermining the faculty members' pedagogical beliefs and autonomy (Grunwald and Peterson, 2003, p. 176).

Barron et al. (2014), Ebersole (2009), Kramer (2008), and Pintrich (2003) explained that motivation is one of the key factors in engaging faculty in the process of assessment incorporation. The researchers used the Expectancy-Value Theory to describe how the motivation process develops through the following steps: a person's successful task completion ability, his/her perceived significance of task, and the expanse he/she is willing to sacrifice to dedicate to complete the task (Barron et al., 2014, p. 77).

Eccles, Barber, Updegraff, and O'Brien (1998) argued that a faculty member must respond, "yes" to this question: "can I do the task?" (Eccles et al., 1998, p. 268) Confidence in one's ability is considered a person's current sense of capability in completing a task he/she agreed to partake (Eccles et al., 1998, p. 269). "In the case of faculty engagement in higher

education assessment, ability beliefs relate to the faculty's current perceptions of their competence for conducting assessment. Expectancies for success, however, reflect faculty beliefs about being able to successfully improve and develop assessment skills and to carry out various components of the assessment process in the future" (Barron et al., 2014, p. 77). The combination of faculty members' ability belief and their success expectancy may lead to answer, "yes" to the question: "can I do the task?" (Eccles et al., 1998, p. 268)

Upon agreeing to take on assessment related tasks, Grunwald and Peterson (2003) conveyed that faculty engagement depends on institutional resources, how the assessment implementation process is viewed and valued as an innovative process, and how communication among faculty members is established (Grunwald and Peterson, 2003, p. 175). The researchers added that large integrated assessment implementation is dependent on institutional resources such as money, time, and administrative assistance. The value that is placed on integrated assessment implementation depends on how vital the faculty members perceive the culture of assessment to be in their institution (Grunwald and Peterson, 2003, p. 175). The significance and the financial aspects of assessment implementation are factors that would determine how much time would be needed to complete the assessment application process in the institution. Grunwald and Peterson (2003) claimed that direct communication among faculty members who are involved in the change implementation and those who have already gained experience in successful application of integrated assessments in their institutions is one of the key factors that enhances faculty motivation and, therefore, engagement (Grunwald and Peterson, 2003, p. 175). Faculty involvement is even stronger if trust is established in the communication process among faculty members and administrators (Grunwald and Peterson, 2003, p. 175). Barron et al. (2014), Ebersole (2009), and Pintrich (2003) also added that increased trust in communication among

faculty and administrators impacts the level of organizational commitment devoted towards integrated assessment implementation by faculty members, resulting in better teaching and enhanced learning.

Conceptual framework

The combination of the main themes in the literature review emphasizes faculty members' perception about the role of assessment in student learning in developmental English/writing courses in American community colleges. The integrated placement and writing assessment in basic skills courses theme explained the rationale of the integrated assessment system, noting that it must use a variety of reading and critical thinking skills in order to target specific curricular learning objectives required in a developmental course. The theme targeted the structure of placement and writing assessments on a national and California context, attempting to show statistics regarding the emphasis on scoring and how assessment for learning should be incorporated in the assessment process within developmental writing courses to enhance students' learning experience.

Enhancement of learning within developmental writing course assessments was addressed by the literature that described how discourse synthesis and critical thinking are the primary elements in the process of learning, further clarifying the roles of assessment for learning and integration noted in the first theme. Also, the evidence illustrated that faculty members can effectively choose to use Student Learning Outcomes in developmental English/writing courses to evaluate student writing.

In addition to the subcategories mentioned in the first two themes, effective writing assessment criteria, combined the rationales of the two sections in order to outline learner-focused and measurable writing assessment criteria. This theme provided a resolution to the

statistics noted in the first two categories, attempting to describe how learning can be the foundation and, at the same time, the core of an assessment in developmental writing courses.

The final heading, faculty pedagogical beliefs about assessment, explored faculty resistance towards integrated assessment implementation along with their involvement. This heading presented evidence about faculty members' reasoning for disengagement in the assessment application process, and it further delved into understanding when faculty involvement generates positive results that support institutional goals for better teaching approaches and enhanced student learning.

The literature review provides a foundation for the research questions posed in the introductory chapter that inquire about faculty members' perceptions about the purpose of assessment in developmental writing courses and, therefore, the criteria for a successful, learning-focused writing placement assessment and developmental course writing assessment, Walser (2009) conveyed that even though the majority of writing assessment design theorists agreed that learning and the learners should be the main emphases in a writing assessment, the majority of studies conclude otherwise. (p. 300) Studies and reports by "Basic Skills Ad Hoc Committee," Condon (2009), California Chancellor's Office, Elwood and Klenoswki (2002), Knoch and Sitajalabhorn (2013), and Morgan & Michaelides (2005), and Stiggins (2005) indicated that due to the use of cutoff scores and generalized, unmodified writing placement exams that do not focus on the learner and his/her learning results, the shift in the purpose of formative writing assessments, the lack of a uniform, integrated writing assessment with measurable Student Learning Outcomes, and the lack of data about how teaching faculty members incorporate the concept of learning as the main priority in designing writing assessment in developmental writing courses, learning enhancement is not the main objective in writing

placement assessments and writing assessments in developmental English/writing courses in many American community colleges, especially in a California community college in the Central Valley.

Conclusion

Even though there are clear measures for what a successful, learning and learner-focused writing assessment in developmental writing courses should consist of, researchers such as Boud (2000), Feak & Dobson (1996), Gebril (2006), Gillett and Hammond (2009), Hamp-Lyons & Kroll (1996), Watanabe (2001), and Weigle (2002 & 2004) agreed that current forms of writing assessments in many community colleges are “not yet fit for purpose” (Gillett & Hammond, 2009, p. 134). Certainly the criteria for a learning and learner-focused, formative-summative, integrated assessment in developmental courses are mutually confirmed by all assessment design researchers in the Literature Review, highlighting that essential elements such as Assessment for Learning (AfL), critical thinking and discourse synthesis in the design of a writing assessment directly and positively enhance students’ learning experience and outcome in developmental writing courses. Also, when integrated assessments are based on an Assessment for Learning (AfL) rationale, faculty members are more eager to be involved in the implementation process, collaborating with administrators to meet the institutional goal of improving student learning.

The literature review themes support the concept that there are no sufficient data within the national and the California community college system to demonstrate that the current writing assessment methodologies in developmental writing courses meet the requirements of a learning-focused, formative-summative, integrated writing assessment. The “Basic Skills Ad Hoc Committee” under the *State of Basic Skills Instructions in California Community Colleges* (2000) confirmed the lack of data about how community colleges in California may or may not

integrate writing assessments in developmental courses to enhance learning and to address specific curricular Student Learning Outcomes in courses; the process of learning cannot be assessed because the majority of California community colleges have not conducted surveys to inquire about developmental students' learning approaches, experience and outcomes, nor identified factors that may have contributed to the low student performance and success rates in developmental writing courses (pp. 7-9).

Along with other researchers, Ewell, Boeke and Zis (2008) and Morgan & Michaelides (2005) for *The College Board* voiced their mutual concern about the use of cutoff scores in writing placement assessments in many community colleges in America, especially in California community colleges, and they confirmed the numerous damaging outcomes that the singular use of standardized cutoff scores have on students' accurate placement in developmental writing courses and their learning experience in the courses. Further, the researchers noted harmful evidence of many nationwide community colleges, especially a Central Valley community college and other colleges in the state of California, that do not customize their writing placement assessments to meet the learning needs of their particular developmental students, presenting their students with the generalized placement assessment that is offered by popular assessment software companies such as ACCUPLACER (Morgan & Michaelides [College Board], 2005, pp. 8-10). While exploring constructive writing assessment criteria that incorporate critical thinking development while using discourse synthesis, higher education assessment design experts such as Condon (2009), Duran and Waugh (2006), and Knoch and Sitajalabhorn (2013) concluded that effective learning can be the main objective in a writing assessment if the format suggests a formative-summative, integrated approach to completely place developmental students' learning needs at the center of what the writing assessment should

address. For the purpose of this study, faculty members' perception about the role of assessment in developmental English/writing courses and the evaluations of Student Learning Outcomes is the focus.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Given the required set of criteria for establishing a learning and learner-focused writing assessment in developmental English/writing courses, the purpose of this study was to explore teaching faculty members' perceptions regarding evaluating Student Learning Outcomes through writing assessments. The study addressed faculty members' pedagogical beliefs regarding the concept of assessment in developmental English/writing courses, exploring how their belief system impacted the way they evaluated Student Learning Outcomes through assessment in developmental courses.

In order to understand teaching faculty members' perceptions of the purposes of writing assessments in developmental English/writing courses, chapter 3 utilizes the phenomenological analysis method, using the oral interview approach in order to learn about teaching faculty members' perceptions about the purposes of writing assessments and evaluating Student Learning Outcomes in developmental English/writing courses at a California community college in the Central Valley. The oral interview questions prompted the participants about the direct impact of their pedagogical beliefs on how they interpreted developmental courses' Student Learning Outcomes.

The questions focused on the participants' recognition of a precise purpose that could guide assessment in a developmental course they had taught before. They proceeded to examine participants' understanding of how learning enhancement within developmental writing courses was addressed, and if faculty felt a sense of responsibility for the type of assessment they created in each developmental course. Also, questions required the participants to explain how their experience in generating assessment led to the fulfillment of Student Learning Outcomes in a developmental course. The questions then required the participants to note if they recognized an

already-operating integrated assessment system at their institution. The interviewer asked the participants to express their pedagogical views regarding the placement exam used by the institution: ACUPLACER. The interview questions closed by allowing the participants to explain their reasoning behind designing writing assessments within developmental courses, focusing on the relationship between student learning and the rationale of assessment. The interview results describe a phenomenon that address the rationale of the primary research questions in this phenomenological study. Chapter 3 explores the phenomenological study as a method used in this research project and provides a description of the setting and the participants of the case study. The chapter also details the approach used in collecting data and describes the analysis method.

Phenomenological study

After World War I ended in 1918, the criteria for what was accepted as social order of European capitalism were completely shaken. “The ideologies on which that order had customarily depended, the cultural values by which it ruled, were also in deep turmoil” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 54). It was during this crisis that the German philosopher, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) “sought to develop a new philosophical method which would lend absolute certainty to a disintegrating civilization” (Eagleton, 1983, p. 54). Husserl suggested that there is a significant difference between the external and the internal world; elements in the external world exist independently from those in the internal world. He did not find information about objects in the external world reliable and argued that in order for a researcher to reach reliability, he/she must ignore anything outside of immediate experience (Eagleton, 1983, p. 56) “and in this way the external world is reduced to the contents of personal consciousness. Realities are thus treated as pure ‘phenomena’ and the only absolute data from where to begin” (Groenewald, 2004, p. 4).

Similarly, Moustakas (1994) viewed one's experience as a vital element that must be the focus of a research study as a whole. He expressed that "experience and behavior" have an inseparable link in a phenomenon that a person experiences (Simon, 2011, p. 2). Moustakas (1994) described the process of phenomenological analysis by stating the following criteria in table 1:

Table 1: Phenomenological Analysis Criteria

Involvement:	Involvement in the experience
Awareness:	Gaining insight and expanding knowledge
Comprehension:	Complete understanding of the experience
Analysis:	Reflecting on the experience
Connection:	Finding patterns and showing relationships

Researchers such as Pereira (2012) and Christensen, Johnson, and Turner (2010) confirmed that the purpose of phenomenological research is to extract and then analyze the meaning and construction of the participants' lived experiences, focusing on a specific phenomenon. The researchers also explained that Moustakas' (1994) analytical criteria showcased in *Table 1* highlight the profound thoroughness of the phenomenological research approach (Pereira, 2012, p. 19; Christensen, Johnson, & Turner, 2010, p. 42).

Moustakas (1994) added that the 5 stated criteria can only be achieved by using central research questions that are formed by focusing on the participants' lived experience(s) around a specific phenomenon and the meaning, structure and the overall rationale of the lived experience(s) of the phenomenon (Simon, 2011, p. 3). This can be accomplished by thorough analysis; the purpose of data analysis is to form an understanding of the meaning that can be derived from the phenomenon description (Pereira, 2012, p. 21; Simon, 2011, p. 4). To reveal the

final essential meaning of the participants' experiences, using phenomenological reduction can assist with the analysis of specific statements generated by the participants. This method allows the researcher to create major themes based on the participants' similar responses, making sure that the data is not misinterpreted. To protect the participants' complete anonymity and ensure that the analysis process is exhaustive, these specific statements should appear in the phenomenological research study to reveal the participants' genuine viewpoints, attitudes, and feelings toward the phenomenon (Simon, 2011, p. 4).

Creswell's (2013) theoretical explanation of the phenomenological study supported the choice for methodology for this study. One of the main features of a phenomenological study is highlighting the common element of an identified group's experiences: how did teaching faculty members interpret the fulfillment process of Student Learning Outcomes after reading a course curriculum, and do they incorporate the concept of assessment to meet Student Learning Outcomes requirements? (Creswell, 2013, p. 76) This approach uses a purposeful sample that must be defined, therefore, emphasizing the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2013, p. 77). In this phenomenological study, the common element was the teaching faculty members' pedagogical beliefs regarding the purposes of assessment and meeting Student Learning Outcomes. Therefore, according to Creswell (2013), the phenomenon of the use of assessment in developmental English/writing courses by the faculty members generated a final description, an essence, that can be applied to the overall logic of the study (p. 76). The essence of the study is noted in Chapter 5 as the main phenomenon, as described by Creswell (2013).

The very first task in this method was to outline what all individuals within a group share that can be defined as a phenomenon. In this study, the emphasis was on how or if teaching faculty members aligned their assessments with Student Learning Outcomes. The development

of a concrete description of the common phenomenon was the next step based on all the data collected from the participants; the depiction revealed “what they experienced and how they experienced it” (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). In this particular study, the analysis of the data supported a solid explanation of faculty perceptions about the purposes of assessment.

Husserl (1931) called this concept “*epoche*” (Creswell, 2013, p. 77). In Greek, *epoche* refers to the concept of suspension, and Husserl (1931) used it in a philosophical context to suspend knowledge and judgment about the external world when phenomenology is concerned to reduce bias (Simon, 2011, p. 6). Husserl’s (1931) explanation of the term suggested that a researcher must recognize that the world has always existed, and it still remains regardless of his/her presumptions. If a researcher adopts this view, then his/her beliefs about the existence of the external world and its actions are hallucinatory. Therefore, if his/her views are eliminated, the conscious, external world remains without the bias of a researcher’s presumptions about it (Lübcke, 1999, p. 1).

Considering the faculty members’ pedagogical beliefs towards the use of assessment in developmental English/writing courses, the data revealed faculty members’ beliefs about the purposes of assessment and how their assessments allow students to demonstrate Student Learning Outcomes in developmental English/writing courses. The entire process of phenomenology is not a mere description; the description of the phenomenon reflected how the data was interpreted. Moustakas (1994) explained Husserl’s (1931) bracketing concept in a manner that it required the researchers to disregard their own experiences and consider the collected data of experiences as a brand new understanding without any prior knowledge: transcendental (Creswell, 2013, p. 80).

In completing a phenomenological study, I, as the researcher, generated the faculty interview questions from the literature about this topic without focusing on my own experience as a teaching faculty member. I then generated a detailed description of the combined information received from the participating faculty members, making the focus of the entire research process the participants' experience of the phenomena (Creswell, 2013, p. 80). I submitted to Moustakas' (1994) viewpoint on Husserl's (1931) epoche (bracketing) that required me to disregard my experiences and only consider the collected data as a new form of understanding—one that did not rely on prior knowledge and carried a transcendental value (Creswell, 2013, p. 80).

Setting

A California community college in the Central Valley was the setting for this research study. Within the community college, the Basic Skills, English and Child Development department was the specific setting. The Basic Skills, English and Child Development department offers 5 developmental English/writing courses that lead to the first transferable English/writing course, English 1A/101: College Composition and Reading. The teaching faculty members within the department have the autonomy to address the required Student Learning Outcomes in any of the developmental English/writing courses according to their own pedagogical beliefs. Initially, the ACUPLACER English/writing placement exam at this particular Central Valley community college is used to place students in one of the 5 developmental English/writing courses or English 1A/101: College Composition and Reading. The community college uses the ACUPLACER's originally designed writing placement exam, and it has not contacted the software company's support team about assessment modification

plans that would better match the assessment plan to common curricular objectives in the 5 developmental English/writing courses offered by the institution.

Participants

The full-time teaching faculty members of developmental English/writing courses at a Central Valley community college English department were the participants in this phenomenological study. Their participation in the study was voluntary. The English, Basic Skills, and Child Development department at a California community college within the Central Valley has 17 full-time faculty members whose main teaching assignments are any of the 5 mentioned developmental English/writing courses at the institution. According to the dean of the English, Basic Skills, and Child Developmental department at this community college in California, more than 85% of the full-time faculty members' teaching assignments per academic semester consist of developmental English/writing courses (personal communication, March, 10, 2015). The full-time faculty members were the pool from which a purposeful sample was drawn. To create a reasonably comprehensive view of the department members' experience, at least half of the purposeful sample participants were interviewed. The interviewees included at least one instructor who had taught each course, ensuring representation from each level of instruction.

Data

Adhering to the criteria of the phenomenological study rationale, oral interviewing was the main approach of data collection in this research study. Full-time teaching faculty members at a Central Valley community college in California received an introductory e-mail invitation and were prompted to schedule an oral interview by a set deadline: see *Appendix B*. The e-mail content briefly informed potential participants about the purpose of the study, their rights and options, and provided direct links to consent and debriefing forms that required their electronic

signature prior to the in-person interview. Documents (see *Appendix C* and *D*) provided the participants with an overview of the study rationale and emphasized their rights and options during and after the research interview. The documents also assured the participants about the complete protection of their anonymity during and after the research process.

Before conducting each interview, I verbally confirmed that I had received a signed copy of the provided consent and debriefing forms by each participant. I also provided each participant a copy of the signed documents prior to starting the interview. When starting the interview, each participant was reminded that the interview would take no more than 50 minutes. As the interviewer of the semi-structured process, I asked the participants one question at a time and drew from a short list of follow-up prompts depending on the participants' responses. I informed each participant that further clarification of technical or theoretical concepts could be provided upon request. I transcribed the participants' responses after each interview session, using a Microsoft Excel sheet.

The oral interview questions provided in *Appendix E* and *Table 2* chart targeted teaching faculty members' pedagogical beliefs regarding the use of assessment in developmental English/writing courses.

Table 2: Faculty Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me about how your pedagogical beliefs about assessment impact the way you interpret a developmental course's Student Learning Outcomes that, perhaps, mention assessment in a general sense?
2. Have you recognized "clear, explicitly stated purposes that can guide assessment" in each developmental English/writing course that you have taught? Can you provide an example? (Huba and Freed, 1999, pp. 68-85)
3. How do faculty members describe the importance of learning enhancement within developmental writing course assessment?
4. Do you "feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for" the type of assessment you

generate? (Huba and Freed, 1999, pp. 68-85)
5. How do you “focus on experiences leading to outcomes as well as on the outcomes themselves? Is assessment ongoing or episodic?” (Huba and Freed, 1999, pp. 68-85)
6. Is there an integrated assessment program at this institution? If so, is it regularly evaluated? (Huba and Freed, 1999, pp. 68-85)
7. Does the concept of assessment “have institution-wide support?” (Huba and Freed, 1999, pp. 68-85)
8. Tell me about your pedagogical views on how students are assessed through ACUPLACER and placed into one of the developmental English/writing courses.
9. Can you tell me about examples of assessment you have designed in one of the developmental English/writing courses?
10. What is the relationship between assessment and student learning?

A number of questions were drawn from Huba and Freed’s (1999) key questions regarding the relationship between faculty members’ pedagogical understanding of assessment plans and Student Learning Outcomes published in *Learner-centered assessment on college campuses: Shifting the focus from teaching to learning* (Huba & Freed, 1999, pp. 68-85). Other questions inquired about faculty members’ interpretations of curricular requirements concerning assessment approaches in developmental English/writing courses. The participants were given the opportunity to develop their oral responses according to their relevant experience and pedagogical knowledge within the 50-minute timeframe.

Analysis

As the researcher, I was the only individual who had access to the interview responses and transcriptions. According to Creswell (2013), individual experiences must be reduced in order to, ultimately, create a common essence that can isolate and describe the research study outcome (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). Using Moustakas’ (1994) simplified Phenomenological

analysis approach, Creswell (2013) outlined how a researcher must analyze his/her collected data. As the researcher, I started with a complete description of my own personal experience with the proposal rationale, attempting to set aside my personal rationale to focus on the interviewees. I then generated a list of significant statements from the interview, focusing on how each individual experienced the proposal rationale. Without creating repetitive statements, I grouped the statements into larger themes and created subsequent categories and, therefore, coding based on Saldana's (2009) qualitative coding criteria (pp. 5-9). Two separate descriptions were created: what the participants experienced with the proposal rationale, and how their experience happened. Lastly, I wrote a composite description/essence, describing the proposal rationale while including both the textural (what) and the structural (how) descriptions under the previous step. With the textural description noted in Chapter 4 and the structural description explained in Chapter 5, these two final segments described the climax of the main phenomenon of the research study (Creswell, 2013, pp. 193-194).

Participant rights

The topics addressed in the interview questions were thought to involve no risks to the research participants. There was no compensation offered, and no other benefits were expected to result from participation in the study. However, the review of literature helped develop my research data to, possibly, understand the role of faculty members' perceptions in designing and implementing assessment in developmental English/writing courses. The anonymity of all participants was maintained, and no comments were ascribed to the participants by name in any written document or verbal presentation.

Electronically signed consent and debriefing forms were stored in a secure, password-operated Cloud drive separate from the interview transcription, so that the participants' answers

could not be matched to their personal information. Each oral interview was transcribed on a Microsoft Excel sheet. The name of the participants was not noted on the Excel sheet, and a randomly generated number was dedicated to each entry. No data were used from the interview transcription that could identify the participants to a third party. The participants were free to withdraw from the research at anytime and/or request that their interview transcription be excluded from the findings. A copy of my completed research report will be made available to the participants upon request. Upon having any queries concerning the nature of the research, the participants were encouraged to contact me through e-mail or a direct phone call.

Potential limitations

Anderson, Anderson, and Arsenault (1998) affirmed that the majority of academic research methods possess potential for fundamental limitations, so the restrictive factors may imperil the validity and objectivity of the research results (Anderson, Anderson, & Arsenault, 1998, p. 171). Considering the mentioned limitation, those agreeing to participate in the research process limited all the interviews conducted with a purposeful sample. The findings of the research study only represented one department in one community college. This was considered a limitation due to the fact that the participants of this research study belonged to only one community college, and other similar higher education institutions offering developmental English/writing courses were not part of the study.

Though I refrained from providing any comments before and during the interview process, even with the bracketing effort, there was potential for bias because I was a member of the academic department at the site study. Also, this limitation could proceed further with the possibility that not all participants articulated their beliefs regarding the proposal rationale because I, as the interviewer, was one of the faculty members in the participants' academic

department. Therefore, the research study assumed that all participants expressed their pedagogical beliefs earnestly while recognizing these limitations.

It was assumed that the participants had a precise and common understanding of technical terms and phrases such as the following: Student Learning Outcomes, writing assessment, integrated assessment, summative assessment, formative assessment, student learning enhancement, and writing placement exam. Because the participants may have held slightly differing definitions for the mentioned academic terms and phrases, the oral interview results may show some variation.

Conclusion

Chapter 3 affirmed the use of the phenomenological approach in the current research study, explaining the importance of disregarding my experiences in order to generate a new description for what all the participants have commonly experienced regarding their pedagogical beliefs' impact on addressing learning through the use of writing assessment in developmental English/writing courses (Creswell, 2013, p. 80). In the meantime, this chapter highlighted details about choosing the study participants and their rights, setting, and how the collected data could be analyzed according to Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological criteria with the aim of returning to concrete, lived experiences of the participants, capturing "the slogan 'Back to the things themselves'" (Eagleton, 1983, p. 56; Kruger, 1988, p. 28; Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). On the other hand, the chapter noted possible limitations that could impact the results of the oral interviews. The results of the research study are provided and analyzed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to explore teaching faculty members' perceptions regarding how they design and implement writing assessments and evaluate Student Learning Outcomes in developmental English/writing courses. The study identifies teaching faculty members' pedagogical beliefs about the purposes of writing assessment in developmental English/writing courses. More specifically, this study documents the instructors' attention to Student Learning Outcomes when designing assessment plans in developmental English/writing courses at California community colleges. This phenomenological study provided the participants with a self-reflective interview process regarding the research topic to reach a final phenomenon (Smith, Flowers, Osborn, 1997, p. 68). The common phenomenon was the teaching faculty members' pedagogical beliefs regarding the use of assessment in evaluating and fulfilling Student Learning Outcomes. In order to understand teaching faculty members' perceptions of the purposes of writing assessments at community colleges, the following two main concepts informed this study: teaching faculty members' perceptions about the purposes of assessment in developmental writing courses and how they evaluate Student Learning Outcomes in developmental writing courses.

To frame responses to the two main research questions, a qualitative research approach documenting certain phenomena inspired the formation of 10 interview questions in *Appendix E* and *Table 2*. Huba and Freed's (1999) rationale of institutional assessment mainly focuses on understanding the relationship between faculty members' pedagogical understanding of assessment and Student Learning Outcomes. The design of faculty interview questions was informed by Hubla and Freed (1999), understanding how faculty members embed Student Learning Outcomes' logic into their assessment plans. Chapter 4 presents the results of the oral

faculty interviews and delivered prominent themes of what all the participant answers had in common by generating categories within each theme. The chapter closes with an explanation of the rationale that supported development of codes, categories, and themes.

Participants

The full-time teaching faculty members of developmental English/writing courses at a Central Valley community college English department participated in this phenomenological study. Their participation in the study was on a voluntary basis. The English, Basic Skills, and Child Development department at a California community college within the Central Valley has 17 full-time faculty members whose main teaching assignments are any of the 5 mentioned developmental English/writing courses at the institution. Of the 17 full-time faculty members, 8 individuals chose to participate in the oral interview that was the main procedure of the study.

The below table provides key characteristics of the participants:

Table 3: Participants' characteristics

Participants	Age Range	Years of Experience Teaching Developmental English/writing Courses	Years of Experience at the Institution	Departmental Activity Level
A	65-75	32	25	Curriculum and Assessment Committee member
B	65-75	34	29	Integrated Assessment Committee member
C	55-65	24	8	Curriculum and Assessment Committee member
D	35-45	16	10	Developmental Course Curriculum Revision Committee member
E	35-45	15	9	Faculty Lead Committee member
F	45-55	18	5	Student Learning Outcome Committee member

G	45-55	21	14	Student Learning Outcome Committee member
H	45-55	20	8	Department leadership team member

As Curriculum and Assessment Committee and Integrated Assessment Committee members, participants A, B, and C had the most experience instructing developmental English/writing courses at a community college level. Due to teaching at the community college for more than two decades, participants A, B, and C appeared to be more familiar with the particular student population that the institution served. They were eager to share their expertise regarding how faculty members design and implement writing assessments and evaluate Student Learning Outcomes in developmental English/writing courses. When responding to individual interview questions, these participants often started by referring to their students. For instance, they began their answers with responses such as the following: “Two semesters ago, I had a small group of students that couldn’t keep up with the rest of the class.” By combining their professional expertise with examples from their classroom teaching, participants A, B, and C emphasized their efforts to design assessment plans that were relevant to students’ learning needs.

As a faculty member who devoted his/her expertise in revising curricular details, participant D spent several semesters reviewing how each developmental course curriculum should mirror students’ learning needs. During the interview, the participant focused on several examples that showed that a course curriculum needs revision regularly in order to have relevant suggestions for instruction that fulfill Student Learning Outcomes. In the same manner, participants F and G served on a similar committee: Student Learning Outcome Committee. These participants mainly voiced their concern about not being able to implement an integrated

assessment plan that could accurately measure particular Student Learning Outcomes within the English department. They both noted that successful curricular revision concerning Student Learning Outcomes depends on regular integrated testing in order to understand what students' strengths and weaknesses are in a developmental English/writing course.

Participants E and H were members of both the faculty and the department leadership teams. Participant E was a full-time faculty member who also served as a Faculty Lead Committee member, attending to faculty members' needs and concerns and communicating with the Vice President of Instruction. Participant H instructed developmental English/writing courses for several years before taking his/her role in the department leadership team. Using his/her numerous years of experience, participant H attempted to answer the interview questions by referring to his/her teaching experience, pedagogical understanding as an instructor, and administrative leadership expertise.

Analysis method

Chapter 4 thematic material emerged from an analysis of individual responses to interview questions. Common experiences within an group are then characterized as a phenomenon. Similar to Moustakas' view on data analysis, Smith, Flowers, and Osborn (1997) emphasized that the purpose of analyzing data within a phenomenological approach is to derive meaning without eliminating facts, attempting to understand what each participant's experience means to him/her by allowing him/her to express his/her "insider's perspective" on the topic (Smith, et al., pp. 68-70). Abiding by Creswell's (2013) description of Moustakas' (1994) approach, Chapter 4 illustrates significant interview statements generated by the participants through use of tables. Each table shows a group of statements regarding how the participants have experienced the research topic. Per Saldana's (2009) recommendation, "similarity codes"

are derived from the set of interview responses. These codes represent the overall rationale of the participants' statements (Saldana, 2009, p. 5). According to Creswell (2013) and Saldana (2009), the "similarity codes" are further grouped into two sets of larger units called categories, and each category represents its primary theme (Creswell, 2013, p. 193; Saldana, 2009, p. 8).

Major themes

Chapter 4 includes a "textural description" (Creswell, 2013, p. 193) of what the participants experienced regarding the main research phenomenon along with verbatim evidence from the oral interview sessions. When the interview participants' responses were transcribed, major themes emerged that corresponded to what all the responses had in common. Based on Saldana's (2009) suggestion for generating prominent themes from qualitative results, the 5 themes are *Participant Stance on Assessment*, *Clear Assessment Purpose*, *Integrated Assessment*, *Placement Exam*, and *Assessment and Leadership Relationship*.

Among the themes, *Participant Stance on Assessment* showcased participants' understanding of a personalized assessment definition according to their own pedagogical beliefs. The theme of *Clear Assessment Purpose* was informed by the participants' desire to assume ownership of any assessment they created for their assigned courses, deciding between ongoing and episodic assessments (Saldana, 2009, pp. 4-7). *Integrated Assessment* is another theme within which the participants expressed their opinions about their institution's policy regarding the incorporation of an integrated assessment plan and its impact within their academic department. As another prominent theme, *Placement Exam* was generated due to participant responses that targeted student-ranking errors in developmental English/writing courses. The final theme, *Assessment and Learning Relationship*, is based on the participants' pedagogical beliefs regarding the role of assessment in learning.

Participant stance on assessment

When asked about the meaning of assessment and their pedagogical beliefs regarding the role of assessment in developmental writing courses, the participants drew from their expert understating regarding the topic. The overall responses of all the participants generated the category of Assessment Definition because all the participants referred to their own definition of assessment without referring to theoretical concepts within academia. A similarity code noted under the mentioned category was Pedagogical Beliefs; all the participants used their own personal pedagogical belief system in order to define assessment and its definitional link to their practice, which can be seen in *Table 4*:

Table 4

Theme	Category	Similarity Code and Participant Quotations
Participant Stance on Assessment	Assessment Definition	Pedagogical Beliefs:
		Participant B: “So far, the theoretical meaning of assessment has been of little use to me because this is not how I like to see assessment as. I do in my class as I see fit.”
		Participant A: “What the department tries to do is the key to collective failure of our English program, so I find myself going back to my own belief system of what assessment is.”
		Participant D: “I create assessment plans or think of assessment after I learn a little more about my students every semester. It gives me the freedom to tailor exams to their individual needs without forcing something irrelevant on

them.

Participant G: “There’s a big gap between what I think and what the department thinks, so I stick to what I think is best for my class and my students when it comes to exams.”

Clear assessment purpose

Regarding how explicitly assessment guidelines and criteria were noted in developmental course curricula, the interview questions centered on the participants’ perception of each course’s curricular content about assessment. Based on the participants’ responses, the theme of *Clear Assessment Purpose* was generated because they mainly focused on what each course curriculum contained about assessment purpose. The majority of participants expressed that assessment guidelines were vague in course curricula, giving faculty members freedom to use their own approach in understanding and utilizing assessment in their courses. The category of Assessment Ownership was then created based on the information that the participants provided about creating original assessment plans for the courses they had taught; the majority of the participants noted that because the courses they had previously taught did not include detailed recommendations for assessments, they felt a strong sense of ownership towards what they decided to create as forms of assessment, depending on Student Learning Outcomes of courses as their only guide. *Table 5* shows the theme of *Clear Assessment Purpose*, its category, and its corresponding similarity codes that emerged based on what all the participants had in common. The table notes the codes, Ongoing and Episodic Assessment based on how the participants referred to the purpose and clarity of developmental course curricula and the support they received from their academic department concerning assessment:

Table 5

Theme	Category	Similarity Code and Participant Quotations
Clear Assessment Purpose	Assessment Ownership	Ongoing and Episodic Assessment:
		Participant D: “I’m not really sure what to say because no one tells me how to do assessment. I create assessments on my own by looking at what kind of SLO I need to address. There’s no recipe, so I decide how many times it needs to be conducted.”
		Participant B: “Well, the question asks ‘clear’ and ‘explicit’, but I cannot see them even though all curriculums tend to talk about assessment, but they don’t mention what it should be. It’s something based on our own imagination. Of course, I take ownership; it’s what I create that meets the SLO, and I have to see if it’s ongoing or episodic.”
		Participant E: “I feel a deep sense of ownership and responsibility for the type of assessment I generate.”

Integrated assessment

The theme of *Integrated Assessment* was generated based on the unanimous responses of the participants regarding the lack of an active integrated assessment within the department. Because the majority of the participants noted that the lack of institutional support was one of the main reasons for an unutilized integrated assessment system, Institutional Support became the category of the current theme. Similarity codes such as Ineffective and Lack of participation

represented the participants' collective responses. A few examples of such responses can be seen in *Table 6*:

Table 6

Theme	Category	Similarity Code and Participant Quotations
Integrated Assessment	Institutional Support	<p data-bbox="927 642 1419 821">Participant C: "Yes, there's an integrated assessment system, but it's not effective because of instructors and institution's apathy and indifference."</p> <p data-bbox="927 863 1419 1041">Participant D: "The institution creates an appearance of an integration on every level. Contradictions are actually hidden in the evaluation process itself."</p> <p data-bbox="927 1083 1419 1329">Participant A: "Yes and No. There's integration. They have written guidelines for it, but we are not told we're required to use it even though it's required. Does it make sense? It's not backed-up, and it's not important, I guess."</p>

Placement exam

When asked about their pedagogical views regarding the use of a uniform placement exam software for determining in which developmental course students should be enrolled in the participants' responses led to the following category: Misplacement of Students. This category is considered within the theme of *Placement Exam*. Similarity codes such as Ineffective, Complaints, Clear Failure, and Incorrect Predictions represented the majority of responses because the participants could not find their institution's placement exam software as an accurate

assessor of developmental students' language skills. The majority of the participants commented on the ineffectiveness of the placement exam software used by the institution because the institution did not use the software company's offer to personalize the placement exam, matching it to developmental English/writing courses' Student Learning Outcomes. They added that faculty members remain the responsible individuals who must attend to misplaced students, attempting to find approaches to create academic balance in developmental English/writing courses and trying to adjust their lesson plans to address a range of skill levels in one class. *Table 7* showcases samples of the participants' responses within this theme:

Table 7

Theme	Category	Similarity Code and Participant Quotations
Placement Exam	Misplacement of Students	<p data-bbox="976 926 1373 1031">Ineffective, Complaints, Clear Failure, and Incorrect Predictions:</p> <p data-bbox="976 1115 1398 1325">Participant D: "I have my doubts about ACUPLACER. Recent research suggests that students' high school grades may be better predictors of student success in a course."</p> <p data-bbox="976 1367 1365 1472">Participant B: "Teachers don't seem to put much faith in ACUPLACER."</p> <p data-bbox="976 1514 1422 1808">Participant E: "I've advocated a writing component for placement in English studies. It 'costs too much' to have faculty read and review applicants. Considering ACUPLACER as an assessment, we are in the crisis of failure to see students as the reason we exist."</p> <p data-bbox="976 1850 1406 1879">Participant G: "This one-size-fits-</p>

all exam doubles our work. We end up with an ESL student sitting next to an advanced writer. Which one do you focus on then?”

Assessment and learning relationship

The participants' responses to the interview questions brought forth the idea of a Relationship as a category within the theme of *Assessment and Learning Relationship*. They explained that the incorporation of a writing assessment in instruction is an essential part of supporting students' learning process. The participants also expressed their frustration with not knowing how and when faculty members within their department incorporate writing assessments in their instruction. Due to lack of an active integrated assessment system and lack of consistent implementation, there is no method of evaluating how faculty members utilize the concept of assessment in developmental English/writing courses. Because of complementary responses from all participants, similarity codes such as Theoretically Clear and Not Applicable in Practice are noted in *Table 8*:

Table 8

Theme	Category	Similarity Code and Participant Quotations
Assessment and Learning Relationship	Relationship	Theoretically Clear and Not Applicable in Practice:
		Participant C: “The relationship is there, but it depends on how faculty handles assessment: is it summative? Is it formative? Why? Do we know if it has impact or very little impact on students? How do we know all of this?”
		Participant B: “The relationship between the two makes the

invisible visible to students and to me.”

Participant D: “Without rigorous assessment, I cannot know what my students are learning. Yet, how do I know what other teachers are applying when they teach the exact same class I am? We don’t have a way to evaluate what faculty members do other than a student survey once a year.”

Conclusion

The interview questions were designed to understand faculty members’ perceptions about the purposes of assessment in developmental English/writing courses. The interview process also explored the approaches that teaching faculty members utilized in evaluating Student Learning Outcomes. Based on participant descriptions from oral interview sessions, major themes were derived: *Participant Stance on Assessment*, *Clear Assessment Purpose*, *Integrated Assessment*, *Placement Exam*, and *Assessment and Student Learning Relationship*. A “textural description” (Creswell, 2013, p. 193) was generated to reflect what all the verbatim examples had in common according to the order that the major themes were presented. The participants viewed the concept of assessment as a necessary tool in students’ learning process in developmental English/writing courses. Regarding the purpose of assessment, the participants believed that regular, episodic assessment plans were vital for evaluating Student Learning Outcomes, and they took ownership of any evaluative material they generated. The participants also recognized the importance of an integrated approach to assessment and its impact on evaluating Student Learning Outcomes and agreed that their academic department did not enforce assessment integration in developmental English/writing courses. They noted their frustration regarding the main placement exam used by

their institution, and they agreed that the placement exam misplaced students in developmental English/writing courses in which they did not belong. The range of students' skills made it difficult for the participants to design lesson plans that addressed all levels of their students' linguistic skills. Finally, the participants claimed that there is a direct correlation between assessment and student learning.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Exploring the participants' views about the purposes of assessment and their approaches towards evaluating Student Learning Outcomes led to findings of this research study. Having presented how the participants' responses led to the major themes and categories and how the coding was derived in Chapter 4, the concluding chapter that follows is the final step within the phenomenological approach. The conclusion includes a statement that represents all the participants' responses regarding their perceptions about teaching faculty members' pedagogical beliefs in designing and implementing assessment and evaluating Student Learning Outcomes in developmental English/writing courses at California community colleges. The concluding chapter contains a "structural description" (Smith, et al., p. 70; Creswell, 2013, p. 194) of how the participants experienced the same phenomenon in a given context and setting. Finally, Chapter 5 closes with a "composite description" of the "essence" of the phenomenon, combining both "what" and "how" the participants experienced (Creswell, 2013, p. 194).

Research questions

The study focused on faculty members' perceptions about the purposes of assessment in developmental English/writing courses, along with the approaches that they use in to address specific, curriculum-focused Student Learning Outcomes. The primary research questions are:

1. What are teaching faculty members' perceptions about the purposes of assessment in developmental writing courses?
2. How do teaching faculty members evaluate Student Learning Outcomes in developmental writing courses?

Interpretations of findings: structural description

Based on Saldana's (2009) recommendation for generating themes from qualitative data, study results are reported from the five themes created from all the participants' responses. The first theme in Chapter 4, *Participant Stance on Assessment* theme with the category of Assessment Definition showed that all participants considered the concept of assessment subjectively, articulating their own personal definition to the overall logic of assessment in developmental English/writing courses. A similarity code of Pedagogical Beliefs represented the participants' response focus, highlighting what the participants considered as their own pedagogical definition as the main criterion for what assessment means.

Under the *Clear Assessment Purpose* theme, the participants' responses mainly targeted the concept of ownership of the design of assessments, leading to the category of Assessment Ownership. Within this category, a code such as Ongoing and Episodic Assessment was noted because the majority of participants expressed that they took full ownership and responsibility for every form of assessment they generated; they valued their assessment development because they stated that most developmental courses' curricula did not suggest detailed assessment guidelines and criteria, therefore, leaving the interpretation and utilization of the concept of assessment to the faculty members.

The theme of *Integrated Assessment* was generated based on participants' responses that highlighted the existence and role of an integrated form of assessment in their academic department. The collective responses of all the participants showed that the institution had set the necessary requirements for an integrated form of assessment to evaluate Student Learning Outcomes in developmental English/writing courses. Based on the responses, the category of Institutional Support represented similarity codes such as Ineffective and Lack of Participation

that referred back to the existing integrated assessment system in the participants' academic department, but it was perceived as a suggestive guideline. However, there was no initiative from any form of academic leadership to enforce the utilization of the suggested guideline, leading the participants to claim that the integration idea was ineffective, and it did not receive the faculty members' active participation due to lack of institutional support.

Placement Exam was another theme that emerged based on the participants' responses regarding ACUPLACER, the main evaluation system that is used by staff to recommend the specific level of developmental course enrollment in the participants' institution. The category of Misplacement of Students was generated because all participants believed that the placement exam software was ineffective and placed students in courses they did not belong. Similarity codes such as Ineffective, Complaints, Clear Failure, and Incorrect Predictions implied that the collective responses found ACUPLACER as an ineffective approach towards conducting assessment because it is currently a stand-alone approach, rather than being one of several assessment methods for placing students in developmental English/writing courses.

In noticing a relationship between students learning and the overall concept of assessment, the participants' responses led to the theme of *Assessment and Learning Relationship*. Within this theme, the participants stated that the link between assessment and student learning is vividly described in theory, but it is difficult to capture the relationship in pedagogical practice. The category of Relationship was based on similarity codes such as Theoretically Clear and Not Applicable in Practice. The category that contained the mentioned codes illustrated responses that targeted the existence of a gap between learning and assessment. Though all the participants agreed that there is a direct link between learning and assessment and that learning cannot occur without rigorous assessment, they remained unsure about how various

faculty members' approaches towards the same concept was evaluated in terms of its effectiveness. The participants' responses revealed that proving the existence of the link between assessment and learning is more difficult in actuality than it is in theory.

Implications: The essence of the findings

According to Creswell (2013), individual experiences must be reduced in order to, ultimately, create a "common essence" that can isolate and describe the research study outcome (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). Using Moustakas' (1994) simplified phenomenological analysis approach, Creswell (2013) outlined how a researcher must analyze his/her data to get to a "common essence" (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). The essence of the findings suggests that if an academic department does not enforce the use of an integrated form of assessment targeted in this study, faculty members' perceptions about the role of assessment in developmental English/writing courses cannot be evaluated. Due to the lack of an integrated assessment that can measure students' writing skill development, the academic department will not be able to confirm if any form of assessment used in classrooms has successfully evaluated Student Learning Outcomes.

To further clarify the essence of the findings according to Moustaka's (1994) Phenomenological analysis method, the success reports data submitted to the *Chancellor's Office* noted that 76% of all the California community colleges admitted that they did not gather any information on why basic skills students did not perform satisfactorily in developmental English/writing courses. From the reporting community colleges, only 15% indicated having minimal research on passing or retention rates among basic skills students in English/writing courses ("Basic Skills Ad Hoc Committee," 2000, pp. 9-11). Based on the interview results, all participants agreed that faculty members claim ownership of the type of assessment they

generate and/or administer in developmental English/writing courses. This concept allows the faculty members to apply their own individual and pedagogical belief system on how Student Learning Outcomes should be evaluated through writing assessment. By agreeing that an integrated form of assessment is essential in understanding how faculty members assess their students in developmental English/writing courses, the participants also acknowledged that their own academic department did not enforce an integrated approach towards assessment. The participants admitted that the institutional placement exam, ACUPLACER, repeatedly misplaced students due to the use of cut-off scores, but they were unable to show the impact of ACUPLACER because of the lack of an integrated assessment that could more easily link students' skills to each course's Student Learning Outcomes. Overall, the participants believed that regular assessment of writing is essential to student learning, but they claimed to operate individually without the support of their academic department towards a more unified philosophy of instruction, assessment, and Student Learning Outcome enhancement through an integrated form of assessment. Therefore, if an integrated form of assessment is not enforced in the academic department, faculty members' approaches toward assessment design and implementation cannot be evaluated. Also, due to the lack of an integrated assessment that can measure students' writing skill development, the academic department will not be able to confirm if any form of assessment used in classrooms monitored Student Learning Outcomes in developmental English/writing courses.

Recommendations for further study

The "Academic Senate for California Community Colleges" concluded that there is urgent need for reliable data regarding basic skills students' reason for not succeeding in developmental English/writing courses ("Basic Skills Ad Hoc Committee," 2000, pp. 9-11). It is

also essential to explore how faculty members generate or use appropriate levels of assessment to address basic skills students' learning needs, systematically evaluating Student Learning Outcomes. The majority of the interview participants noted that due to the fact that they possessed too much autonomy in their professional, academic practice, they were the only individuals who could decide what type of assessment of writing, if at all, to choose or create for the developmental English/writing courses they were assigned. Though teaching faculty members who teach developmental English/writing courses focus on every course's teaching and learning objectives as they design various coursework, they do not follow a uniform assessment system that can prove how Student Learning Outcomes are effectively evaluated through writing assessment.

Knoch and Sitajalabhorn (2013) explained that the only way that faculty members would be able to confirm that all students in a multi-section developmental English/writing course have the opportunity to have their learning assessed is through an integrated, formative-summative assessment form. Therefore, there is need for data regarding the use of an integrated form of writing assessment on a departmental level within all California community colleges in order evaluate the role of assessment in learning enhancement. Working towards collecting these data will also increase the chance of responding to the inquiry by the "Academic Senate for California Community Colleges" regarding basic skills students' lack of success in developmental English/writing courses, understanding whether results from an integrated approach to writing assessment would provide some reliable reasoning about students' level of learning.

Researchers such as Shults (2000), Jenkins and Boswell (2002), Prince (2005), and Collins (2008), along with researchers for the California Community Colleges *Chancellor's Office*, have explored the use of an institutional placement exam and have reported that the

majority of students are misplaced because most community colleges in America do not take advantage of the expert support provided by popular exam software companies to redesign and align each placement exam with specific English/writing Student Learning Outcomes (Morgan & Michaelides [College Board], 2005, p. 10). All interview participants agreed that their institution's placement exam, ACUPLACER, misplaced students in developmental English/writing courses and was used inappropriately as the sole measure for students' performance. For this reason, there is an urgent research need for research to understand why community colleges do not seek assistance to personalize their institutional placement exam according to their courses' Student Learning Outcomes.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore teaching faculty members' perceptions about the purposes of assessment and evaluation of Student Learning Outcomes in developmental English/writing courses. The study identifies teaching faculty members' pedagogical beliefs about the purposes of writing assessment in developmental English/writing courses. More specifically, this study documents the instructors' attention to Student Learning Outcomes when designing assessment plans in developmental English/writing courses at California community colleges.

The analysis of data indicated that the participants recognized writing assessment as an essential part of student learning, but they also expressed that faculty members work independently to develop any form of assessment for their English/writing courses. The data analysis also suggested that the academic department's suggested guideline for an integrated form of writing assessment is not enforced, and faculty members do not conform to it, considering the guideline an ineffective departmental suggestion. Also, the analysis of data

confirmed that the institution's placement exam, ACUPLACER, is not used properly, regularly causing students to be misplaced in developmental English/writing courses.

The process of assessment can directly impact the learning process, so educators and researchers in the assessment field should be encouraged to reflect on their assumptions about frequently evaluating their approaches towards assessment design and practice to see if their methodologies align with current research evidence that proves the practice's effectiveness at the classroom level (Elwood & Klenowski, 2002, p. 244). As the results of the study indicated, the interview participants agreed that there is a direct link between assessment and student learning, but they admitted that the majority of faculty members in their institution practiced their pedagogical beliefs individually without conforming to institutional regulations towards assessment. The results of the study also suggested that students at the site study at a California community college were often misplaced in developmental English/writing courses because of the institution-wide placement exam, ACUPLACER. The interview participants expressed that it was difficult for them to maintain a balanced instructional approach according to a course's Student Learning Outcomes because not all students within a developmental course possessed a similar set of linguistic skills. Therefore, in order to incorporate measurable criteria for all faculty members and what students gain from a developmental English/writing course, how faculty members choose to address Student Learning Outcomes in a course, and create a balanced instructional approach while teaching students who possess a wide range of linguistic skills, the interview participants agreed that an integrated approach to assessment would benefit their academic department because what faculty members experienced in their department was "not yet fit for purpose" (Gillett & Hammond, 2009, p. 134).

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Appendix A

Document Assessment Practices and Processes in a Formal Plan

<p>Criterion 17. There is a written assessment plan in place that describes when, how, and how frequently each Student Learning Outcome is assessed</p>	<p>17a. Does the assessment plan demonstrate how student learning outcomes assessment is integrated across the entire institution?</p> <p>17b. Does the assessment plan include when, how, and how frequently each institution-wide student learning outcome is assessed?</p> <p>17c. Does the assessment plan include academic program-level assessment?</p> <p>17d. Does the assessment plan include cocurricular program-level assessment?</p> <p>17e. How was the assessment plan developed, and were appropriate stakeholders (internal and external) from all constituencies involved in the development of the assessment plan?</p> <p>17f. Does the assessment plan align with the institution's strategic planning process?</p>
<p>Criterion 18. The assessment plan is supported by adequate and appropriate infrastructure and resources to ensure its sustainability</p>	<p>18a. Are human resources sufficient to carry out the assessment plan? Provide an explanation.</p> <p>18b. Are financial resources sufficient to carry out the assessment plan? Provide an explanation.</p>
<p>Criterion 19. The assessment plan is regularly re-examined</p>	<p>19a. How often is the assessment plan reviewed?</p> <p>19b. Were appropriate internal and external stakeholders involved in the reviews?</p> <p>19c. Has the assessment plan been revised as a result of these reviews? If so, how?</p>
<p>Criterion 20. The institution has a chart, diagram, map, narrative, or other document that identifies the places in the curriculum and cocurriculum where students encounter and/or achieve each Student Learning Outcome</p>	<p>20a. Can the institution demonstrate where in the curriculum and cocurriculum students encounter and/or achieve each institution-wide student learning outcome? How is this information collected?</p> <p>20b. Can the institution demonstrate where in the curriculum students encounter and/or achieve academic program-level student learning outcomes? How is this information collected?</p>

	20c. Can the institution demonstrate where in the cocurriculum students encounter and/or achieve cocurricular program-level student learning outcomes? How is this information collected?
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Appendix B

Faculty Pre Interview Informative E-mail

My name is Doreen Danielson, and I am a doctoral student in the Transformative Educational Leadership program at the University of New England.

This e-mail serves as an invitation to participate in a short, oral interview session. The _____ Community College IRB has approved this research study. Targeting full-time faculty members within the English, Basic Skills, and Child Development department, I would like to ask those who have experience in teaching _____ to reply to this e-mail to schedule an in-person interview with me. The deadline for scheduling the interview is July 20th, 2015.

The research study I have created explores teaching faculty members' pedagogical beliefs regarding the concept of assessment and its impact on Student Learning Outcomes in developmental English/writing courses in California community colleges. Each oral interview session will take no more than 60 minutes. Prior to participating in the research interview, please provide an electronic signature to Consent and Debriefing forms by visiting the following link:

Before you partake in the research interview, I wish to confirm that:

- The Dean of _____ Community College, Dr. _____, has given permission for this research to be carried out.
- Your anonymity will be maintained and no comments will be ascribed to you by name in any written document or verbal presentation. No data will be used from the interview transcription that might identify you to a third party.
- You are free to withdraw from the research at anytime and/or request that your interview transcription be excluded from the findings.
- A copy of my completed research report will be made available to you upon request.
- If you have any queries concerning the nature of the research or are unclear about any question please contact me at email

Lastly, I would like to thank you for taking the time to help me with my research; I appreciate it very much.

Sincerely,
Doreen Danielson
Doctoral Candidate
University of New England

Appendix C

Consent Form

As a doctoral research candidate, I would like to invite you to participate in a 60-minute interview that will seek your opinion and responses to a collection of questions that target the concept of using assessments in developmental English/writing courses at ____ Community College. The ____ Community College IRB has approved this research study. The results of this interview will be used for determining whether or not assessment is used for the purpose of enhancing learning and addressing curricular Student Learning Outcomes in developmental English/writing courses; the intended use is restricted to practicing data collection and statistical computation, but I hope to collect authentic responses.

As the interviewer, I will ask you to answer general questions about yourself, considering your teaching approach and methodology in _____ courses. Then, the interview questions will request that you respond to items concerning (a) your students' academic skills as writers based on any diagnostic exam prior to/while taking one of the mentioned courses (b) your students' academic skills as writers based on a collective essays/exams after taking a course (c) your approach to a course's teaching and learning objectives (d) your approach to using assessment to enhance learning (e) your pedagogical beliefs regarding using assessment to address Assessment of Learning (AoL) or Assessment for Learning (AfL)

The collection of items described above are thought to involve minimal to no risks to research participants. There is no compensation offered, and no other benefits are expected to result from participation in this study. However, the research will help develop my research data to, possibly, understand the role of assessment in determining Student Learning Outcomes achievements in developmental English/writing courses.

Information obtained as part of this study will remain confidential, and no information on individual participants will be released. Electronically signed consent and debriefing forms will be stored in a secure, password-operated Cloud drive separate from the interview transcription, so that your answers cannot be matched to your personal information.

You may withdraw consent and terminate participation in this study at any time. You are also in no way required to provide any information on a written questionnaire if you do not feel comfortable doing so.

If you have any questions, complaints, or concerns regarding this study, you may contact Doreen Danielson, ____ Community College Lecturer, at email

Consent:

The researcher has explained the faculty research interview purpose and the process to me, and I understand her explanation. I understand the procedure and the possible risks. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and all such questions and inquiries were answered to my satisfaction.

By signing, I provide my consent to participate in this study.

Participant's Signature

Date

Appendix D

Debriefing Form

Thank you for agreeing to complete a faculty research interview as part of this research. The purpose of this study is to determine whether or not assessment is used for the purpose of enhancing learning and addressing curricular Student Learning Outcomes in developmental English/writing courses. The ____ Community College IRB has approved this research study. Writing assessments possess the opportunity to directly and constructively impact the learning quality and experience of students enrolled in developmental writing courses in community colleges. A successful writing assessment encourages the use of an Assessment for Learning (AfL) instead of an Assessment of Learning (AoL). While AoL merely serves the purpose of noting what curricular objectives are met by the participating students, AfL targets and directly improves student learning without interrupting the teaching flow, allowing students to fully engage in their own particular learning experience and motivating them to improve their own learning quality.

If you have any questions, complaints, or concerns regarding this study, you may contact Doreen Danielson, ____ Community College Lecturer, at email

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research interview.

Your electronic signature (name and last name) can be provided as a response to the first item on the form; please do not provide a signature on this page, as it will not be recorded.

Participant's Signature

Date

Appendix E

Faculty Interview Questions

11. Can you tell me about how your pedagogical beliefs about assessment impact the way you interpret a developmental course's Student Learning Outcomes that, perhaps, mention assessment in a general sense?
12. Have you recognized "clear, explicitly stated purposes that can guide assessment" in each developmental English/writing course that you have taught? Can you provide an example? (Huba and Freed, 1999, pp. 68-85)
13. How do faculty members describe the importance of learning enhancement within developmental writing course assessment?
14. Do you "feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for" the type of assessment you generate? (Huba and Freed, 1999, pp. 68-85)
15. How do you "focus on experiences leading to outcomes as well as on the outcomes themselves? Is assessment ongoing or episodic?" (Huba and Freed, 1999, pp. 68-85)
16. Is there an integrated assessment program at this institution? If so, is it regularly evaluated? (Huba and Freed, 1999, pp. 68-85)
17. Does the concept of assessment "have institution-wide support?" (Huba and Freed, 1999, pp. 68-85)
18. Tell me about your pedagogical views on how students are assessed through ACUPLACER and placed into one of the developmental English/writing courses.
19. Can you tell me about examples of assessment you have designed in one of the developmental English/writing courses?
20. What is the relationship between assessment and student learning?